



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

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PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL AWARDS FOR INNOVATION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ADELAIDE - 13 AUGUST 1986

It gives me great pleasure to be with you on this occasion, the presentation of the National Awards for Innovation in Local Government.

This is the first time the awards have been presented.

They represent a further recognition of Local Government at the national level and I would like to congratulate Tom Uren for having the foresight to introduce them.

In the years ahead I am certain the awards will come to be seen as prized indicators of achievement in Local Government.

The awards have three purposes.

First, they are designed to recognise the achievements of Local Government. Those of you in Local Government know that these achievements are many. But it is important that they be recognised by those outside Local Government and be used to present a more balanced picture of Local Government than sometimes comes forward.

The second purpose is to encourage innovative practices. In today's difficult economic circumstances the introduction of innovative techniques and approaches is essential if we are to adapt to meet the challenges that confront us. This must be done in the Local Government sector as elsewhere.

The third purpose of the Awards is perhaps the most important. It is to promote the sharing of ideas and experiences and to disseminate the benefits of innovation. It is something that can be done with maximum effectiveness at the national level.

The Awards were launched in March. They instantly attracted the attention of Local Government throughout the country and some 250 applications were received.

I am told that a panel of experts, principally drawn from major national Local Government bodies, pondered long and hard before selecting what it considered to be the outstanding entries.

With so many worthy efforts the panel found that it could not confine itself to eight awards. It therefore recommended, in addition, some 16 commendations for outstanding innovation achievement.

To all those councils who have won an award or a commendation I offer my congratulations. You have by your efforts demonstrated your leadership in your industry and you are providing a fine example for others, including other public sector managers, to follow.

I also congratulate all those other councils who submitted entries. Their interest in this award has helped make it a real success. Many of the innovations submitted by these councils were of the highest quality and because of this, a booklet will be produced detailing every application. In this way we hope to ensure that maximum advantage is taken by councils of the experiments, proposals and developments of other councils.

The National Awards for Innovation in Local Government are an integral part of my Government's commitment to strengthen Local Government and to raise its status and capacity. For too long too little recognition has been given to the important, indeed vital, role that Local Government plays both in the administration and welfare of this country. Other levels of government, have been too ready to treat Local Government as a distant relative. I believe that as a result, too often we have failed to appreciate, learn from and build upon the impressive strengths of Local Government.

When we took office in 1983 we took steps to correct this situation.

We established the first Ministry for Local Government and appointed one of our most experienced Ministers to lead it. Subsequent events have proved how correct was the choice of Tom Uren as Local Government Minister. Nobody has fought harder for your cause. I can tell you that from personal experience. Nobody could have achieved more than Tom has, given the circumstances that have prevailed.

We have expanded and developed the Commonwealth Office of Local Government. In contrast to its pitiable state before 1983, it now has the resources and expertise to advise the Government effectively on local government matters and to fight the Local Government cause within the Commonwealth bureaucracy.

We have backed our words of support for Local Government with funds. In the year just completed, 1985-86, the Government provided over \$1 billion to Local Government - a level 50 per cent higher than in the last year of the Fraser Government.

The \$1 billion being provided by the Commonwealth is significant in terms of Commonwealth expenditure. It reflects the importance we attach to the role of Local Government in the economic and social development of this nation.

For this coming financial year we have taken steps to ensure that the key part of local Government's funding from the Commonwealth - the untied general purpose assistance grants - is maintained in real terms. It will mean that for this year the level of these grants could increase to some \$580 million.

This has again placed Local Government in a better position than the States. This year the States will suffer a decline in real terms in the assistance they receive from the Commonwealth. When the Budget is delivered next Tuesday and you can see its effects on Commonwealth Departments and Authorities you will realise what a good deal Local Government has received.

In these times of economic difficulty and constraint, the new general purpose funding arrangements for Local Government are a significant achievement for your sphere of Government. They, in fact, represent a vote of confidence by my Government in Local Government.

I am told that the successful negotiation of these new arrangements for Local Government was in no small part due to the ability of Local Government's national and state representatives to perceive the key issues and to quickly establish a common position. I congratulate Local Government on its efforts in this area.

There is one aspect of the new general purpose financial assistance arrangements for Local Government that I would like to emphasise. That is the increased emphasis the new arrangements will place on providing assistance to the more disadvantaged councils.

Under the new arrangements such councils - whether they be in rural areas, provincial towns or the cities - will receive a better deal than they have in the past.

This, of course, is consistent with my Government's concern to protect the less well off sections of our society and to ensure that our limited resources are distributed in the fairest way possible.

This consideration is even more important in the difficult times we are now in. With the current emphasis on restraint all levels of Government must re-double their efforts to ensure expenditure is directed to the most worthy areas.

A pleasing feature of the new financial assistance arrangements for Local Government is the manner in which co-operation between the three spheres of government is strengthened.

Under the new arrangements provision is made for all three spheres - Local Government, the States and the Commonwealth - to be involved in drawing up the principles that will determine the distribution of funds between councils in each State.

This change reflects our commitment to strengthen co-operation between Governments in the Local Government area.

It is evident in the Local Government Ministers Conference where we have upgraded the role of that Conference in co-operation with the States and Local Government. That conference is now playing a leading part in assessing local Government's role in economic development and in the provision of community services - matters that will be at the forefront of Local Government concern in the years ahead.

This strengthened co-operation has also been evident in the employment area where the Commonwealth's Community Employment Program has achieved considerable success. Much of the credit for that success rests with Local Government which has responded magnificently in the provision of projects, supervision and resources.

I am looking forward to an equally impressive response from Local Government as we press ahead with providing a wider range of employment opportunities for young people.

A major factor in our success in encouraging greater co-operation between Governments has been the introduction of the Local Government development program.

Under this program we have spent over \$11 million since 1983 funding, in total, some 430 projects, directly involving 327 councils, in all States and the Northern Territory.

Not only has the program encouraged greatly increased co-operation between the three spheres of government but it has enhanced co-operation between councils as well.

However, increasingly, the major thrust of the program has been to spread the use of more effective and efficient practices throughout Local Government. It is an even more timely program in the present economic climate when we all need to become more productive and effective.

All aspects of Local Government activity; management, training, accounting, infrastructure planning, environmental improvement, service delivery, and employment initiatives, to name but a few, have been embraced by this program.

The results of these projects are now becoming available and action is underway to disseminate the experiences throughout the Local Government industry. Priority will be given to this task in the year ahead.

There is no doubt that the Local Government development program will prove to be of major importance for Local Government.

Equally, there can be no doubt that it has been a successful initiative of this Government.

In recognition of this I am pleased to announce that the Government will continue the program in 1986-87, although at a reduced funding level, commensurate with the budgetary restraints that now face us all.

Some of you will be disappointed that funding for this small but important program will be reduced. I too am disappointed that we have been unable to maintain funding levels, but for this year, at least, economies must be achieved.

The challenge you now have in this year of restraint is to make the very best use of these funds. I am sure that, for his part, Tom will be making every dollar count.

There are other areas in which we have taken steps to strengthen and improve local Government's position.

In last year's budget we introduced new arrangements to permit the deductibility for income tax purposes of expenses incurred in Local Government elections. This was a reform long overdue and brought the Local Government situation more into line with that applying to State and Commonwealth elections.

We have also moved to ensure that Local Government is represented at key national economic forums. The Australian Council of Local Government Associations is represented, for instance, on the Economic Planning Advisory Council and makes a valuable contribution to its work.

In placing Local Government on EPAC we have recognised that Local Government is an important part of the economic process at the local level. It is a significant employer, provider of facilities, services and infrastructure and consumer of good and services. It serves as an important catalyst in many instances in developing community resources and capacities. It has many economic functions.

We have also encouraged and assisted Local Government in its rightful claim to be included in the Australian Constitution, supporting your representatives at the Brisbane meeting last year and ensuring that Local Government is adequately represented on the Constitutional Commission we established recently.

We were heartened by the outcome for Local Government of the Brisbane convention. I am hopeful that firm recommendations will now come from the Constitutional Commission, enabling us to proceed to changes in the constitution which will give Local Government proper recognition. There is no doubt in my mind that such recognition is long overdue.

I have referred, several times, to the economic difficulties we face as a nation.

For us to pull out of this situation - and we will - requires the efforts of all parts of our society. It is simply not a case of our manufacturers producing more, or our farmers producing more efficiently.

We have called upon the private sector to sharpen its performance, to become more outward looking, to adopt more innovative management and work practices, to modernise plant and equipment, to give greater attention to marketing and to invest more readily in research and development.

We have also encouraged the public sector to become leaner and more efficient, to develop improved management practices geared to achieving better results and to be more responsive and accountable in its activities.

A range of Public Service reforms have been introduced to modernise the Australian Public Service. We have said quite clearly to the Federal bureaucracy, do more, do it more effectively and do it with fewer resources.

Local Government, as part of the public sector of the nation, needs also to respond to these imperatives. Many councils are already doing that and have developed approaches from which other Government bodies - Federal, State and Local - can learn.

But, of course, there remains much to be done and that is our collective challenge - to work together to develop a more flexible, responsive and innovative public sector for the future.

I am confident that local Government will be able to rise to meet that challenge.

The National Awards for Innovation in Local Government provide ample evidence of its progressiveness and its strength.

They renew my optimism about Local Government's future and my Government's belief in its ability to play a significant part in strengthening our nation.
