



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
NATIONAL SEMINAR OF THE INSTITUTE OF MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT
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It gives me considerable pleasure to be with you on this occasion - the 8th Biennial National Local Government Seminar conducted by the Institute of Municipal Management.

The Government has a strong commitment to raising the status and strengthening the capacity of Local Government. Our aim is a genuine partnership of the Commonwealth, States and Local Government.

In this we see the Institute of Municipal Management as having a most important role to play. Established nearly fifty years ago the Institute is committed to improving the quality of performance of those serving Local Government throughout Australia.

With very good reason the Institute takes pride in its achievements. It has contributed significantly to Local Government's ability to deal effectively with the increasingly complex tasks our communities now expect our Councils to perform.

My Government established the first Ministry for Local Government last year and appointed one of its most experienced Ministers to lead it. That represented an historic step forward for Local Government.

With the States we aim to secure recognition for Local Government as an essential part of the Australian federal system.

During the past year, this Government has embarked on a number of programs aimed at understanding better the needs of Local Government, and at securing better co-ordination of Commonwealth activities of interest to Local Government.

As Tom Uren, has said

"We aim to strengthen the capacity of Local Government to deal efficiently and equitably with the concerns of people where they live; and we are seeking to do that in ways which achieve a sustainable shift in the status and functioning of Local Government".

Local Government is at once a significant employer, provider of facilities, services and infrastructure, and consumer of goods and services. Our Local Government network is a significant element of the social fabric of our nation, and serves as a major catalyst in developing community resources and capacities.

For these reasons, as the Institute itself has noted:

"It is more essential than ever that Local Government administration should be broad in its outlook, knowledgeable in application, effective, efficient and economical in performance, and of high integrity at all times".

It is for Local Governments to demonstrate these qualities. To the extent they do, we can be confident that the skills and resources of our local communities will be brought into full play. It is with this objective in mind that the Federal Government will be working for a durable strengthening of Local Government capacity.

We want Local Government as a genuine partner in our three sphere system of government, co-operating in a broad range of functions to build a vigorous Australian community and economy from the grass roots up.

This will be a quite radical change from the past. But over the last 12 months we have made some important beginnings in securing this shift in inter-governmental relations.

The representation of the Australian Council of Local Government Associations at the National Economic Summit Conference, and the membership of that Association on the Economic Planning Advisory Council, have recognised the contribution Local Government can make to the national economic policy consultative and advisory process.

The voice of Local Government is now being heard. It is now recognised that Local Government has a contribution to make to the development of national policies. We seek - we need - its co-operation in the great tasks of community development and economic reconstruction.

Local Government's closeness to community groups and small enterprises make it well placed to support and understand them, and to draw them into the broader processes.

Another major step has been the formation of a sub-committee of the Australian Constitutional Convention to work on a co-operative approach to the constitutional recognition of Local Government. This provides a valuable opportunity for a reappraisal of the place of Local Government in the Australian governmental system.

In relation to this matter, Mr Uren has commented more specifically:

"We need" he has said, "to break beyond the narrow legacy of a restricted concept of Local Government's role in Australia and look to the broad range of functions administered elsewhere, with due regard to the national and state responsibilities in the Australian federal system".

The establishing of a National Inquiry into Local Government Tax Sharing Arrangements is another important initiative. It provides a unique opportunity for an historic reappraisal of Local Government functions and resources.

This Inquiry should lay the foundations for a more stable, efficient and equitable system of resourcing Local Government's expanding functions. The proposed terms of reference of the Inquiry reflect this objective. As suggested by the Commonwealth, the Inquiry would review the Local Government tax sharing arrangements and report on any changes required to improve the operation of the Local Government (Personal Income Tax Sharing) Act 1976, with reference to:

- . The respective roles of the Commonwealth and the States in regard to Local Government;
- . The purpose and functions of Local Government revenue sharing; and
- . The level and form of funding for Local Government available from Commonwealth, State and Local Government sources and the principles which should determine the level and allocation of the Local Government revenue sharing funds between and within states.

Given the importance of this Inquiry, I should hope we shall soon have the concurrence of all States in these proposed terms of reference. I am pleased that most States have already signalled their support.

Another useful input to consideration of the future role of Local Government in Australia will be the report of the Advisory Council on Inter-Government Relations on Local Government's Responsibilities and Resources.

This Report, taken together with the work of the Sub-Committee of the Australian Constitutional Convention and of the National Inquiry into Local Government Tax Sharing Arrangements, will provide the best basis there has ever been for a vigorous, well informed community discussion about the problems and possibilities of Local Government.

Out of such discussion I should expect to see emerge constructive proposals for future reform in the character, role and responsibility of Local Government in Australia. For all those interested in good Government in Australia, the prospect is an exciting one.

There are, however, steps we can take immediately to help Local Government to extend its functions and further develop its capacities. The consideration now being given to a Regional Community Development Program is a case in point.

Two pilot programs for regional community development in association with the local councils of Western Sydney and Western/North Western Melbourne regions have been begun through a budget allocation of \$1.5 million.

The programs are being undertaken in co-operation with the New South Wales and Victorian Governments. As you would all be aware, the regions singled out for the pilot program have serious deficiencies in social and community facilities and services, have large concentrations of low income earners, and have high levels of unemployment and rapid population growth.

Importantly the Councils of the target areas - despite strained resources - seem willing to work together in tackling the longer-term problems of their regions' development.

If successful, the pilot ventures should help improve those Councils capacities to participate in the advancement of their regions. They could also assist local councils in planning and budgeting for required activities, and help them make more efficient and equitable the programs of the State and Commonwealth Governments which affect their regions.

What is being sought through the pilot projects is the development of effective co-operative processes.

While there have been hitches along the way, the projects, if they can be made to work, should stimulate innovative activity in terms of Local Government's role in housing, economic enterprises and recreation facilities, as well as providing a catalyst to essential research and information activities by Local Governments.

If innovative approaches of this kind are to succeed we cannot afford to ignore the most immediate needs of our Local Government system. High among those needs must be that for a better flow of local area information - a key resource for planning, managing and evaluating programs and policies.

Such information is crucially important as a catalyst to effective processes of inter-governmental co-operation. It, is, therefore, appropriate that the Department of Territories and Local Government has given particular priority to working with other departments and agencies at the Federal level, and with the various State and Local Government bodies, for the purpose of securing a more regular and reliable provision of local area information.

It will be to the advantage of all areas of government to secure the maximum possible progress and co-operation in the provision of such data.

Good government will often hinge on the availability of timely and accurate information. In the three tier system of government such as we know in Australia, the effective channeling of information between the various levels of government can be of quite considerable importance.

As well, Local Government will only be able to participate fully as a genuine partner in the nation's system of government, if it is fully aware of actions by the Federal Government affecting its particular sphere of interest.

The Department of Territories and Local Government has, therefore, prepared and disseminated to all councils a resume of the 1983/84 Budget's impact on Local Government. Its release of the guide to "Commonwealth Government Assistance for Local Projects" and the updating of the "Digest of Local Government Statistics" should also prove invaluable tools to many local councils.

This type of co-ordination in the provision of information should become an ongoing part on the Commonwealth's responsibility in its relationship with Local Government.

Education and training is another important area in which the Federal Government can provide assistance to Local Government. Increased Federal assistance is being provided through industry training councils, and through expanded support for senior management training. The Federal Government is also looking at developing a broader system of staff exchange between the Commonwealth and Local Government and the States.

Of particular interest to the Institute will be the fact that this year the Government also increased the Local Government Scholarship Scheme to provide assistance to council officers and elected members to participate in employment development and training programs run by the Australian Centre for Local Government Studies at the Canberra College of Advanced Education.

In this regard I think it important that we all acknowledge the instrumental role played by the Institute in the establishment of an educational program designed to further the professional capacity and performance of local government administrators and their staffs.

It was at your Institute's instigation that the Canberra College of Advanced Education established the Australian Centre of Local Government Studies in 1973. The Centre now conducts courses in senior management that have attracted participants not only from around Australia but also from overseas. Other courses are held in conjunction with Colleges of Advanced Education in the States.

The role of the Institute in raising qualification standards, in the dissemination of information and in the conduct of conferences, seminars, and training courses has provided a particularly useful contribution to the labour force development needs of Local Government.

The pressure for enhanced capacity at the Local Government level is certain to increase. It is not only that there is a need for all spheres of Government to co-operate in a national program of economic reconstruction if we are to sustain and diversify the recovery that is now under way.

It is also that there is increasing recognition that Local Government should be directly involved in major programs of national interest.

The Community Employment Program is a case in point. It offers the opportunity for a very significant role for Local Government. Through it Local Government can move beyond a simple agency function towards a more active involvement in the development of employment opportunities and expanded employment and economic promotion activities.

The challenge to Local Government is to ensure that it is adequately equipped to participate effectively in such programs. The Federal Government will do what it can to assist, but ultimately the responsibility lies with Local Government itself to take necessary action.

Like government at the National and State levels, Local Government in Australia has become significantly more complex and significantly more involved in a whole range of community issues associated with the provision of services.

The task before Local Government is one of becoming more responsive to community perceptions and needs, developing effective means of meeting new tasks and handling old ones more satisfactorily, and of planning to create the best possible environment for its citizens now and into the future, including by preserving the best aspects of the past.

At the core of this lies the need for modern, effective management. This is what your seminar with its theme "Municipal Management Methods" is about. Your Institute's new title also recognises the centrality of this aspect. Through new insights and shared experience I should expect you will all emerge from this Seminar better equipped to deal effectively with the various, complex and diverse interests of your communities.

It is important that you should; our program of building a better Australia in partnership with our communities will in large measure depend on it.
