



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTRE
CANBERRA - 26 FEBRUARY 1987**

Sir Albert Abbott, National President of the Australian Council of Local Government Associations,

Tom Uren,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been a long held objective of the Australian Council of Local Government Associations to have its own building in the National Capital - a bricks and mortar presence in Canberra which would both assist and highlight the increasingly prominent role Local Government is playing in national affairs.

Those who worked to bring this project to fruition saw the need for Local Government to have a strong voice and a high profile in Canberra. They saw the need for Local Government to understand better the decision-making processes at the Federal level and to be better positioned to participate in national policy development.

The fulfilment of that objective has been made possible by the support of your State Associations, local councils and individuals. It has been a true co-operative effort and the result is a credit to you all.

So it is a pleasure to be here today to open officially this new Centre.

I had the pleasure last August of presenting in Adelaide the first National Awards for Innovation - an effort by the Commonwealth and your Council to strengthen Local Government by promoting and disseminating innovative techniques and approaches by Local Government associations.

The awards symbolised the current close relationship between the Federal and Local tiers of government. Indeed our relationship has never been closer than it has been in the four years since my Government came to office in March 1983. Your Council, Sir Albert, has played an important role in building and enhancing that relationship.

We were the first Federal Government to appoint a Minister for Local Government - and in Tom Uren you have had a formidable champion of your cause at the Commonwealth level. As well as his continuing efforts to help local government organisations improve the quality of their services, Tom has been a strong advocate of the constitutional recognition of Local Government, which would give formal and long overdue expression to the reality of Local Government participation in the Federation.

The close relationship between Federal and Local Governments is based not just on the Commonwealth's recognition of your ability to deliver services and assist people at the grass roots levels throughout Australia.

It is also firmly anchored in the knowledge that now, more than ever before, we need co-operation among the various levels of Government to meet effectively the economic and social challenges we face as a nation.

Increasingly we need a Local Government sector competent in the administration of local affairs and the design and delivery of community programs, as well as one which is responsive in meeting broad national goals.

Local Government is certainly proving its capacity to play a role in national policy making.

The truth of that assertion is demonstrated by the contribution made by Local Government representatives at the National Economic Summit and the Taxation Summit, and by the continuing and valuable work performed by the Australian Council of Local Government Associations on the Economic Planning Advisory Council. We are grateful to you for the care and the thoughtfulness which typifies your work in these forums.

At the local level, the productive relationship between our two levels of government takes tangible form in the thousands of buildings and projects and services we have created together.

Under the Community Employment Program, we have together helped many thousands of people, unemployed for long periods of time, find valuable work and develop new skills while contributing in a real way to their local community.

Under the Home and Community Care program we have together provided aged people throughout Australia with improved home care, in the belief that encouraging people to stay at home rather than seek institutional care not only provides a better life for the people themselves but is more economical for the nation as a whole.

These examples can be multiplied elsewhere thanks to your contribution to programs for youth, housing, the environment, local and arterial roads, and the "Buy Australian" campaign, to mention just a few.

On the central issue of revenues, my Government is committed to supporting Local Government through the system of untied grants. Following the national Inquiry into Local Government Finance, and our consultation with the States and your National Council, we were able to improve that program and to create the new Local Government Financial Assistance Act of 1986.

The new act is significant in that it is the first piece of federal legislation to require Local Government to be consulted in determining the principles governing the distribution of funds.

In view of the necessity for budgetary constraints in the current economic climate, that act provided a good and fair outcome for Local Government.

I made it clear earlier this week that Australia still faces considerable economic difficulties which will require all of us to practise continued restraint.

The Government has decided that a May Expenditure Statement will be necessary to ensure that necessary savings can take effect over the full 1987-88 budgetary year.

I have also put the States on notice that they, too, must accept further disciplines.

In this current situation, restraint is required not just of the Commonwealth but of all levels of government for some time to come.

I want to turn now to one of the key mechanisms we have developed for coordinating policies towards Local Government, namely the Local Government Ministers' Conference.

Given the active involvement of your National Council in the research program sponsored by the conference, it is appropriate that I publicly launch today the first two products of that work.

One report concerns the role of Local Government in the co-ordination and delivery of human services - a field of activity in which Local Government is becoming increasingly involved.

The other report concerns the role of Local Government in economic development, drawing attention to the contribution to business and employment creation which Local Government is able to make.

Both of these reports warrant serious examination at every level of Government. Accordingly, I have asked Tom Uren to consult his Ministerial colleagues and to arrange for the Office of Local Government to consult with the Australian Council of Local Government Associations, and also to seek responses from relevant Departments, so that he can report to me on the implications of these reports for the Commonwealth.

I am also pleased to learn that the Local Government Ministers have now turned their attention to a national review of Local Government labour markets. The review is the first of its kind, and is a significant initiative investigating a significant issue.

These various initiatives demonstrate the partnership that is developing between our spheres of Government. We are witnessing, I believe, a historic transformation of inter-governmental relations in Australia.

Now that you have consolidated your presence in Canberra with this new Centre I believe your involvement and influence in national administration will grow. So I have much pleasure in officially opening the Australian Local Government Centre.
