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

28 August 2008

Dear Ms Scarlett

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

Thank you for your letter of 15 July 2008 inviting submissions into the inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce.

Although the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW (LGSA) will be providing a submission on behalf of local government in New South Wales I would also like to offer some comment on my observations of some of the issues that impact on females participating in the workforce.

In general, the current wage fixing principles set the basis for a broad band approach to structures that create gender equity in local government as well as the requirement under the NSW Local Government Act for councils to adopt Equal Employment Opportunity programs and plans and I am advised that the LGSA will be providing more detail in relation to this in their submission.

More broadly though, female participation in the work force is often impeded by the difficulties associated with balancing workplace commitments with the major caring role, both of children and later caring for elderly parents, partners and others. For many, this 'balancing' of roles forces females to abandon career paths and/or move from full-time to part-time positions. This leads to pay reduction, loss of job continuity, reduced opportunity for promotion and skills/knowledge development. Current provision around maternity leave, flexible opportunities to return to work following maternity leave and working from home provisions require closer examination and reform.

Many employers argue that they are 'family friendly' workplaces, however on closer examination, this is not always the case. Advancement of the careers of women has also been impeded by employers notions or concerns that female employees may have future work/family choices that may cause an inconvenience on the workplace. A radical shift in thought across the nation is required and world best practices, especially those

2 Conder Street Burwood NSW 2134 PO Box 240 Burwood NSW 1805  
phone: 9911 9911 facsimile: 9911 9900 email: council@burwood.nsw.gov.au

website: www.burwood.nsw.gov.au

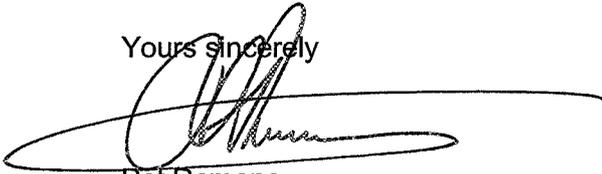
that have been in place in Europe over several decades, now need to be encouraged in Australia. A stronger promotional campaign might not be as effective as an actual 'bonus for change' schemes similar to the Keating Governments introduction of training into workplaces.

Some areas that are particularly affected by pay equity would be in areas that are female dominated such as childcare centres, libraries and other community/human service industries, all areas that local government play a major role.

At a local level, it is my observation that individual councils need to work harder to allow female employees to break through the 'glass ceiling'. Local government in New South Wales has traditionally been male dominated but because councils cannot compete with the private sector on salaries, share options, large bonus payments etc we need to provide more family friendly and flexible work practices as well as career development options targeting females. The innovative councils in New South Wales have become employers of choice by meeting and exceeding the needs of females in the workforce by recognizing that the 'glass ceiling' still exists in local government in New South Wales and developing strategies to address this issue.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide some comments to this important inquiry and I look forward to the outcome.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Romano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Pat Romano  
GENERAL MANAGER