



14 August 2014

The Hon. Geoff Brock MP  
Minister for Local Government  
GPO Box 1671  
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister Brock

As you are aware the Outback Communities Authority (OCA) has received correspondence from the Premier of South Australia about his intention to abolish all boards and committees unless it can be demonstrated the board or committee has an essential service that cannot be met through other means.

On behalf of the OCA I write to you to put a case for granting an exemption from abolition for the OCA and the Andamooka Town Management Committee (ATMC), a joint management committee established under section 11 of the *Outback Communities (Administration & Management) Act 2009* (the Act) with independent, community and OCA representation.

#### **The OCA Governance Model**

Retaining the OCA is critical to the people living and working in the outback and the South Australian Government for the following reasons:

- The outback governance model was developed through a long term engagement process with outback communities and has been widely supported since the Act came into effect in 2009.
- The appointment of the OCA's seven members, with the requirement for at least four members to be from the outback, ensures a diverse portfolio of experience, skill and knowledge of matters affecting those living and working in the outback.
- The OCA is the only authority that is strategically placed to provide objective advice to the Government of South Australia on a wide range of sensitive social, cultural, economic and environmental issues.
- The OCA is best placed to independently implement a community contribution levy into communities to enhance the amenity of that community.
- The OCA attracts around \$1.455 million in Commonwealth funding annually for the provision of local government services to the outback.

**The OCA is a very cost effective way of achieving this outcome and has facilitated positive change for outback communities, as evidenced by establishment of the ATMC, referred to later in this submission.**

## **Future Direction**

In setting its Strategic Plan 2016-2020 the OCA aims to:

- Establish itself as the voice of the outback and a conduit between State Government, industry and the community.
- Strengthen communications between Government and outback people by working collaboratively with the OCA's regional peers such as Regional Development Australia and Natural Resource Management groups.
- Establish networks to ensure Government policy and planning is informed of the views, aspirations and priorities for outback communities.
- Attract funding from new sources such as industry partnerships, untapped Commonwealth funding, and innovative thinking such as research initiatives that will assist outback communities.

**The cumulative skills, experience and networks of OCA members will assist in delivering these outcomes.**

Legislators drafted the Act with the intent of establishing an independent body to carry out the responsibility of government to provide facilities and services in the outback and to articulate the views, interests and aspirations of outback communities. The Outback Communities Authority, within our means to do so, ensures the public services usually delivered by local government are available to those living, working and visiting the outback. Similar geographic areas within Australia are represented by many smaller more formal local government models that have local representation making local decisions (excepting far west NSW which has a unrepresentative administrative model).

**The OCA represents a model of governance that is unique in the Australian 'local government' context that ensures the effective management of facilities and services in the unincorporated areas, allowing the State Government to maintain an arm's length oversight from what is usually recognised as the role of local government.**

## **Attracting Funding**

As an independent statutory body, the OCA is recognised in the *South Australian Local Government Grants Commission Act 1992* as a provider of local government service. As such the OCA is in a unique position where it attracts Commonwealth funding. This year alone the OCA has secured \$1.455 million from the Australian Government in Financial Assistance Grants. The mechanism that underpins the Constitutional guarantee of continuance of local government service in South Australia is such that this money would be lost to the State and the outback specifically, if the OCA were to be abolished.

**The OCA is able to attract local government grants annually from the Australian Government at a ratio of around 1:2.5 (State to Commonwealth).**

OCA is eligible to attract other Commonwealth funding. To date the OCA has been integral in securing over \$6 million in funding for major outback infrastructure upgrades of strategically located remote aerodromes at Marla, Oodnadatta, Mintabie, William Creek, Glendambo, Manna Hill and Marree. The Municipal and Essential Services program provided nearly \$250,000 in grants in this year alone for municipal service delivery, including funding to employ a program manager into the Aboriginal community of Oodnadatta.



**The OCA's ability to attract funding from sources other than the State is improving the safety and general amenity of those living and working in the outback.**

The Act makes provision for the OCA to impose an Assets Sustainability Levy (ASL) across the outback and a Community Contribution Scheme (CCS) on individual communities, in a similar way local government levy's a general rate and special rate respectively. The OCA is:

- Facilitating a CCS in Andamooka and Iron Knob, raising \$250,000 annually for the provision of services in those towns.
- Working through the ATMC and other benchmark town management mechanisms to deliver crucial change for the management of the Andamooka community.
- Working toward the introduction of an ASL to generate revenue for maintenance of outback infrastructure.

**The implementation of an ASL and a CCS requires a level of independence from State Government, ensuring absolute objectivity to encourage participation of outback communities in their administration and management.**

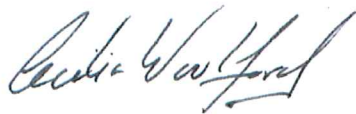
The OCA is mindful of the resources required to carry out the objectives of the Act and welcomes the opportunity for review. The OCA will:

- Review the OCA's effectiveness in delivering quality governance.
- Review the skill sets currently on the OCA and progressively address gaps.
- Assist in legislative review, and provide advice to State Government on how OCA legislation can best meet the governance needs of the outback.

**In summary, the existence of the OCA is critical in meeting the objectives of the Act and for the effective, efficient management of local government facilities and services in the outback.**

We therefore ask that the OCA and the ATMC be granted an exemption from abolition.

Yours sincerely



**Cecilia Woolford**  
**Chair**  
Outback Communities Authority