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*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

Good morning delegates and thank you for your invitation to address the National General Assembly of Local Government.

Firstly I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet, and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

Well, we're almost there!

We're almost at the end of the longest election campaign for over 50 years.

In 10 days' time the vote count will start, the television and radio ads will have ceased and campaign teams will prepare to start pulling down election posters.

One thing that won't stop is Labor's commitment to local government.

Labor recognises the critical role local government has in social and local infrastructure, providing the essential services people need in the places they live – in their local communities.

It is my strong belief that the Federal Government must play an active part in supporting local government and providing the right context for local services to be delivered to local people in an efficient and responsive manner.

The Federal Government must provide leadership and a Labor government under Bill Shorten will do this, where the Abbott and Turnbull Liberal-National Governments have failed.

When Mr Shorten spoke to you at last year's Assembly he highlighted the defining global trends facing Australia, in particular the opportunities that we can make of the surge in digital technology.

It is perhaps fortuitous then, that the theme of this year's Assembly is Partners in an Innovative and Prosperous Australia.

Labor knows that to be a prosperous nation we must be an innovative nation, which is why we've led the policy debate in this area.

Long before the current Prime Minister started talking about the exciting times we live in; Labor had already announced a comprehensive suite of innovation policies to take to the upcoming federal election.

Policies like providing 25,000 teaching scholarships to new and recent graduates of STEM degrees to encourage them to continue their study and become a STEM teacher.

And policies like our \$4.5 million grants program to support organisations that promote, encourage and inspire girls to learn code so that in the future Australian women are just as equipped to benefit from the jobs of the future as men will be.

When the Government finally came to the table on innovation policies late last year, about half of the policies they announced were borrowed from Labor.

While we are proud of the progress we have made in leading the conversation on innovation in Australia, there is always more to learn - to stay ahead of the curve on innovation.

Labor wants local government to be a genuine partner in building innovation and prosperity, not an afterthought as you have been all too often under this government.

Today I want to tell you about Labor's positive policies to support and strengthen local government.

Labor's commitment to local government

In 2015, Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten described local government as

"Australia's most direct and accessible form of democracy".

He said

You are our frontline for delivering services in our wonderful country. Every day, in a hundred different ways, local governments build our civic identity and add to the heart and soul of our nation".

That message is no less true today than it was 12 months ago.

Labor wants local government to thrive because we know the positive impact it can have on our local communities, and our nations.

Labor values local government and our record shows it.

Gough Whitlam introduced direct grants to local government and made local government part of the nation building agenda. Labor pioneered urban policy in Australia and made it a matter of national debate and a national priority.

The Hawke Government created the Better Cities program under Brian Howe.

The Rudd Government introduced the national summit of mayors and ministers to discuss priorities and common issues.

It was Labor that gave local government a seat at the COAG table.

We created Infrastructure Australia, the Major Cities unit, the Urban Policy Forum and doubled roads funding when last in government.

We produced the State of Australian Cities reports and developed the Urban Design protocol.

The creation of the \$1 billion Regional Development Australia Fund and the Liveable Cities Program also consolidated the role of the federal government in working with local government to deliver a range of projects for councils and shires to improve community infrastructure.

When our national prosperity was threatened by the GFC, local government and the previous federal Labor government worked together to deliver infrastructure projects to stave off recession.

We partnered with local government to deliver over 6,000 local community projects.

This was partnership that delivered for local communities and the nation.

Even from opposition Labor has delivered for local government, including \$1.1 billion in additional Roads to Recovery funding.

Labor is the natural party for local government.

When we say we are committed to local government that is not the end of the conversation. We mean what we say and we have a clear record of delivery on this commitment.

On any objective measure the same cannot be said for this government, either under Tony Abbott or Malcolm Turnbull.

Labor's positive policies for local government

Labor doesn't have any indecision or doubt about the role of local government. We won't waffle on without giving you clear and measurable commitments.

By working collaboratively with local government and working with local government to formally recognise their important role, a Labor federal government can facilitate this growth where it is needed most.

Critical to this growth is properly resourcing local councils.

Labor knows this because we have heard from many of you, since the 2014 Budget, about exactly what it means when those resources don't keep pace.

The indexation freeze on financial assistance grants, which was imposed on local government without any analysis or consultation, saw \$925 million cut from your budgets.

Labor's own analysis of this ill-advised freeze showed that around two-thirds, or \$680 million, was borne by regional communities who could least afford it.

We have seen that cuts of this magnitude put new works on the back burner, threaten on-going maintenance and force you to look elsewhere for savings, take on debt or ask your ratepayers to contribute more.

The already confronting deficit for local government infrastructure estimated by ALGA at around \$14.5 billion makes these significant cuts even more unsustainable.

Labor will put an end to the uncertainty of the indexation freeze on financial assistance grants and commit to recommencing indexation from 1 July 2017.

This will enable local government to once again plan for the future and make strategic decisions about infrastructure and service priorities.

At the same time as councils have been dealing with the impact of a freeze on financial assistance grants, the inefficient and politically motivated National Stronger Regions Fund, instead of delivering jobs and investment for struggling regional communities, has let local councils and communities down.

For the last three years the LNP has used regional development funding to try and win votes in target seats, instead of supporting communities that need it most.

More than 70 percent of the total \$505 million already allocated under the first two rounds of the National Stronger Regions Fund has gone to seats held by LNP MPs or seats being targeted by the Turnbull Liberal-National Government.

Small regional councils without the capacity to match funding were effectively locked out of this funding program.

The Turnbull Liberal-National Government has also cut billions of dollars from health, education, universities and infrastructure - cuts which disproportionately hurt regional communities.

Now, three years and half a billion dollars later the Turnbull Liberal-National Government has finally announced that it will fix its own regional funding mess.

Despite admitting yesterday that the National Stronger Regions Fund is fundamentally flawed and would be replaced by a new program called the Building Better Regions Fund, it is understood that the Turnbull Liberal-National Government, if it retains government, will continue to deliver the third round of funding under this the National Stronger Regions Fund.

It is therefore unclear what, if any, of the original \$1 billion funding allocated for the National Stronger Regions fund to 2020, will even be available to be delivered under this proposed new funding model dedicated to regional Australia.

Rather than being a sudden understanding of the needs of regional Australia, this appears to be a desperate attempt by the LNP to play catch-up only ten days out from the election.

While we welcome the LNP finally acknowledging part of their failure on regional funding, it is simply too little too late.

A future Labor Government won't play politics with regional development funding like the LNP has.

We want to work with local councils, like we did when we were last in government to invest in our regions, because strong regions deliver a stronger Australia.

Infrastructure financing facility to drive investment

While we must genuinely invest in our regions where the LNP has failed, we also acknowledge that Australia's cities are growing rapidly.

By 2031 our four largest capitals – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth – will have increased by 46 per cent. Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart and Darwin are expected to grow by nearly 30 per cent.

At the same time, public sector infrastructure investment has declined by 20 per cent under the Abbott-Turnbull Government.

You can't claim to be building for the future, as Malcolm Turnbull has done on a daily basis throughout this campaign, when you're actually reducing infrastructure investment.

A Labor Government will make private investment in nation building easier through a \$10 billion infrastructure financing facility administered by Infrastructure Australia.

In a time of limited resources government must think creatively about new financing models for infrastructure.

The model will be similar to the highly successful Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which has attracted \$1.80 in private investment for every dollar of public investment.

Subject to strict and transparent guidelines, Infrastructure Australia will work with private investors to help mitigate risk on big projects using loan guarantees, loans, seed money and direct investment to get projects up and running.

This will give the private sector the confidence it needs to be involved.

It also opens the door to the \$2 trillion held in superannuation, bringing a national pipeline of investment online.

Labor will drive smart and sustainable infrastructure

The LNP's strategy of announcing projects on the run has also failed, leaving behind the East West Link fiasco, the collapse of the Perth Freight Link in the courts and a \$6.8 billion cost blowout on Westconnex.

Labor wants to see a return to evidence-based policy decisions, where projects are assessed independently by Infrastructure Australia.

As part of this, we will ensure proposals anticipate future needs as well as current demand. That is why we will require any project submitted to Infrastructure Australia to demonstrate consideration of smart infrastructure and sustainability.

Smart infrastructure uses digital technology to manage infrastructure use and improve consumer experience. For example, on motorways smart technology can be used for entry ramp signalling, variable speed limit signs, lane control, Closed Circuit TVs, and digital message signs which provide live updates on traffic conditions and delays. Yarra Valley Water is using smart technology to locate leaks, bursts, meter failures and to monitor the performance of water and sewerage systems in real time.

This technology works. Yarra Water has saved nearly \$1 million and over a billion litres of water in the last financial year. This technology saves money, resources and improves the consumer experience.

Similar successes of smart technology can be seen in my home state of Tasmania, where the world's first economy-wide intelligent sensor network is creating a digital map of Tasmania with benefits across sectors. From tourism tracking data helping to cater to visitors, to improving efficiency and sustainability of irrigation, agriculture and aquaculture, the application of this technology is wide-ranging.

Smart technology is improving our decision making capacity and is just one example of the kind of innovation that can transform our local communities.

While the Liberals have announced a \$50 million Smart Cities Program in recent days, they are merely trying to keep up with Labor's economy-wide leadership in the area.

Our sustainability requirement for major projects will also assist us to both mitigate the effects of climate change and to reduce change by making our major urban centres greener. Increasing tree canopy coverage and green walls and roofs requirements make our cities and urban centre better places to live, to visit and to be.

Labor believes major projects should integrate active transport activities through bike sheds, lockers and facilities to support people who want to ride to work, school, university or town.

Innovation must be underpinned by the NBN

Fundamental to the innovation agenda, to our future as a smart, digitally-ready economy is the provision of high-speed, fibre internet.

Technology is transforming the way that our communities grow, the types of jobs Australians have and the way those jobs are performed.

This situation is reflected in CEDA's prediction that almost five million jobs – about 40 per cent of today's workforce are likely to be replaced in the next 10-20 years.

If local government is to play a genuine role in this future, it is vital that you foster an environment where businesses can take advantage of the jobs of the future. To take advantage of future growth government must facilitate an environment that is digitally-ready.

This is exactly why Labor brought the NBN project off the drawing board and into the homes and businesses of Australia. The Turnbull Government has dumped our plans for fibre to all premises and introduced the inferior fibre to the node. This will reinforce, not address, inequality between suburbs and regions. So too will the decision to dump uniform national access pricing.

In the last three years Australia has plummeted from 30th in the world for internet speeds to 60th. We are now behind most of Europe. We are behind most of Asia. We are behind the United States and Canada and New Zealand. We are even behind Romania, Russia, Poland and Slovakia.

Make no mistake – the NBN isn't just nice to have. It is an essential part of the national infrastructure that will underpin economic growth. Not having access or inferior access will restrict growth in your local government areas and shires. Already real estate advertisements make NBN connection a feature of a property for sale. Unlike the current Government, Labor won't tell people just to move to an area where the NBN is already introduced.

Digital infrastructure supports innovation. Without it the economic potential of those areas with inferior connections will be restricted. Labor will not accept the arbitrary consolidation of existing inequality. We will build a connected, digitally ready country that facilitates equality and we need local government to be a part of this task.

Regional innovation fund to build strong regions

Ensuring we have the infrastructure to innovate underpins our plan to create a Regional Innovation Fund to kickstart a range of initiatives to expand the role of Australia's regions in contributing to the national innovation effort.

It will, for example, invest in an expansion of the network of hubs and accelerators across the country, focusing on regional and rural sites.

Our approach will be flexible, underpinned by consultations with stakeholders in rural and regional Australia to ensure investment reinforces local economic strengths and priorities or helps diversify economic activity.

Labor wants to work with regions to establish self-sustaining innovation hubs that are closely integrated with the local business community.

The Fund could address skills and experience gaps by enabling established entrepreneurs from various parts of the country to team up with regional accelerators and mentor new startups; and enable university-based accelerators to offer seed funding for a limited number of student-led startups on a competitive basis to support prototyping and early proof-of-concept.

Central to our approach will be a commitment to consult and work with regions to ensure that the Regional Innovation Fund provides the greatest possible benefit to a regional innovation effort

Local government has a key role to play in fostering innovation – in service delivery, infrastructure development and management, digital start-ups and livable urban, regional and rural environments.

Only Labor will provide local government with the support, certainty and resources needed to achieve this vision.

The Australian Council of Local Government

Labor's plan does not end with the policy direction and support to deliver the services and the infrastructure our community deserves; we are also fundamentally committed to repairing the relationship between local government and the Federal Government that has been so damaged over the last three years.

Labor will reintroduce the Australian Council of Local Government, to be held annually, to ensure councils and shires have a direct and consistent dialogue with the Prime Minister and the Ministry.

The Australia Council of Local Government, which built relationships between different levels of government since Labor introduced it in 2008, will once again forge a stronger partnership between the Federal Government and councils and shires, with the aim of giving local communities a greater voice in the future of our country.

Labor's Australia Council of Local Government will once again foster cooperation between national and local government to work together to achieve stronger, shared outcomes to support local jobs and invest in infrastructure.

This won't be a talk fest – it will be a serious working meeting to discuss our relationship, national priorities and how the Federal Government and local government can work together.

Critically the Australia Council of Local Government will provide a forum for us to actually take advantage of the digital economy and innovation that can drive our local communities.

Labor will work closely with you and a formal annual consultative arrangement will ensure that this close relationship is locked in to the national calendar. Labor will allocate \$400,000 over four years to deliver on this commitment.

It will be from this partnership that a Shorten Labor Government will launch our future growth.

Giving people the power to decide on amalgamations

While Labor will start to restore the relationship with local councils by reintroducing the Australia Council of Local Government, we will also restore the link between local councils and their communities and give ratepayers a genuine say in how their councils are elected.

Labor will set aside \$20 million in funding to offset the costs of the Australian Electoral Commission running plebiscites across NSW at the request of councils, so that the people can decide how they want their local governments formed.

This will give the people of NSW the power to stand up to the Baird Liberal Government, and their plan to unilaterally dispense with democracy and force councils to merge and sack councillors.

The plebiscites will be available for all councils.

Under Labor's plan, even those councils that have been spared amalgamation would be able to request a plebiscite to affirm community support, sending a clear message to the NSW Government to keep their hands off the council.

This move is similar to the one taken by the Howard Liberal Government in 2007 when the Queensland Government amalgamated councils.

As the level of government closest to the community, it is the community who should determine how their local government operates and Labor will ensure that power stays with the community.

Connected to this commitment, I would also like to once again put on record that Labor continues to back the constitutional recognition of local government.

We understand that local government long ago moved beyond being about rates, roads and rubbish.

A Shorten Labor Government would work with local government around the best mechanism to progress this matter.

We do however recognise that the ultimate success or otherwise of the constitutional recognition of local government is dependent on the bipartisan support of the federal parliament.

Women in local government

Labor believes that local councils in your own right can deliver strong outcomes not just in the way you invest in our communities but in the way you lead our communities.

It is critical that councils and shires, as the level of government closest to the community, reflect the communities that they seek to represent.

There is no lack of talented women in Australia, and many get their political start in local government.

Councils are big employers in local communities. Organisations that employ women and people from diverse backgrounds better represent and understand their community, which leads to better results.

Labor has shown a strong commitment to women in local government. The Year of Women in Local government 2010 was an initiative between the Local Government Managers Association, the Australian Local Government Women's Association and the Local Government and Planning Ministers Council and supported by federal and state governments.

We funded the 50:50 Vision: Councils for Gender Equity program which audited councils and shires to determine the status and role of women in leadership roles as well as their participation in the workplace.

We provided scholarships to enable senior women in local government to participate in leadership programs and improved the collection of data and reporting on the status of women in the local government sector.

Despite this strong support and positive momentum, the current Federal Government cut funding, stepped away from this important commitment, and cut these initiatives

Labor is committed to putting this issue back on the agenda.

A Shorten Labor Government will help better fund women's support networks for local government representatives to encourage and support female councillors across the country. Currently only a third of all councillors in Australia are women, about one in four mayors are women and just one in ten local government CEOs are women.

These ratios are all too low.

We will make \$2 million over four years available to work with the Australian Local Government Women's Association to increase female representation in local government through mentoring and scholarship programs. These programs will encourage women to enter the sector in both elected and professional positions.

Labor will again lead a federal government that supports women in local government and demonstrate a real commitment to stronger, more inclusive communities.

Conclusion

It has been my great pleasure to meet with you today as part of the National General Assembly of Local Government.

It's been a great pleasure because Labor is a close friend and ally of local government.

Labor has a proud record of achievement on local government. From Whitlam, through the Hawke, Keating, Rudd and Gillard governments Labor has provided certainty, support and infrastructure development to ensure local government can drive economic growth, build stronger communities and provide the services that people need.

Our commitments to support local government are clear.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Stop the Liberal cuts and reintroduce the indexation of Financial Assistance Grants.
- Reintroduce the Australia Council of Local Government to give you a seat at the table again.
- Introduce a \$10 billion infrastructure financing facility through Infrastructure Australia.
- Require new infrastructure projects to meet smart technology and sustainability requirements.
- Lead the innovation agenda.
- Support and facilitate the greater participation of women in local government.
- Set aside \$20 million in funding to ensure people can decide how they want their local governments formed.

Labor is the natural party for local government.

Labor's record on local government is unmatched by any other political party in Australia.

We have the ambition and the vision to support local government to play a vital role in building a better Australia.

Labor has always recognised that local government is the level of government closest to the community and most connected to them.

And Labor will partner with you in innovation and prosperity.

Accept no pale imitation or promises that aren't validated by a record of delivery in government.

I hope to soon be working with you in partnership in government to build our scope to grow stronger communities, drive fair economic growth and to deliver and maintain the clever infrastructure we need in the 21st century.

Labor has a clear plan to work with local government to put people first.