



22 February 2013

Ms Michelle Rowland MP
Chair
Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Michelle
Dear Ms Rowland

I am writing to you following the Committee's hearing on 20 February, at which I reiterated the Australian Local Government Association's (ALGA's) commitment to support a referendum in 2013 and our own efforts to engage with State Governments to gain their support for the wording to amend Section 96 of the Constitution to allow direct funding from the Commonwealth Government to local government. We await the Committee's final report, as well as a formal decision by the Government to proceed with the referendum.

I convened an urgent meeting of the ALGA Board today to discuss the funding and structure of the ALGA campaign to support the referendum which would be ready to proceed immediately as soon as the Government gives a formal undertaking to proceed to referendum.

I am writing to advise you of the unanimous resolution of the ALGA Board today and to reemphasise the full support of all ALGA's state and territory associations to proceed with a campaign to support a referendum on financial recognition.

During the hearing the Committee referred to the Government funding which could be made available for the Yes case, and how that funding could be allocated. Minister Crean's indication to me at a meeting last week that there would be public funding made available for the Yes case, and the Committee's questioning on this issue was discussed during the ALGA Board meeting today.

I would like to advise you of the unanimous resolution of the ALGA Board, which agreed that:

- ALGA will support and campaign for a referendum to amend S96 of the Constitution to support direct funding of local government, as soon as it is proposed by the Federal Government;
- the ALGA Secretariat will immediately investigate and explore options to secure a National Yes Campaign Director, polling, creative and media agencies, to prosecute the Yes campaign;
- a formal commitment be sought from the Government to designate ALGA as the exclusive body formally responsible for the expenditure of any public funding made available to support a partisan Yes case for a referendum to recognise local government;
- the President write to both the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, and to the Chair of the Joint Select Committee advising them of the resolution.

ALGA is the peak body for local government in this country and has pursued a referendum on constitutional recognition of local government for the past five and a half years, spending in the order of \$1 million to advance the issue. We have been committed specifically to a change to section 96 of the Constitution to provide for direct federal funding of councils since 2009 and we have championed the need for federal funding of the Yes, No and neutral public information campaigns, in line with the funding provided in the Republic Referendum, since that time.

ALGA's member associations have pledged up to \$10 million, contributed from around 560 member councils, to fund a Yes campaign and it is our view that ALGA is the only body with the capacity and standing, within local government and the broader community to manage the expenditure of public funds for a partisan Yes case. It is absolutely essential that any public funding for the Yes case be used for an integrated, seamless campaign which draws together funding from all local government sources.

As an apolitical organisation focused solely on advancing the interests of local governments and their communities the ALGA Board strongly reinforced during its meeting that it is the only appropriate body to exclusively receive public funding for the Yes case. I have sought minister Crean's commitment on behalf of the Government that ALGA will be designated as the exclusive body formally responsible for the expenditure of any public funding made available to support a partisan Yes case for a referendum to recognise local government;

I have also written to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, advising him of the Board's unanimous resolution.

Yours sincerely

Felicity-ann Lewis
President