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Diamantina Shire Council

Media Release – Expert Panel’s Announcement Welcomed

Views sought on changing the Constitution to include local government

Diamantina Shire Council recently welcomed the announcement made by the independent Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of their consultation program that has been kicked off with release of a discussion paper and website www.localgovrecognition.gov.au.

The Panel, appointed by the Australian Government in June, is inviting all Australians to have their say on whether local government should be recognised in the Australian Constitution.

"It's critical for local government, the third and most community-responsive tier of government to be formally recognised in the constitution of our Commonwealth. It's not just about security of direct funding from the Federal Government direct to Councils, but to celebrate the success of local government in the history of Australia by recognising its identity. It will also remove fear that state government could abolish the local system of government. I urge individuals and organisations to make a submission to the panel should they have views either way. Don't just assume there will be plenty of submissions. One of the problems with society is that people remain silent when everything is good and this is one case where people should speak up to support local government," said Mayor Cr Robbie Dare, Diamantina Shire Council.

The Panel Chair, the Honorable James Spigelman AC QC said "it has long been the wish of local councils throughout Australia, and the policy of a number of parties and political leaders, that local government be recognised in our founding political and legal document."

"Whether, and if so how, this should be done is what the Panel has been asked to consider", he added.

The Panel now begins to consult widely, including with Premiers, Opposition leaders, local government representatives, communities and constitutional experts, before reporting to Government on its findings in December 2011. Written submissions can be lodged until November 4, 2011.

The Panel specifically wants to form a view on:

- the level of support for constitutional recognition of local government, and
- the various forms that such recognition could take, together with the advantages and disadvantages of different options.

In 2010, the Australian Government made a commitment to hold a referendum on the recognition of local government in the Australian Constitution. To succeed, a referendum must attract the support of a majority of votes nationally, and a majority of votes in a majority of states.

End.

Thursday, September 29, 2011

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