



Media Release

Strengthening Local Government Task Force

17/11/2006

COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND UNIONS CRITIQUE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Community, environmental groups and unions believe councils need to maintain human, cultural, and education services, but require a fairer share of resources to be able to provide them.

They also think that these services should be prioritised in long term strategic planning processes - they want councils to avoid making populist decisions at the expense of what is best long term for their communities.

These were just some of the views expressed yesterday at the first in a series of roundtables coordinated by the Strengthening Local Government Task Force to get broad and independent input into the future of NSW Local Government.

A cross section of community and environmental organisations as well as unions took part in the round table, including the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW, Public Library Associations, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the Council Of The Ageing and the United Services Union.

"This roundtable was very valuable in terms of giving the task force an understanding of how communities are affected by local government problems," Co-Chair of the Task Force, Cr Genia McCaffery said.

"It's clear that these groups have a preference for dealing with local government and believe the sector is best placed to provide many services, but they have to deal with the State Government because they know our sector doesn't have the resources."

Cr McCaffery added that the only solution to this is more direct funding to local government and a greater cut of taxation revenue, as well as improved management practices within councils. "Roundtable participants were shocked that local government only gets 5% of taxation revenue—communities need to know that we are working with limited capacity."

Other issues raised at the round table include:

- The need to address the skills shortage in the local government sector, particularly in the areas of planning and engineering;
- Safeguards for council employees, particularly relating to outsourcing;
- Incentives for developers and organisations that support the environment;
- The importance of the State and Local Governments working together.
- Financial pressures should not be used as an excuse to cut services or put pressure on employees.

"We asked attendees to be frank about their concerns, and we're grateful that they did. We'll take it all on board when we work out what changes are needed to the way councils raise revenue and are governed and managed in NSW," Cr Col Sullivan OAM, Co-Chair of the task force said.

"The importance of a positive working relationship between the State and Local Governments was also raised. The Opposition has agreed to sign an Inter-governmental Agreement if elected to government, and we hope the State Government listens to the NSW community and follows suit."

"Ensuring councils avoid making populist decisions for short term gain is also important, and long term social planning may be a part solution."

The next roundtable will be held for business organisations at 1.30pm on 20 November 2006. For more information contact the task force project management team on 9242 4045.

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