

## **50:50 VISION**

# **A National Program for Gender Equity in Local Government**

**Australian Local Government Women's Association**

**April 2009**

## Preface

This report marks a new phase in implementing the National Framework for Women in Local Government. It launches a range of initiatives under the banner **50:50 Vision**. The Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) sees this as a decade-long program to advance gender equity in local government.

The National Framework was first developed by ALGWA in 2001. It received broad recognition as a key statement of the need to achieve greater representation of women as both elected members and senior managers in Councils. Many Councils and state and federal agencies adopted the Framework as a basis for action.

However, progress towards true gender equity remained slow. In 2007 ALGWA reviewed the National Framework and published a revised version titled *The Way Forward*. This incorporated a new Statement of Commitment for adoption by all stakeholders, and foreshadowed further steps to ensure effective implementation.

Since 2007 ALGWA has been working with its partners to move ahead with the agenda set out in *The Way Forward*. We are now in a position to release details of actions already taken and to outline the program of activities to be undertaken in the next phase of implementation. In summary, those actions include:

- Partnership with Local Government Managers Australia to promote 2010 as the *Year of Women in Local Government*
- Establishment of the National Steering Committee for implementation of the National Framework
- Ongoing promotion of the Statement of Commitment and implementation by Councils
- Developing an accreditation and awards scheme
- A new national survey to assess progress since 2007
- Further data collection and analysis to inform future activities.

I wish to express my appreciation to all those who have contributed to making this launch possible, especially our partners Local Government Managers Australia; the federal Office for Women and department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; and state ministries of local government. I also wish to acknowledge the work of ALGWA members and colleagues on the National Executive, as well as the support received from those many Councils across Australia that have already taken steps to implement the National Framework. Once again, this report is based on research undertaken by the UTS Centre for Local Government, and its efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

**Kaele Way JP**  
National President

## National Statement of Commitment

*We will work towards increasing the representation of women in local government, both as elected members and as senior managers and professionals. We will undertake ongoing reviews of policies and practices to remove barriers to women's participation and to engender safe, supportive working and decision-making environments that encourage and value a wide range of views.*

### Goal

*To increase the participation of women in Australian local government so that Councils more accurately reflect their communities.*

This will be evidenced by continuing growth in numbers of women councillors, mayors, chief executives and senior staff in all States and the Northern Territory and in all types of Councils.

### Objectives

- *To create Councils and communities where all participate and actively share their skills, knowledge and experience.*
- *To engender inclusive Councils where a full range of opinions is sought, respected and taken into account in decision-making*
- *To ensure effective leadership in implementing the strategies set out in this Framework*
- *To expand training and networking opportunities that will support those strategies.*

## Program Components

### 2010 Year of Women in Local Government

ALGWA strongly welcomed the move in early 2008 by Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) to declare 2010 the *Year of Women in Local Government*, and has now entered into a partnership with LGMA to ensure the success of this venture.

LGMA and ALGWA are deeply concerned that across Australia women still account for less than 30% of councillors, only 20% of senior managers and only 5% of chief executives in local government. Clearly, a greater effort is required to address this gender imbalance and the 2010 Year is intended to kick start new programs for gender equity.

The *Year of Women in Local Government* will be designed to:

- Raise the awareness of the need to increase the participation of women in local government
- Encourage Councils to set targets for increased participation of women in decision making roles, management and leadership training
- Encourage Councils to adopt modern HR practices
- Establish more flexible ways of working.

A series of events is being planned to:

- Raise awareness and educate the sector on the need for gender equity at both councillor and executive levels, and the important role that women play in terms of the effectiveness and long term health of local government
- Specifically promote the employment of more female chief executives
- Provide networking and information sharing opportunities for women aspiring to leadership and decision making roles
- Provide additional professional and personal development opportunities for women to enable them to achieve their desired roles in the sector
- Promote best practice in diversity management, flexible work practices, professional development and succession planning.

**ALGWA plans to convene its biennial conference in late 2010 to provide a fitting conclusion to the Year's activities and an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved.**

### National Steering Committee

*The Way Forward* recommended establishment of a National Steering Committee of key stakeholders to guide implementation of the various strategies proposed. ALGWA has been successful in securing the support of state and federal agencies, LGMA and the Australian Local Government Association for the Committee. This activity and other steps taken by ALGWA to implement *The Way Forward* have been funded by the Australian Government through the Women's Leadership and Development program.

Current members of the National Steering Committee are:

**Kaele Way** JP, National President, ALGWA (Chairperson)  
**Cr Janet Davidson** JP, ALGWA Vice President  
**Darriea Turley**, NSW delegate, ALGWA National Board  
**Cr Margaret De Wit**, Australian Local Government Association  
**Penny Holloway**, Local Government Managers Australia  
**Angela Byron**, Manager – National Rural Women's Network, Australian Government Office for Women  
**Jessie Byrne**, Director, Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania  
**Jane Gascoigne**, Director, Local Government Grants and Regional Communities, South Australia  
**Peta Jamieson** Executive Director, Service Delivery, Department of Local Government, Sport & Recreation, Queensland  
**Karen Patterson**, Manager – Policy and Research, Department of Local Government, New South Wales  
**Eve Robinson**, Executive Director, Department of Local Government and Housing, Northern Territory  
**Virginia Scott**, Principal Project Officer – Community Capacity Building, Office of Local Government, Western Australia

New representatives of the Victorian government and the federal department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government are expected to join the Committee in the near future.

The Committee has provided a valuable platform for cooperation between jurisdictions and across the sector to promote the National Framework's Statement of Commitment; to share information on the status and needs of women in local government,

as well as existing policies and activities to enhance gender equity; and to launch new initiatives such as the proposed accreditation and awards program (see below).

## Accreditation and Awards Program

*The Way Forward* suggested implementation of a 'Gender Matters' program that might comprise:

- A self-assessment checklist to enable Councils to measure their progress in implementing the National Framework
- Graded recognition for Councils that have put in place some or all of the strategies in the checklist *and* can demonstrate effective implementation
- Visits to Councils by peer review panels organised by ALGWA and/or local government associations/professional institutes to verify progress being made
- Awards for high-achieving Councils, either as a separate scheme or as part of an existing awards program (eg the National Awards for Local Government and various State awards).

It proposed that a feasibility study be carried out to assess the viability of such a program.

ALGWA is pleased to announce that the concept of an accreditation and awards program has received strong support from members of the National Steering Committee, and in particular through an Australian Government grant to go ahead with the feasibility study. Work is now well advanced towards finalising the program design and gaining the endorsement of Local Government Ministers. It is envisaged that the program would be launched as part of the *Year of Women in Local Government*.

ALGWA is also having discussions with the federal department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government on a possible new approach to the National Award for Women's Participation in Local Government, to be linked to the proposed accreditation and awards program.

## 2009 National Web Survey

The 2006 review of the National Framework included a web-based survey of women in local government to determine current issues of concern. It attracted 602 completed responses. Of those, around 19% were from elected representatives, 77% were from council officers and 4% were from women who had been an unsuccessful candidate in a local government election.

As a basis for the further steps now being taken, a repeat survey was conducted in February-March 2009. This proved highly successful, with over 3,300 responses. For the most part, the results of the 2006 survey were confirmed, although there were some significant departures. Overall, there appears to have been a modest improvement in the status and treatment of women in local government.

Key findings of the 2009 survey include:

- The overwhelming majority of women councillors are over 40 years old, with nearly half aged 55-69
- For women councillors, the principal areas of concern were demands on their time (about 80% of respondents); balancing public and family life (70%); exclusion from informal decision-making outside meetings (65%); the need for training and confidence building (60%); inadequate remuneration (65%); the cost of election campaigns (55%); harassment, bullying and sexist remarks (45%); CEO and senior staff support (40%).
- Compared to 2006, there was a significant reduction in financial concerns.
- Female members of staff were more evenly distributed between age groups, with around 80% between 26 and 55 years
- For female staff, the principal issues were a need for family-friendly policies, including child care and home-based work (75%); decision-making styles (65%); feeling undervalued (55%); a male-dominated culture (50%); lack of career structure (40%); job selection processes (40%); managing conflict (40%).
- Compared to 2006, there was a steep increase in concerns about job selection, and a substantial rise in expressions of the need for more family-friendly policies; but significant reductions in concerns about training, confidence building and an overall male-dominated culture.

The survey also recorded many individual comments from respondents. Some were very positive, notably one that said: *I have no issues – I have a great job, work part time, work from home on a regular basis, have a great team of both males and females and feel absolutely no gender bias in this workplace!*

A detailed account of the survey results will be posted on the ALGWA website. ALGWA plans to repeat these web surveys every few years.

## Other Data Collection

As well as conducting the new web survey, ALGWA commissioned an analysis of the 2006 Census to provide supplementary data on women in the local government workforce and how their qualifications, status and earnings compare with those of men.

In summary, it was found that:

- Overall, income levels in local government are lower than federal and state governments or the private sector
- Women earn on average less than men, but the gap is considerably smaller in local government than in the other spheres
- Women in local government are now typically better qualified than men, more so than in federal or state governments
- Women constitute a majority of those with TAFE diplomas, bachelor's degrees and postgraduate qualifications – but not postgraduate degrees
- Women are thus in the majority amongst local government professionals – but not managers.
- A much higher proportion of women than men work part-time, and this perhaps explains a number of other findings.

In addition to ALGWA's work, state government representatives on the National Steering Committee are collecting and exchanging their own information on the status of women in local government, and initiatives being taken to enhance gender equity. The aim is to put together consistent national data that will enable comparisons between states and the Northern Territory; keep track of changes over time; and inform policy development.

These efforts to collect and collate available data will greatly improve our knowledge of the issues facing women in local government, and are essential to provide a sound basis for further action. ALGWA will continue to press to ensure that data gathering and analysis receives the priority it deserves.

## Statements of Commitment and Action by Councils

Copies of *The Way Forward* were distributed to all Councils and Local Government Associations throughout June 2007, and Councils were urged to adopt the revised National Framework and take steps towards its implementation. Since then, ALGWA has regularly followed up to check progress and in particular to ensure that Councils have acknowledged and considered the National Framework, and to secure adoption of the Statement of Commitment.

ALGWA is pleased to report that over 120 Councils across Australia have responded positively. It recognises the following Councils who have acknowledged, endorsed or implemented the recommendations of *The Way Forward*, and congratulates these Councils on their support and encouragement of women's participation in local government. They are listed in Attachment A.

ALGWA also welcomes the steps being taken by many Councils to pursue the objectives of the National Framework. Some examples are presented here to show the wide range of actions that can contribute to enhancing the participation of women.

### Adelaide City Council, South Australia

The Council endorsed the National Framework for Women in Local Government in 2002, and then successfully ran a marketing campaign to increase the number of women candidates for elections. By 2007, 32% of candidates were women which was an increase of around 10% since 2003.

In addition an Organisational Development Framework has been developed to foster a positive and diversified employee climate. Nearly 10% of women in the workforce are enrolled in tertiary education. Council offers funding for a range of education programs for elected representatives and employees. Council also has an internal mentoring program available to all staff, a home-based work policy, flexible working hours, high levels of support for women returning from maternity leave, and women included in all job selection panels. All council and other council-related meetings are timed to finish by 11pm, and council has a very effective process for dealing with bullying and harassment complaints by elected representatives and employees.

### **Glenelg Shire Council, Victoria**

Since the launch of "The Way Forward" in June 2007 Council has negotiated a new Enterprise Agreement. The Agreement includes provisions for 14 weeks paid maternity leave, paid childcare for attending training and meetings outside normal working hours, and other "family friendly" work initiatives. Recently the Council conducted a staff survey titled "The Better Work and Family Balance" questionnaire, which was developed to assist in tailoring the organisation's procedures and practices.

Information provided November 2007

### **Holroyd City Council, NSW**

Council endorsed "The Way Forward" in June 2007, and then conducted a self-assessment against the "Gender Matters" checklist. The Women's Development Team which has been established for about two years then developed an action plan for the 2007/2008 year. The plan was grouped in objectives for Family Friendly Environment, Professional Development, Health and Well-being, Increasing Women's Participation, and Promotion and Reporting. The plan contains strategies which are backed up with timeframes, responsible officers, performance measures and budget items.

The plan included a budget allocation of \$3,000 to conduct seminars for women interested in nominating for Council. Council also supports and resources the Holroyd Women's Working Party, which is community based and looks at both the work and life issues of women in the community.

Information provided January 2008

### **Brisbane City Council, Queensland**

Brisbane City Council has a number of pro-active measures in place which align with those in the National Framework. For example:

- Council has in place an EEO action plan, and encourages and endorses regular feedback from each of the EEO Reference Groups. The Women's Reference Group reports regularly on issues affecting women in the organization;
- Feedback is also given by this group to the Women in Council Forums;
- Council has a range of flexible work arrangements including compressed working weeks, telecommuting, carer's leave and others; and
- Council supports women's career development through lunchbox sessions, networking initiatives and coaching.

Targets are set for the employment of women in Council, and for the first time since the targets were introduced in 2004 the targets in each category have been achieved. The CEO reports that:

"Significant progress has been made over the past decade for women in the workplace, and in local government. More women than ever enter the workforce, more women are returning (and returning earlier) from maternity leave, more women work in management and senior roles and more women take up elected government positions. This has been a long struggle and was made possible through initiatives such as access to flexible work arrangements, increased childcare options, improved governance and a change in work and political culture."

Information provided October 2008

## Penrith City Council, NSW

In February 2008 Penrith City Council conducted a thorough internal self-assessment against the 'Gender Matters' checklist. Council has the following initiatives in place:

- A statement on breastfeeding in the workplace, and provision of a breastfeeding room
- Councillors who require access to childcare for council meetings and events are provided with registered childcare at council's expense
- There is an informal "buddy" system with longer serving Councillors taking on the role of mentor for new Councillors
- Council has a Working from Home policy, and since 2006 13 applications to work from home have been lodged and approved
- Council staff can salary sacrifice the costs of childcare in services sponsored by Council – the benefit for employees is that this portion of their salary is not then subject to tax, and a total of 19 women utilize this benefit
- Frontline Management Training – 33 women participated in the program representing 63.5% of all participants.

Information provided February 2008

## City of Boroondara, Victoria

Boorandara's Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Policy outlines Council's commitment to ensuring that employees are treated fairly and equitably in the workplace. As well the People Strategy (2007-2012) includes many actions which are included in "The Way Forward". Council conducts analysis on relevant issues such as demographic staff profiling, trend analysis, areas of skill shortage and generational issues. The People Strategy has a number of actions which aim to "build awareness of the need to redesign jobs and work structures around the needs of quality employees".

Currently over 30% of the Council's departmental managers and 3 out of 5 of its Directors are women. Also, women have been elected Mayor in 7 out of the previous 13 Mayoral terms.

Information provided March 2008

## City of Nedlands, Western Australia

In 2008 the Council adopted a number of recommendations based on "The Way Forward" document. Council endorsed the following response:

*The City of Nedlands is proud of its commitment to the participation of talented women in local government and will continue to support and endorse the Goal and Objectives of the National Framework.*

At the Council level 54% of elected members are women, and 50% of Directors and 40% of Managers are women. The City also has a female Mayor.

Information provided December 2008

## Hobart City Council, Tasmania

The Hobart City Council is committed to the principles of equity and equal employment opportunity and to the elimination of inappropriate and unlawful discrimination, and this position is reflected in its policies and procedures.

In terms of specific actions supporting the principles contained in The Way Forward, the Council has in place a range of strategies, policies and procedures including:

- Adoption of a robust Code of Conduct for both employees and elected members including clearly documented complaints handling processes for each, together with defined actions for their review;
- Implementation of a comprehensive policy in relation to Equity and Discrimination supported by an active E&D Panel;
- Review and re-development of the organisation's learning and development strategy, including consideration of specific programs targeted for women such as the introduction of a women's leadership program;
- Extensive training and development opportunities across the organisation, including access to specific Councillor training programs;
- Increasing allowances paid to elected members in 2008 to a level considered by this Council to more appropriately reflect the contemporary nature of the role, including issues such as demands on time, impact on work and family life, its relevance to the community, together with the specific demographic issues involved in serving on a capital city council;
- Reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred by elected members in undertaking their role for travel, telecommunications and child care;
- Providing elected members with a range of equipment to assist them discharge their duties, including dedicated fully equipped office space, mobile phones and computers, together with access to relevant employees to offer advice, specialist support and general administrative assistance, as necessary;
- A comprehensive induction to the organisation for all newly elected members, including provision of an Aldermanic Handbook containing organisational profiles, structures, contacts, policies and administrative procedures, together with other relevant information pertaining both to the Council and the elected representatives' roles;
- A suite of Council policies and Award provisions for employees enabling flexibility within the workplace through such avenues as working from home, working hours, transition to retirement, and parental and maternity leave and a range of options available to allow the transition back into the workplace after maternity leave;
- A recruitment policy requiring that all reasonable efforts are to be made to ensure that both genders are represented on interview panels, subject to knowledge and expertise requirements.

Information provided March 2009

# Attachment A

## New South Wales

- Cobar Shire Council
- Tamworth Regional Council
- Shoalhaven City Council
- Campbelltown City Council
- Kogarah Municipal Council
- Nambucca Shire Council
- Coolamon Shire Council
- Wakool Shire Council
- City of Canterbury
- Hunters Hill Council
- Gosford City Council
- Fairfield City Council
- Greater Taree Council
- City of Lake Macquarie
- Blacktown City Council
- Randwick City Council
- Baulkham Hills Shire Council
- Narrabri Shire Council
- Liverpool Plains Shire Council
- Ballina Shire Council
- Greater Hume Shire Council
- Holyroyd City Council
- Cowra Shire Council
- Auburn Council
- Bathurst Regional Council
- Pittwater Council
- Hawkesbury City Council
- Armidale Dumaresq Council
- Lithgow City Council
- Wollondilly Shire Council
- Ku-ring-gai Council
- Sydney City Council
- Wollongong City Council
- Forbes Shire Council
- Muswellbrook Shire Council
- Mosman Municipal Council
- Cootamundra Shire Council
- Lane Cove Council

- Orange City Council
- Gloucester Shire Council
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Lockhart Shire Council
- Richmond Valley Council
- Penrith City Council
- Lismore City Council
- Wyong Shire Council
- Tweed Shire Council

## Victoria

- Latrobe City Council
- City of Darebin
- Moyne Shire Council
- Maroondah City Council
- City of Whittlesea
- Cardinia Shire Council
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Glen Eira City Council
- City of Yarra Council
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Buloke Shire Council
- Mildura Rural City Council
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Moreland City Council
- Mitchell Shire Council
- City of Melbourne
- Hume City Council
- Hobson's Bay City Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Indigo Shire Council
- Benalla Rural City Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- City of Whitehorse
- Shire of Strathbogie
- Boroondara City Council

## **Northern Territory**

- Darwin City Council

## **Western Australia**

- Nungarin Shire Council
- Shire of Denmark
- Shire of West Arthur
- Shire of Gnowangerup
- Shire of York
- Town of Bassendean
- City of Gosnells
- Shire of Northam
- Town of Mosman Park
- City of Nedlands
- City of Perth

## **Tasmania**

- Hobart City Council
- Latrobe Council
- Launceston City Council
- Kingborough Council
- Southern Midlands Council

## **Queensland**

- Mackay Regional Council
- Shire of Hinchinbrook
- South Burnett Regional Council

- Tablelands Regional Council
- Cairns Regional Council
- Townsville City Council
- Murweh Shire Council
- Diamantina Shire Council
- Scenic Rim Regional Council
- Moreton Bay Regional Council
- Dalby Regional Council
- Gold Coast City Council
- Longreach Regional Council
- Logan City Council
- Brisbane City Council
- Rockhampton Regional Council

## **South Australia**

- Wakefield Regional Council
- City of Mount Gambier
- Alexandrina Council
- The Flinders Ranges Council
- District Council of Kimba
- Adelaide City Council
- District Council of Grant
- City of Tea Tree Gully
- Campbelltown City Council
- Town of Walkerville
- Town of Gawler
- City of Marion
- Coppercoast District Council
- Kangaroo Island Council
- City of Charles Sturt Council