



Report on the 2010 National General Assembly of Local Government

Borough of Queenscliffe Council

Monday 5 July 2010

Introduction

The 2010 National General Assembly of Local Government (NGA), held at the National Convention Centre in Canberra from 14 – 17 June 2010, was attended by Mayor Bob Merriman and CEO, Lenny Jenner. The NGA's conference was framed around the three themes of Population, Participation and Productivity, reflecting the key issues identified in the Federal Government's 2010 Intergenerational Report that underlines the substantial challenges all levels of government will face.

Highlights of the National General Assembly of Local Government

- 1. The release of the Australian Local Government Association's 10-Point Plan (National Resilience - Local Communities).** This was launched by the ALGA and all Federal Government Ministers attending the NGA were presented with a copy by the ALGA President, Geoff Lake. The Policy includes the priority policy reforms that local government is seeking from the all political parties as we approach the forthcoming Federal election. A copy of this policy platform is available at the ALGA website, <http://www.alga.asn.au/federalelection/>. During the conference various Members of Parliament foreshadowed their parties response to specific components of the ALGA policy platform, particularly the question of reform of the Australian Constitution to recognize local government.
- 2. Scheduled meetings with Federal Members of Parliament, specifically:**
 - ***The Hon Martin Ferguson, Minister for Resources and Energy; Minister for Tourism*** – the meeting agenda centered on seeking Federal Government assistance to meet the funding challenges impacting on coastal municipalities that manage the significant population influx associated with coastal tourism. While Minister Ferguson acknowledged the infrastructure renewal pressures on local government on the Australian coastline, he identified that the key source of funding for local government rested with Minister Albanese and his Department's administration of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Minister Ferguson pointed to a number of research and planning strategies funded by his Department to increase tourism activity beyond the capital cities. He specifically cited a recent successful strategy to attract cruise ship tourists into regional NSW. We will bring this study to the attention of Roger Grant at Geelong Otway Tourism.
 - ***The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support*** – in the first instance this meeting focused on BoQ highlighting the importance of the Department of Defence to the social and economic fabric of the Borough. The meeting also examined opportunities to address a range of issues impacting on the

Queenscliff Golf Club and course operations, particularly renewal of the Golf Club lease, the lease conditions, improvements to the guard house practices and the impact of kangaroos on the local flora and fauna. Dr Kelly made a commitment to reviewing the matters raised. Since the conference the Mayor and CEO have provided follow up briefings with the Fort Commanding Officer, Colonel Andrew Galloway and Mr Stephen Allison whose responsibilities include asset management of Department of Defence facilities in Victoria.

3. Specific conference presentations from Government Ministers and Party Leaders

- ***Presentation by The Hon Anthony Albanese, Leader of the House; Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (representing the Prime Minister)*** – the Minister underlined the Labor Government’s commitment to (1) continuing a direct funding relationship from Federal to Local Government (2) supporting constitutional reform to recognize Local Government (the Minister announced a \$250K to the ALGA to support a national community awareness campaign focusing on the importance of Local Government recognition in the Federal Constitution (3) achieving a Federal budget surplus by 2013.
- ***Presentation by Senator Bob Brown, Leader of The Greens*** – the Senator reinforced The Green’s commitment to achieving constitutional recognition of Local Government in the next term of government. Senator Brown also made particular reference to progressing (1) a national population debate (2) the Garnaut model of carbon tax (3) an increased taxation of mining profits and (4) the cessation of logging of old growth forests.
- ***Presentation from The Hon Andrew Robb, Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction (representing, and presenting the speech of, the Leader of the Opposition)*** – this presentation also highlighted the Coalition’s commitment to Constitutional Reform to recognize Local Government. Andrew Robb also stated the Coalition’s future agenda (if elected) would include expansion of Federal Government grants directly to Local Government and support local government’s independence in setting municipal rates.

4. Conference sessions of particular relevance to the Borough of Queenscliffe included:

- ***Constitutional Reform Update*** (presentation by Professor George Williams and Robert Ray, former Federal Labor Minister) – this session provided (1) the results of a recent national survey regarding community attitudes to local government recognition in the Federal constitution (2) an excellent summary of the alternative models (and preferred model – ‘financial recognition’) for achieving local government recognition in the Federal constitution and (3) the ALGA strategy for progressing a referendum to achieve constitutional recognition of local government. This session highlighted the major challenges associated with achieving this outcome and reinforced the importance of (a) increasing community awareness of the important role of local government in achieving national outcomes (b) bi-partisan support for Constitutional reform (c) achieving Federal and State Government support (d) separating this referendum from other proposed changes to the Constitution that are unlikely to succeed (e) not linking the timing of the referendum to a State or Federal election (f) generating interest and excitement associated with

the recognition of local government. For details regarding this matter refer to the new ALGA website www.councilreferendum.com.au

- **Abandon or Adapt Symposium** (with presentations from a panel including Jo Mummery, Federal Department of Climate Change, Mayor Patti Creevy, Mandura Council, WA, Andrew Beatty, from Law Firm Baker & McKenzie, Professor Bruce Thom President, Australian Coastal Society and member of the Wentworth Group and Michael Nolan, Risk Management consultant) – this session endeavoured to provide an overview of climate change debates and developments across the nation. Critical issues that were highlighted included (1) the pivotal role of, and importance of increasing the level of engagement and policy reform by, State Government (2) the vulnerable position of local government given the nature and limited progress of State Government coastal land use planning policy reforms (3) the potential legal risks facing local government given the lack of State Government policy reform and protection for Councils and (4) proposed imminent changes to highly relevant coastal land use planning legislation in NSW. A key conclusion was that legislation and policy reform was ‘lagging behind’ the realities of the ‘here and now’ responsibilities of local government planning decisions and that State Governments had placed local government in a very difficult position. Particular reference was made to the imminent Federal Government release of new tools to assist local government to assess climate change planning and a set of workshops for local government officers to be held in Melbourne on 21 June 2010. Despite the late notice Rob Byrne, Communications & Governance Officer, BoQ, was able to attend and information will be provided to Council and the Sea Level Rise Reference Group. Other relevant papers referred to at this symposium included:
 - i. Australian Government, *Adapting to Climate Change in Australia*, Australian Government Position Paper, 2010.
 - ii. Australian Government, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, *Climate Change Adaptation Actions for Local Government*, Report by SMEC Australia, 2010.
 - iii. The paper presented by Andrew Beatty from Law Firm Baker & McKenzie has been requested from ALGA.
- The Conference highlighted the work of Professor Peter Brain who has recently completed the national ***‘State of the Regions 2010/11’ report***. Geoff Lake, President, ALGA, acknowledged the work of Peter Brain, Director, National Economics, in mapping and comparing the key economic and demographic indicators and trends in each region in Australia.

5. National Seachange Taskforce meeting

The National Seachange Taskforce (NST) Committee met at the conclusion of the conference program on Thursday 16 June 2010. The Mayor and CEO requested participation in the Committee Meeting as observers and the Committee agreed. Details regarding the purpose and priorities of the National Seachange Taskforce are available at www.seachangetaskforce.org.au.

While the Committee has an interest in all issues related to coastal 'seachange' communities across Australia there is a specific interest in matters related to climate

change and sea level rise. The agenda items of the Committee Meeting that were particularly relevant to the Borough Council included the new legislation introduced into the NSW Parliament, 'Coastal Protection Bill'; coastal planning undertaken by East Gippsland Shire in Victoria and Shoalhaven Council in NSW and storm water harvesting projects on the Sunshine Coast. The National Seachange Taskforce has applied to the Federal Government for a National Climate Change Research Grant. More details are available on the NST website.

6. Australian Local Government Association Annual Meeting to vote on Motions for Debate

The NGA incorporated several sessions dedicated to debating motions presented by local government across Australia (a copy of all motions is included with this report). Of particular relevance to the Borough of Queenscliffe were motions focusing on responding to climate change and sea level rise and increasing funding to improve local government financial sustainability, particularly in respect of asset renewal.

7. Prime Minister, Ministers and MPs meeting with Local Government Mayors from across Australia - 16 & 17 June 2010

Prior to attending the dinner hosted by the then Prime Minister the Mayor attended the National Awards Ceremony where presentations were made by Minister Albanese and Minister McKew. There were some significant projects particularly Waverly Council, New South Wales and its control of its assets renewal program. The booklet containing all of the projects is available from the CEO and I would encourage Councillors to review the document. The CEO is following up with Waverly Council in respect to their project. The two major winners were announced at the Prime Minister's dinner and I believe it is worthwhile the Borough of Queenscliffe Council considering a future entry.

At the dinner the then Prime Minister concluded his address by announcing a further direct grant of \$100m to local government of which our share is \$30,000 based on population. The Mayor has written to Minister Albanese highlighting the inadequacy of this formula based funding model given that for a significant number of months our population is much higher and that we need infrastructure to support tourism and other regular visitors.

Table arrangements at the dinner ensured that local Mayors sat with their Members and had ample opportunity to talk with Federal Member for Corangamite, Darren Cheeseman and during the evening informally with other Ministers.

On the Friday morning a Community Cabinet meeting chaired by the then Prime Minister occurred with questions mainly centered around changes to the health regime, education, future funding, a referendum to include local government in the constitution and other federal issues concerning climate change.

At the conclusion of the Community Cabinet meeting we broke up into working groups which the Mayor attended the Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Forum chaired by Minister Wong's junior Minister Greg Combet. Twelve people attended this round table forum together with two senior officials from Minister Wong's department. The forum

went for 1 1/2 hours and it was very clear, apart from Byron Bay, we are a long way ahead of other local councils. The federal department indicated that they would be holding forums which would be followed up with modeling tools to assist state and local government in planning decisions.

8. Networking with other Local Government Mayors, Councillors and Chief Executive Officers

The 2010 National General Assembly of Local Government provided many opportunities to exchange information and ideas, policy and program challenges and potential strategies for addressing local community issues. There was a high level of representation from small municipalities facing the fiscal pressures associated with asset renewal and coastal LGAs grappling with land use planning challenges linked to climate change and sea level rise. The opportunity to spend some quality conversation time with colleagues from our neighbouring municipalities in the G21 region (Geelong, Golden Plains, Surf Coast and Colac Otway) was very beneficial.

Background Material to the Report

- *NGA 2010, National General Assembly of Local Government, Australian Local Government Association, Population, Participation & Productivity, Program and Registration. This provides a summary of the Conference Program.*
- *NGA 2010, National General Assembly of Local Government, Australian Local Government Association, Discussion Paper - Population, Participation & Productivity. This paper provides a contextual reference point for informing the conference themes.*
- *NGA 2010, National General Assembly of Local Government, Australian Local Government Association, Population, Participation & Productivity, Business Papers. This details all ALGA Motions for Debate.*
- *NGA 2010, National General Assembly of Local Government, Australian Local Government Association, Population, Participation & Productivity, List of Participants.*
- *Council has requested the ALGA to forward a range of additional papers presented at the Conference.*

***Report by Mayor Bob Merriman and CEO, Lenny Jenner
July 2010***