

### 6.3 REPORT ON NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE

Submitting Councillors – McCluskey, Samardzija, Luo, Fergeus, de Silva, Zographos

#### **MOTION**

*That Council receives the report by Councillors on their attendance at the National General Assembly of Local Government, held from 20 to 23 June 2021.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

At its May 2021 meeting, Council gave its approval for six Councillors to attend the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association, held in Canberra from 20 to 23 June 2021. Councillors have attended this event on a number of previous occasions, this being the first since 2019. COVID-19 restrictions precluded the event being held in 2020.

The National General Assembly (NGA) of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) provides those Councillors attending with an important opportunity to further their collective and individual knowledge around the challenges faced, initiatives undertaken and perspectives held by other Local Government Authorities (LGA) across Australia.

The broad spectrum of LGA representatives attending the conference provided a valuable insight into the diverse approaches taken to shared issues, and what is recognised as best practice. This is particularly valuable in terms of the effects and learning from the COVID-19 environment, how other jurisdictions coped with the onset of COVID-19, and how they continue to do so, including how newly-established best practice may be applied to the City of Monash's delivery of programs and services.

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 provides a unique opportunity for representatives from councils across Australia, including Councillors, CEOs and officers, to share perspectives and ideas, and establish national and regional positions on issues affecting many Australian communities.

Presentations from subject matter experts, Councillors, Mayors and Federal Parliamentarians provided insights into policy and positions of government, but also valuable information and data on matters affecting communities for which Councillors have responsibility.

The theme of the 27<sup>th</sup> NGA conference “Working Together for our Communities” encompassed the valuable role played by LGAs in supporting our communities in times of adversity such as has been experienced during the COVID-19 period thus far. This included embracing what is still needing to be continued and advancing the role local government can play in the national approach to combatting the virus and its effects.

The conference catered for in-person and virtual attendance with a parallel program where portions of the conference were live streamed as well as supplemented with virtual content at other stages. Motions were debated and dealt with on the floor at the conference venue itself.

A number of presentations, discussions groups and forums were held, with key sessions of note as follows:

The Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Nationals, the Hon. Michael McCormack MP\*

Mr McCormack spoke about the importance of local government in guiding state and federal governments in their policy responses. He noted that local government provides critical on-the-ground information about communities and local areas that cannot be seen from Canberra. Local government comes into its own when it is called upon to deal with a challenge such as COVID-19; a challenge that requires a nationally coordinated response, but with a deep understanding of what is required for success at the local level.

Mr McCormack also spoke about the particular importance of local governments to their communities in regional areas and towns, and the very different challenges facing those communities and local governments compared with local governments in metropolitan areas.

COVID – The Long Goodbye - Presentation by speakers and live Q & A session

Speakers:

- Professor Mary-Louise McLaws, Epidemiology, Hospital Infection and Infectious Diseases Control – UNSW
- Professor Gigi Forster, School of Economics - UNSW
- Professor Sanjaya Senanayake, Infectious Diseases Specialist – ANU

A rather engaging session that honed in on the distinct different perspectives of disease control and its inherent humanitarian focus versus that of an economics perspective and its concentration on the financial current and future state. It is to be noted that Professor Forster’s ‘economic’ perspective is largely not supported by most economists and can be contrasted with the address from Danielle Wood, CEO of the Grattan Institute (summary below). An unmistakable clash of ideologies and preferences in how communities across the nation firstly cope with, then look to recover from, the effects of COVID-19. Truly reflective of sentiment throughout communities and the political landscape. Common though was that local

government should and could play a more significant role as part of a national approach.

#### Keynote Address: Planning a Prosperous Future

Danielle Wood, CEO of the Grattan Institute, provided an in-depth and evidence-based presentation on the path towards economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges such as climate change and skilled migration. Ms Wood's economic analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic suggested that a successful health response to the pandemic was intertwined with and key to a successful economic recovery, but that more support was needed for people hardest hit by lockdowns and other public health measures, such as young people, women and people in casual employment. Local government can play a key role in rolling out vital public health measures such as vaccinations, as well as economic support for people and sectors hardest hit.

#### Panel of Mayors: Local Employment and Economic Stimulus

Speakers:

- Nicholas Reece - Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne
- Tracy Roberts – Mayor, City of Wanneroo, WA
- Sean Dillon – Mayor, Barcaldine Regional Council, QLD

The discussion provided an interesting showcase of the different challenges facing LGAs across Australia, from inner urban, peri-urban, and rural councils. Deputy Lord Mayor Reece outlined the unique challenges facing Melbourne's central business district, with data showing the city is seeing less than half the pedestrian traffic given the stay-at-home and work-from-home public health orders. He outlined several successful initiatives the City of Melbourne has undertaken to support local businesses, residents and people sleeping rough, and encourage people back to the city. In contrast, Mayor Roberts spoke about the renewed activity in the suburbs as less people travelled to the central business district.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The attendance by councillors from the City of Monash at the NGA provided a unique and valuable opportunity to seek and share different perspectives, lessons and evolving best practice. This input will assist the City of Monash to establish relevant and up-to-date policies and initiatives, and inform reviews and implementation at Monash.

The overwhelming focus for the 2021 conference was the COVID-19 environment, acknowledging that communities across the country continue to grapple with the virus and its effects and, importantly, how we are all looking to contribute to the needs of our own communities at a local level in coping with the virus and how we look to recover.

\*The Hon Michael McCormack MP was replaced later that day by the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP as Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Leader of the Nationals.