

DECLARATION

DECLARATION ON THE ROLE OF AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

24 November 1997

We elected members of Australian local governments gathered at the 1997 National General Assembly of Local Government in Canberra on 24 November 1997;

Recalling the worldwide Declaration of Local self-government renewed by the International Union of Local Authorities in Toronto in June 1993;

Now proclaim the following Declaration in the Role of Local Government as a standard to which all Australian governments should aspire in their efforts to achieve a more effective democratic process and secure the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of their constituents.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Local governments are elected to represent their local communities; to be a responsible and accountable sphere of democratic governance; to be a focus for community identity and civic spirit; to provide appropriate services to meet community needs in an efficient and effective manner; and to facilitate and coordinate local efforts and resources in pursuit of community goals.

To these ends, the principle of elected Local government must be enshrined in the Australian Constitution and the constitutions of each state and the Northern Territory.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. MUST BE A PARTNER IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

- Local government is a necessary participating partner in the Australian system of democratically elected, representative government in accordance with the view expressed without dissent at the Australian Constitution Convention in Hobart, 1996

2. WILL BE RESPONSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Local government is elected by the local community to respond to its aspirations and concerns, and to meet its needs within available resources. Local government must be electorally accountable to the local community, and manage its affairs in a transparent way.

3. WILL PROVIDE GOOD LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- Local government seeks to provide good governance for its community by being fully informed on local issues; by considering all aspects of environment, social and economic wellbeing through effective strategic and corporate planning based in extensive community consultation; and by balancing competing claims and interests openly, fairly and sympathetically. Local government will, without fear or favour, uphold the highest standards set by legislation and public policy or formulated having regard to local community values.

4. MUST EXERCISE LOCAL AUTONOMY

- As an elected sphere of government, Local government must be free to exercise its own powers and to apply relevant Commonwealth and state/territory laws in a manner which reflects local needs and circumstances. To this end, its revenue base should be enhanced and not be subject to arbitrary limitations by other governments. Local government should not be required to act as an agent of the Commonwealth or states/Northern Territory unless it chooses to do so, and contractual conditions have been mutually agreed through negotiation.

5. WILL PROVIDE LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

- Local government will lead and inform the local community on issues affecting it, and will advocate and represent community interests to other spheres of government and in wider forum. Local government will provide a strong and united voice at state/territory and

national levels for the common concerns and aspirations of local communities.

6. WILL PROMOTE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Local government will encourage non-discriminatory participation of all citizens in building democratic communities which share power and ensure a more equitable allocation of community resources.

7. WILL FOSTER LOCAL IDENTITY AND CIVIC PRIDE

- Through effective leadership, local government will provide a focus for local identity and civic pride, including a caring attitude to others and to the local environment, whether natural or built. It will strive to encourage community participation in civic affairs, and community contributions to local projects and programs.

8. WILL SECURE COMMUNITY COHESION

- Local government will promote tolerant and cohesive communities, based on respect of the values of others, irrespective of race, creed or cultural heritage.

9. WILL ENSURE LOCAL SERVICES DELIVERY

- Local government will provide, or ensure the provision of, programs and services required to meet local community needs. These must be affordable and delivered equitably, efficiently and effectively. Local revenues and resources must be supplemented by external resources, including Commonwealth of state/territory grants, when appropriate.

10. WILL FACILITATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Local government will seek to ensure the balanced physical, social and economic development of its local communities.

11. WILL FOSTER REGIONAL COOPERATION

- Local government will cooperate at a regional scale to address issues affecting adjoining communities, and to provide a basis for effective intergovernment relations. This will include appropriate resource sharing and joint activities amongst councils.

12. WILL ADAPT TO CHANGE

- Local government undertakes to keep pace with the changing circumstances of local communities and its broader operation environment. It commits to the application of benchmarking, continuous improvement and quality assurance systems in order to attain best practice standards and ensure the best possible outcomes for the communities it serves.

Councillor John Campbell
President, Australian Local Government Association
Chair, 1997 National General Assembly