

# Local Government Association of NSW



# Shires Association of NSW

Our ref: R10/0033  
24 March 2011

Mr Barry O'Farrell, MP  
Leader of the Opposition,  
Shadow Minister for Western Sydney,  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr O'Farrell,

Thank you for responding to the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (LGSA) *NSW Election Priorities 2011*.

We are pleased with the overall direction of your response and would like an opportunity to discuss many aspects in more detail. We offer initial comment throughout this letter.

Should you be successful at the election on Saturday, we would like to book a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss our priorities for Local Government and the communities they serve, and how the State Government and NSW councils can work together best to achieve our priorities.

NSW councils are heartened by your response that you will end rampant cost-shifting and treat Local Government as a partner, rather than a neglected poor cousin.

We note if elected to Government, you will undertake a full review of Local Government finances and conduct the review in consultation with Local Governments and the LGSA. We stand ready to fully participate in that review.

The LGSA recognise you will work with stakeholders to review funding arrangements for emergency services. However, we are concerned that one of your starting points is ensuring their funding streams are protected. We must explore what this means in detail.

Similarly, the LGSA are disappointed that you have not agreed to end rate pegging and seek the opportunity to try again to convince you of the merits of our case.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals commitment to rewrite the State's planning laws is most definitely welcomed by the LGSA. It is vitally important that you are committed to returning local planning powers to local communities through their councils.

We agree with your commitment to scrapping Part 3A, your commitment to re-examining the role of Joint Regional Planning Panels and your comments on the harmful effects of

the Affordable Rental Housing SEPP. We hope to work closely with you on giving real detailed meaning to the solutions on all these land use planning issues.

We keenly anticipate working with you on developing smaller Local Health Networks and ensuring that local communities, including Local Government, have a real voice in these decision-making processes.

In relation to Home and Community Care, we look forward to working with you as part of wider negotiations between the three spheres of government, with a focus on partnership and negotiation rather than forced subordination.

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that NSW Government funding is desperately needed by the public library network. So we are troubled as to why the NSW Liberals and Nationals have committed to a review of the funding allocated to our public libraries and we would like to discuss this with you further.

The LGSA acknowledge that the NSW Liberals and Nationals have taken a strong position in support of regional communities and industry in the Murray Darling Basin. We share your view that any future water reform in the Murray Darling Basin must be in accord with the triple bottom line – i.e. equal treatment of environmental, agricultural and socio economic needs.

While we will work with a NSW Liberals and Nationals Government to undertake a review of the waste levy and its operation, we are concerned that you have not understood the depth of both analysis and feeling on this issue and have not supported our request more directly. We look forward to renewing our dialogue on the waste issue.

A major commitment is required to assist councils and communities to manage the impacts of climate change. We note and share your concern that the current Government has been frustratingly slow to finalise and release a Climate Change Action Plan. However, the required commitment must go well beyond the Renewable Energy Buy-Back Scheme..

The LGSA welcome your commitment to an additional \$6 million per annum for weed control and we look forward to working with you to ensure that these funds are effectively and strategically deployed.

It is recognised that you are committed to supporting Catchment Management Authorities and have said you will announce further details. We await those details with interest.

Ownership of local water utilities should remain a function of Local Government and / or regional alliances. We are relieved that you are opposed to forced amalgamations of water utilities in regional NSW. We would be most interested in exploring the details of your commitment to supporting the voluntary merger of water utilities in regional NSW where a significant benefit will accrue to customers.

The LGSA are pleased to note that you have no plans to change the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage program.

We also welcome your planned reassessment of Timber Bridges Partnership Program.

As you are aware, we proposed the creation a \$1 billion Local Government Infrastructure Fund, so we are disappointed with the proposed subsidised loan scheme. Nonetheless, we are prepared to work with you on the mechanics of how this proceeds should you be elected to Government.

We are delighted with your endorsement of the proposal from the Australian Local Government Association for a referendum to amend the Australian Constitution to give the Australian Government the power to fund Local Government and to protect people's rights to democratically elect their councils.

The LGSA are similarly pleased by your commitment to amend the relevant legislation to permit council general managers to be responsible for the administration of Local Government elections, whilst maintaining the option of sub-contracting the administration to Elections NSW.

Finally, we would like to discuss further your ideas of including the establishment of an Intergovernmental Commission for Future Local Government and the establishment of a mentoring program, as part of a review of the *Local Government Act*.

The LGSA look forward to building a strong partnership with the incoming State Government, and we wish you well in the final days of your campaign.

Yours sincerely

Cr Keith Rhoades AFSM  
**President**  
*Local Government Association of NSW*

Cr Bruce Miller  
**President**  
*Shires Association of NSW*