7.3 REPORT ON NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE

Submitting Councillors – Crs Klisaris, Nolan, Paterson and Zographos

NOTICE OF MOTION

That Council receives the report by Councillors on their attendance at the National General Assembly of Local Government, held from 14 to 17 June 2015.

INTRODUCTION

At its 31 March 2015 meeting, the Council gave approval for our attendance at the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association, which was held in Canberra from 14 to 17 June 2015.

The City of Monash has sent Councillors to this event on a number of previous occasions.

The National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association (NGA) provides those Councillors attending with an important opportunity to further our knowledge and understanding of issues affecting Local Government across Australia and in the City of Monash.

Participation at the NGA also provides a valuable insight into best practice in the efficient, effective and equitable delivery of services to residents, which can then be applied to the City of Monash’s service delivery programs.

It is important that the knowledge gained be shared with fellow Councillors and others where appropriate.

NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

The NGA is the premiere Australian Local Government event, bringing together approximately 1000 representatives from Councils across Australia, to develop Local Government policy ideas, meet with key Federal politicians and hear from renowned experts on the key issues affecting Local Government in Australia.

This year’s NGA theme was “Closest to the Community: Local Government in the Federation” and much of the presentations focussed on how local governments’ position ‘on the ground’ put them in an enviable position to assess and respond to the needs of communities. However, challenges do lie ahead for local government and the current debates on the reform of the Federation and taxation need to address those challenges.
Federal politicians presented and provided their views on current policy and the future direction of local government in Australia.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Nationals, the Hon. Warren Truss MP, spoke on the need for Federation reform saying, “It would be better if States (and Local Government) did not have to keep demanding more money from the Commonwealth for services they have the constitutional responsibility to deliver. Reforming the Federation is vital if we are to deliver our publicly funded services to the Australian people more effectively, more efficiently and more fairly.”

He also talked at length on the Roads for Recovery program, saying that the funding had been doubled for the next round which was open to local government only.

Federal Opposition Leader the Hon. Bill Shorten MP, urged the Federal Government to “take politics out of infrastructure” and “think as big as the people who elect us expect us to” when it comes to housing supply, density, public transport, job centres and building additional major cities in each state.

He spoke passionately on family violence, saying that it is an issue of national importance, requiring true leadership from our elected representatives to see it come to an end. He said “family violence is not a family matter”, “it is not a marginal issue or a women’s issue”, but something we all need to work towards solving. He said “family violence is about men’s behaviour and men’s attitudes” and this is what needs to be addressed. He applauded the efforts of the Municipal Association of Victoria’s Prevention of Violence against Women program which focuses on primary prevention and professional development and he believes this model can be rolled out Australia wide.

He also said that local government should be striving to see women equally represented on councils and encouraging more women to run for office.

The Leader of the Greens Senator Dr Richard di Natale, highlighted the Green’s support for constitutional recognition of local government and his hope that the Federation White Paper will address this issue. He spoke out against the freeze on the indexation of Federal Assistance Grants by the Federal Government and said that the Government needs to stop cutting and look at revenue instead. He said “I don’t buy the argument that the community aren’t happy to pay for improving services” He also said “Whenever there is a vacuum, local government steps in.”

Further to this, keynote presentations were also provided by the Hon. Greg Hunt MP, Minister for the Environment, who talked about clean air, energy efficiency and transport. Tim Soutphommasane, Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner spoke about the path to radicalisation and the importance of programs such as ‘living safe together’.
Australian of the Year Rosie Batty closed the conference with an emotional address on the importance of all 3 tiers of government and all Australians coming together to defeat family violence. She spoke specifically on the role of local government in this fight.

80 motions were received from Councils around Australia and these were discussed and voted upon over the course of the assembly. Topics included the freezing of Federal Assistance Grants, calls for additional public transport and infrastructure resources, climate change response, provision of affordable housing, the Commonwealth Home Support Program, natural disaster response and increasing resources for youth mental health and family violence.

Maroondah City Council was honoured with the 2015 National Award for Excellence in Local Government in recognition of the Changing Places - Changing Lives project. The design provides major improvements to standard accessible toilets and gives people with a disability greater independence so they can participate in everyday activities that many people take for granted. Each toilet includes a height adjustable adult sized changing bench and a tracking hoist system.

CONCLUSION

City of Monash representation at the NGA allows up to date information and policy direction to be received, discussed and returned to the Council to assist it with on-going planning and implementation of its activities.

The 2015 National General Assembly provided an important opportunity for this Council to be involved in understanding the challenges that lie ahead for councils and to have a voice in shaping the future of Local Government in our nation.