

**DRAFT SPEECH NOTES  
FOR JANE GASCOIGNE, DIRECTOR, LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS AUSTRALIA  
WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT FORUM  
RYDGES LAKESIDE, CANBERRA  
4.55 – 5.10 pm TUESDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**“PRESENTATION OF INITIATIVES”**

**Thank you -**

- My thanks to Local Government Managers Australia for inviting me to speak about initiatives aimed at improving the participation of women in Local Government in South Australia.

**Cooperative contributions –**

- Firstly, I must say that the South Australian initiatives that I am outlining today are the result of much hard work from many quarters.
- The achievements are due to people working together to establish structures, networks and support, and to continue to promote the issue of strengthening the role of women in Local Government in South Australia.
- South Australia knows that in this area we have come some distance in a relatively short time.
- Yet, and as *The Way Forward* (the national review strategy) identifies, there is some way to go.

## **SA Branch established**

- Kaele Way (President ALGWA) will recall that, it was just the end of 2005 when South Australia was the only State in Australia not to have a Branch of the national ALGWA.
- In October 2005 Kaele invited women in South Australia with an interest in Local Government to a meeting where it was resolved to re-form the Branch in SA.

## **Timing important**

- The timing of this could not have been better for raising the profile of women's interests in Local Government.
- This was in the 12-month lead up to South Australia's November 2006 Local Government Elections.
- Accordingly, the South Australian Government, through the Office for State/Local Government Relations, actively supported the establishment of the South Australian Branch.

## **Constitution of SA Branch**

- OSLGR convened a working party to draft the SA Branch Constitution.
- The SA Branch was Constituted in June 2006.
- Julie Kerr [EO, LGMA SA Division], who is here today, became the first Secretary of the new SA Branch.

## **Local Government Works resource kit**

- OSLGR then engaged the State's Office for Women and the Local Government Association of SA in the production of a resource kit for women in Local Government.
- The engagement of the Office for Women at this time sought to attract interest in Local Government among women from a wider network, that is, beyond those already involved in Local Government.
- The kit provided a new logo for the Branch, featured a membership form and it is now used to promote the SA Branch as a supportive women's network.
- The resource kit, titled *Local Government Works*, has provided the SA Branch with a tangible resource for women interested in Local Government, both as a career of choice and as an elected member. As well as being available through the SA Branch, it is available through the State Government's Women's Information Service.

### **Taking Up the Challenge – Candidates Information Kit**

- Parallel to this work, a booklet titled *Taking Up The Challenge* was developed.
- This is an information kit for women interested in standing as a candidate in council elections.

- It was released in draft form, just prior to the opening of nominations for the November 2006 council elections (ie September).
- It was also available at Information Sessions held in the lead up to the elections, and discussed at the joint State and LGA country Information Sessions held with Aboriginal leaders.
- After the Elections, *Taking up the Challenge* was further developed to include testimonials and case studies of women candidates – whether successful or unsuccessful in the elections.

### **New webpage**

- The resources can be accessed at the LGA's new webpage titled *Women on the Move*.
- Since inception, the SA Branch has gone from strength to strength and has representation on several key Committees. It has a 60 strong membership.

### **National Biennial Conference**

- Most recently it has taken up the offer to host the National Biennial Conference for Women in Local Government in Adelaide in April 2009.
- In July 2008, the former Minister for State/Local Government Relations, the Hon Jennifer Rankine, wrote to all SA Councils to encourage their support for the Conference. The Minister

also used this as an opportunity to remind Councils about *The Way Forward - the Review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government*”, one year on from its release in SA.

- The Office of Women has also offered the SA Branch the opportunity to promote the Conference during the *International Women’s Day Events* scheduled for March 2009. This also will reach a wider audience, beyond Local Government.

### **Dual Ministerial responsibilities**

- Along with getting the timing right, and having the State’s Office for Women engaged, it has also been incredibly beneficial for South Australia to have a Minister holding the dual responsibilities of the Minister for State/Local Government Relations and Minister for the Status of Women.
- SA recently had a Ministerial reshuffle (in late July 2008) and, given the activities we have on the go, it is great that the dual Ministerial portfolio responsibilities have remained with our new Minister, the Hon Gail Gago.

### **The National Framework and review**

- With the Local Government elections initiatives complete, the release of the national review *The Way Forward* has proved timely for SA to maintain the momentum on strengthening the role of women officers in Local Government.
- The review draws attention to the lack of women in leadership positions.
- For women employed in Local Government it is not difficult to realise that there is a real under-representation in Local Government, most starkly in executive positions in council administrations.
- In Local Government in South Australia, women hold only 45% of all positions. Of these, most are employed in the human/community services area. The *2001 national Framework for Women in Local Government* had identified the lack of career structures for those working in the human/community services area.
- In SA women hold approximately 16% of senior employee positions in councils. Of SA's 68 Councils, only two CEOs are female.
- While *The Way Forward* found that while some progress has been made in overcoming challenges associated with improving women's participation, these changes have not substantially increased the number of women in decision making positions.

- Further work is necessary to address the continuing under-representation.

### **National Steering Committee**

- At a National level, the ALGWA has established the national Steering Committee to implement the findings and monitor progress of councils in taking up strategies.
- The establishment of the Committee provides leadership for implementation of the *National Framework for Women in Local Government* and enables monitoring of progress in Australia.
- I am pleased to participate as SA representative in the National Committee, which is scheduled to meet again later this year.

### **Working group on women in Local Government**

- In SA the Minister's State/Local Government Forum and the LGA State Executive have put the issue of Women in Local Government on the agenda.
- 2008 has seen the establishment of a joint working group, chaired by the LGA, with State Government, LGMA SA, SA Branch and council involvement. This group is leading work to identify strategies and projects to improve women's participation in Local Government.
- The Group is currently developing its work plan.

- While it is clear that the relatively low numbers of women in Local Government is not representative of the population as a whole, the issue is particularly relevant given the current skill shortages that Local Government faces.
- Women make up 51% of the population, and are now a majority of university graduates. A sector that has difficulty in attracting and retaining female employees, particularly young skilled employees, is in a weaker position to tackle this shortage.
- Building the leadership capabilities of women across a wide range of roles and responsibilities releases an untapped workforce potential.

## **Award**

- As an immediate step to re-invigorate interest in women's participation in Local Government, in April 2008 the State Government sponsored an *Award for Excellence in Advancing the Status of Women in Local Government*.
- The inaugural *Award* winner was presented to the City of Onkaparinga for Council's commitment to giving targeted development opportunities and actively encouraging applications to senior positions from within the Council.
- The *Award* was part of the annual LGMA SA Award categories that go to recognise leadership in excellence in Local Government.

## **Leadership Resource Project**

- Currently, the LGMA SA (Julie Kerr) and the ALGWA SA Branch are involved in a project to produce a showcase of good practice examples of SA council's efforts, experiences and approaches in providing support to women officers.
- It aims to stimulate discussion among councils and to increase women's interest in making local government a career of choice. The project is near completion and its release is imminent.

## **Close**

- There has been much energy and drive in South Australia to respond to the concern that women are still significantly under represented in Local Government.
- The continuing interest and involvement of women in key positions to raise the profile of women's interests in Local Government stands our State well.

Thank you

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