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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: ewr.reps@aph.gov.au

Pay equity and associated issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce

The Local Government Association of New South Wales and the Shires Association of New South Wales (**the Associations**) are pleased to contribute to the enquiry of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relation into issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce.

Local Government in New South Wales has previously undergone an extensive process of award re-drafting and consolidation with the consent of the relevant union parties. This process resulted in six classification based awards covering over 400 classifications being consolidated into one skills-based award within which positions were broadbanded into 15 levels across 4 bands according to six generic skill descriptors. This new award was called the *Local Government (State) Award (the Award)*.

It is the Associations' view that this skills-based award has eliminated any pay equity issues between the genders through the incorporation of a skill matrix. The skills-based structure allows, in an impartial way, the proper assessment of a rate of pay for all employees in the industry, based on the skills, qualifications, experience and responsibilities associated with the work performed by that employee. The Award provides for an accurate assessment of the value of work, instead of relying upon historical relatives and gender biases from the past. Further, the new salary structure provides councils with the flexibility to design jobs which meet the needs of the council and the needs of the community.

The Committee refers to “the adequacy of current arrangements to ensure fair access to training and promotion for women who have taken maternity leave and/or returned to work part-time and/or sought flexible work hours” as a potential issue effecting women’s participation in the workforce. In this regard, it should be noted that the Award provides flexibility in the arrangement and spread of hours which allows employees to reach agreement with their employer about new ways of working. The Award also ensures that any flexible working arrangements are set up as a co-operative exercise, and as such require genuine agreement between Council and its employees. In addition, the Award also provides generous leave provisions, including portable sick leave and long service leave entitlements which are transferable on change of employment from council to council, the ability to access long service leave after five years of service, and nine weeks paid maternity leave. The ability to access such leave entitlements is particularly beneficial to female employees seeking to balance work, family and career priorities. Finally, the Award allows council and their staff to redesign jobs to incorporate broader functions and encourage multi-skilling.

The Associations are of the view that such initiatives have positively contributed to the promotion and development of women in Local Government and have also facilitated a balance between the work and family needs of working women.

The Associations support the principles of pay equity and these have clearly been incorporated into all awards applicable to Local Government employees, including:

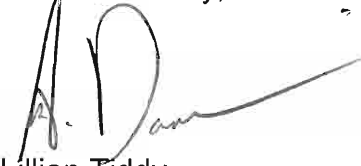
- *Local Government (State) Award 2007*; and
- *Local Government Electricians (State) Award*.

Further, the Associations have affirmed their commitment to equal pay principles through the integration of discrimination principles within these industrial instruments.

It is submitted that NSW Local Government has undergone extensive industrial reform which has not only resulted in improved productivity and efficiency at the industry and council level, but has also sought to address issues of gender bias and inequality in the workplace. There is a strong desire to maintain the benefits that have flowed from the simplification of the terms and conditions of employment for employees within the NSW Local Government industry and the development of mutually beneficial work practices.

We thank the Committee for giving consideration to the comments and submissions contained in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

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Lillian Tiddy
Director, Workplace Solutions Division