7.3 REPORT ON ATTENDANCE AT 2017 ALGA NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Submitting Councillors: Crs Fergeus and James

MOTION

That Council receives the report by Councillors on their attendance at the National General Assembly of Local Government, held from 19 to 21 June 2017.

INTRODUCTION

At its 28 March 2017 meeting, Council approved our attendance at the National General (NGA) of the Australian Local Government Association, which was held in Canberra from 19 to 21 June 2017. The assembly was well attended, with over 800 delegates from Councils right across Australia.

The 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.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The Australia Association of Local Government (ALGA) states that:

“NGA is the premier event in the local government calendar and is an opportunity for key local government representatives to debate issues of national significance, hear from political and academic speakers as well as to develop policy and fiscal strategy for the coming year.

Local government plays a significant role in the national economy and councils play critical roles in their local economies. The NGA provides an important opportunity for the sector to unite and build on the work of the ALGA Board and State and Territory Local Government Associations strengthen the contribution that local government makes.”

There were also a range of interesting items raised by speakers over the course of the NGA:

- The Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, officially opened the NGA and welcomed councillors to Canberra. He stressed the importance of local government in strong terms, and put the call out for more nominations from councils for the Honours list, particularly of women making strong contributions to communities;
- David O’Loughlin, President of the ALGA and Mayor of Port Pirie, addressed the NGA. Among other comments, he stressed the necessity of the local government sector understanding the full impact of driverless cars;
A panel of experts addressed the NGA on the use of technology. Some councils are moving to be ‘Smart Cities’, focusing on issues including structural health monitoring, flood adaptation, and land use assessment. Some Councils are not only using technology to live stream their meetings, but have also implemented participatory elements to their meetings where residents and ratepayers can ask questions and participate in meetings via online platforms. Several Councils are now regularly getting 200+ people taking part in meetings and consultations;

The Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, addressed the NGA and asserted that Federal politicians can learn a lot from local government. He formally invited each Council in Australia to put forward three ideas for local projects to the Australian Labor Party through his Office and the Office of the Shadow Minister for Local Government, Stephen Jones MP;

Stephen Jones, Shadow Minister for Local Government, strongly backed constitutional recognition for local governments;

The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion, addressed the NGA on the issue of closing the gap and stated that Councils have a key role to play.

Senator Fiona Nash, Minister for Local Government, announced the return of indexation for the Community Grants program for the 2017/2018 financial year

Laura Tingle spoke about the disappointment in the lack of policy direction on climate change despite overwhelming support amongst the community and leaders. She said that political instability in party leaders have driven politicians to distance themselves from good policy and instead align themselves within different party factions

Sean Callanan told us that one in three uses of a mobile phone each day is to check Facebook and that on average Facebook is checked 47 times per day by users. He said that 53% of social media users expected a response to their questions within one hour.

Michael Keenan, Minister for Justice, said that building strong, cohesive and inclusive communities is the best defence against the threat of terror

The debate on motions was a highlight of the NGA and was conducted over a number of days. Any Australian Council can put forward a motion for consideration of the NGA, and more than 100 motions were put to the 2017 Assembly. Motions which were carried included:

- That the National General Assembly call upon the Federal government to hold a referendum to amend the Commonwealth Constitution to formally recognise ‘local government’ and further that the National General Assembly seek bi-partisan support for the proposal;
- That the Australian Local Government Association call on the Australian Government to reallocate Commonwealth taxes to achieve at least a 1% share for local government throughout Australia;
- That the National General Assembly call upon call on the Australian Government to review the amount and method of indexing Financial Assistance Grants to ensure that funding is commensurate with increases in the costs of efficient local government service delivery in 2017-18 and beyond;
- That the NGA condemn state and territory government rate capping policies and call on the Federal Government to immediately review state government control over Local Government’s capacity to set its own rates and control its own revenue;
• That the National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to accelerate the development of a national approach to the regulatory framework and Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) architecture to facilitate the introduction of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAVs);

• That the NGA advocate to the Federal Government for national funds for Local Government to implement Smart Communities initiatives such as Tesla batteries and other technological solutions;

• That the National General Assembly call on the Federal Government to declare high-speed, high-capacity broadband to be a utility, defined as an essential infrastructure service provided principally for public benefit and which enables economic growth and greater quality of life to achieve the goal of universal coverage;

• That the National General Assembly call on the Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments to support the inclusion of Family Violence clauses in all work place policies nationally;

• That the National General Assembly supports the Welcoming Cities initiative launched by the Scanlon Foundation and Welcome to Australia in March 2016; and the development of The Australian Standard for Welcoming Cities, to support local councils in their work to create more inclusive communities;

• That the National General Assembly encourage Australian councils to consider efforts they could take to lobby the Federal Government to change the date of recognition of Australia Day;

• That the National General Assembly call on the Federal Government to implement an Innovation Fund for the specific purpose of reducing plastic waste;

• That the National General Assembly call on the Commonwealth to work with local and state/territory governments towards implementing a national ban on single use non-reusable plastic bags.

CONCLUSION

It is encouraging to see that Monash Council is taking action on a range of initiatives which are being considered by councils across Australia. For future Assemblies, it is our recommendation that Council should form an official position on Motions, especially those that are particularly relevant to our municipality, and clearly identify a voting delegate with responsibility for representing Councils position.

Attendance at the NGA offers a range of benefits – ability to represent Monash Council in debate on a range of issues of national importance, direct access to Ministers and key Members of Parliament, and the opportunity to network and share best practice with academics, experts, and representatives from Councils across the country.

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 and we recommend continued attendance by Councillors in the future.