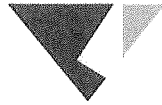


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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

**SUBMISSION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND
WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

on behalf of

The Western Australian Local Government Association

**PAY EQUITY AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES RELATING TO
INCREASING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE
WORKFORCE**

19 August 2008

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Chairman,

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations inquiry into matters pertaining to “pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce”. In making this submission I would also like to reiterate that I would be pleased to be afforded the opportunity to attend the Standing Committee to make a verbal submission in support of this paper.

1. Executive Summary

The Western Australian Local Government Association represent the interests of all Local Governments in Western Australia, advocating the views of councils to governments, promoting Local Government to the community and by providing specialist advice and services. It is in this latter capacity that I offer our views and experiences in relation to matters related to the Committee’s inquiry.

The question of potential disadvantage to women’s participation in the Local Government workforce in Western Australia is, with respect, too narrow in its scope in relation to the difficulties being felt within our sector by our member Councils. Whilst there are some issues associated with the advancement of women within some professions within Local Government, it is clear that the attraction and retention of employees in virtually all job types is a much more pressing concern for our members.

Gender is not a criterion which is applied by Western Australian Local Governments when employing people for jobs including Planners, Engineers, Public Health Officers, Accountants or indeed horticulturalists, truck drivers or other forms of unskilled labour. Rather it is a question of availability of labour in an environment where other employers in the Western Australian economy enjoy a significant advantage when it comes to remuneration and benefits, and where there is a poor supply of skills into Local Government specific job types through the secondary and tertiary education systems.

WALGA is the only organisation which collects and reports on data related to the sector’s labour market . This is provided on a voluntary basis by our members and is produced in March/April each year in the Local Government Remuneration Survey. A small number of non Western Australian Local Governments also contribute to the survey. Any data which is referred to throughout this submission will be sourced from the 2008 Report, unless otherwise indicated.

2. The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA)

As the peak lobbying, advocacy and service support organisation for the sector WALGA represents all 139 Local Governments in WA as well as the Shires of Christmas and Cocos-Keeling Islands. These Local Governments employ approximately 14,000 employees on functions as diverse as:

- building services, including inspections, licensing, certification and enforcement;
- planning and development approval;
- infrastructure and property services, including local roads, bridges, footpaths, drainage, waste collection and management;
- health services such as water and food inspection, immunisation services, toilet facilities, noise control and meat inspection and animal control;
- provision of recreation facilities, such as parks, sports fields and stadiums, golf courses, swimming pools, sport centres, halls, camping grounds and caravan parks;
- community services, such as child care, aged care and accommodation, community care and welfare services;
- administration of facilities, such as airports and aerodromes, ports and marinas, cemeteries, parking facilities and street parking;
- cultural facilities and services, such as libraries, art galleries and museums; and

The Association's 'Local Government Workplace Solutions' ('Workplace Solutions') unit provides support to Member Local Governments in the management of their employees in Human Resource areas including Recruitment, Training, Award interpretation and advice, industrial advocacy and representation, position classifications, organisational and governance advice as well as providing model Human Resources policies and procedures and remuneration data.

The Workplace Solutions unit is actively engaged in working with Members in identifying the labour challenges facing the sector in Western Australia and has established close working relationships with many State and Federal Government agencies in its efforts to attract and retain skilled and qualified people. WALGA staff have participated in many local careers expos, and have also attended five expos including two in the UK, two in South Africa and one in New Zealand in efforts to attract employees to the sector.

3. Skills Shortages – the real problem

The sustainability of many Local Governments in Western Australia is being compromised by an inability to provide essential services and functions, most notably in professional areas such as Planning, Environmental Health, Engineering, Accounting and Building Survey. The evidence is that the existing labour market is ever diminishing due to exits from the sector, and because of a reduced number of graduates coming into local government. It is also the case that whilst some success has been achieved in the employment of migrants/visa holders, the absence of a centralised local government advisory and coordination point has resulted in duplication and technical errors.

The chronic level of skills shortages in Western Australian Local Governments is reflective of a national problem within the sector. This is further compounded by the high level of resources development activity in Western Australia, which has contributed to the movement of qualified and skilled employees into this high income employment area. This is a problem for many employers in the State, but particularly those who are located in rural, regional or remote areas and whose salary structures cannot possibly compete with those available in resources connected businesses.

Difficulties being faced by the WA Local Government sector in attracting and retaining employees is not a new phenomena, but has developed to become a more obvious and a significant issue in the last five years. It has been the Association's challenge to attempt to quantify the nature and size of the problem in the absence of any data compiled by either the Local Governments themselves or – more appropriately the State Government department responsible for legislation governing these Councils (the Department of Local Government and Regional Development – 'DLGRD').

There are currently 139 Local Governments in Western Australia, ranging in size from the Shire of Menzies in the Goldfields Region (7 employees) to the City of Stirling in the northern metropolitan area (900 employees) yet there is no clear accountability with DLGRD, or any other agency, to collect Human Resource Management data relating to positions or people, and consequently no data from these sources reporting recruitment, turnover, absenteeism or the numbers and classifications of job types.

It is in this environment that WALGA has found itself attempting to collect its own information in an effort to quantify the size of the challenge facing the sector. Surveys conducted by Workplace Solutions in 2005 and 2007 established that many employment areas were problematic, and this is continuing. Examples are shown on the next page.

Function	Percentage of respondents experiencing recruitment difficulties	Percentage of respondents experiencing recruitment difficulties
	2005	2007
Engineering	51.10%	56.25%
Planning	63.80%	50.00%
Environmental		
Health	40.40%	43.75%
Building Survey	53.20%	41.67%
Accounting	51.10%	39.58%
Information		
Technology	19.10%	27.08%
Horticultural	14.90%	20.83%
Recreation		
Services	14.90%	18.75%
Drafting	8.50%	12.50%
Childcare		
Services	12.80%	10.42%

(based on 32% response rate)

Strategies implemented by the Workplace Solutions recruitment service to address member Local Governments' needs now include:-

- Management of the sourcing of labour from outside Australia including:
 - Attendance at careers expos in targeted countries (e.g. UK, South Africa, New Zealand)
 - Coordination of demand for labour by member local governments (e.g. registration of vacancies, management of skills database, interviews);
 - Coordinate all dialogue with overseas applicants as potential or actual employees of member local governments;
 - Liaison with Federal government agencies, particularly the Department of Immigration and Citizenship ('DIAC') in relation to the granting of visas;
 - Liaison with relevant State government agencies (e.g. Department of Health, Department of Planning & Infrastructure), with a focus on validation of qualifications;
- Active liaison with individuals and groups in secondary and tertiary education with a view to raising employment in local government to a higher level of profile, and to enhance attraction to appropriate fields of study;
- Coordinating the profiling of employment in the sector at careers expos within WA and at overseas venues.

Whilst there has been some success with approximately forty people placed in employment, and acknowledging that these strategies are eighteen months into a three year timeline, it is clear that there is much yet to do by the WA State Government, the Commonwealth, by the Associations and professional bodies and by Local Governments themselves. It is in this context that WALGA would direct attention principally to workforce shortages rather than gender pay equity issues as a priority.

4. Inquiry terms of reference

Whilst WALGA perceives labour and skills shortages as a high priority, it is appropriate to address those criteria which the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations has established for this inquiry.

1. The adequacy of current data to reliably monitor employment changes that may impact on pay equity issues

As previously indicated, WALGA considers that there is a paucity of data from sources other than its own annual Local Government Remuneration Survey ('the survey'). The 2008 survey had contributions from 62% of its members (88 Local Governments), which is a decrease from 68% in the 2007 survey although this response rate is in the range reflected in the period of collection since 2001.

Some key data which would be of interest to the Inquiry are:

- Women comprise 51% of the WA Local Government workforce (Attachment 1, Fig 1)
- Average age of women is 38 compared to men at 41 years (Attachment 1, Fig 2)
- Most women are employed in the Corporate or the Human Services functional areas (Attachment 1, Fig 3)
- Women comprise 20% of the full time workforce (men 37.5%); 12.2% part time (men 2.5%); and 19.4% casual (men 7.4%); (Attachment 2, Fig 1)
- Women are under represented in managerial positions (Attachment 2, Fig 2)

2. The need for education and information among employers, employees and trade unions in relation to pay equity issues

It is WALGA's view that there are no significant systemic problems pertaining to pay equity, or relativities in remuneration generally within Local Government, either in Western Australia or in other States and Territories. As previously indicated, Local Governments face significant challenges in recruiting employees generally, there are no issues pertaining to employees working within job types or functional areas receiving different levels of remuneration based solely on gender. Differences will always be based on nature of skills and qualifications, nature and type of work experience and in some cases differences between regional/remote area Local Governments.

Consequently it is not considered that there is a need for expenditure of public funds on education or information campaigns. It is WALGA's view, however, that the State and Federal Government education sectors should continue with, and accelerate, in school programs which highlight employment opportunities which exist in employment areas which are usually perceived to be non traditional for women e.g. engineering and infrastructure construction and maintenance. Equally, it is important to invest effort in advertising similar opportunities which exist for males in other areas, including Human/Social services.

3. Current structural arrangements in the negotiation of wages that may impact disproportionately on women

Employees working within Local Government are generally employed within the Federal industrial relations system. There are two main federal Awards which operate, being the Local Government Officers' (WA) Award 1999 and the Municipal Employees' (WA) Award 1999.

Operating within the federal system, WA Local Government employees work within the following arrangements:

- Union Collective Agreements
- Non Union Collective Agreements
- Over Award payments
- Award

All employees, regardless of gender or any other demographic, are involved on an equal footing in the negotiation of their Agreements by the appointed bargaining agents and committee structures therefore there does not appear to be any structural impediments to groups of employees – women or otherwise – who are systemically disadvantaged.

4. The adequacy of recent and current equal remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation

Considered to be adequate, and not requiring further legislative impost which would cause operational and financial difficulties for small to medium size Local Governments.

5. 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 indicated in (4) above, WALGA would not support further prescriptive measures targeted at a specific section of the workforce in relation to training, promotion or variation of work hours.

Local Government employs approximately 14,000 people of which over 50% are females. These employees work in 141 Local Governments throughout Western Australia – 30 in the Perth metropolitan area and the remainder in regional and rural WA, with a workforce reflected as follows:

0 – 99:	74% of Local Governments
100 - 249:	16% of Local Governments
250 - 500:	7% of Local Governments
> 500:	2% of Local Governments

As so many of WALGA's member Councils employ less than 250 people, indeed with over 74% of Local Government employing fewer than 100 people, the Association considers that further statutory or regulatory impost on them which dictated an outcome which reflects increased costs to ratepayers and decreased flexibility in allocating staff resources would be untenable. In our view, it is preferable to continue to support and encourage Local Governments to make the best use of flexible working arrangements and to appropriately train and educate their workforce, rather than apply the 'blunt instrument' regulation.

6. The need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia.

Same comments as (5) – WALGA does not support further legislative impost on member Local Governments.

6. Close

In summary, the Inquiry should be aware that the Local Government sector faces a high degree of difficulty in the current environment, with the sustainability of many municipalities being questioned in the face of rising prices, increasing Government imposts and cost shifting as well as shortages in the supply of skilled, qualified and experienced labour. This is true not only for Western Australian Local Governments but also for those in other States and Territories.

It is this context that many Local Governments can be reported to be making the best use of any and all resources that are available to them, and this includes establishing flexible and family friendly working arrangements in an attempt to attract and retain the right people. WALGA's view is that this should be encouraged and supported, and that State and Federal Governments can best assist by working with the Local Government sector to enhance training and education opportunities where skills in demand exist, and in ensuring that there is a steady supply of people to work in providing services to the community, at the local level. The sector is not best served by further legislated or regulated imposts on already overburdened people.



Cr W (Bill) Mitchell
President
Western Australian Local Government Association

5. Attachments

Attachment 1
Fig 1
WA Local Government Employees –Age & Gender

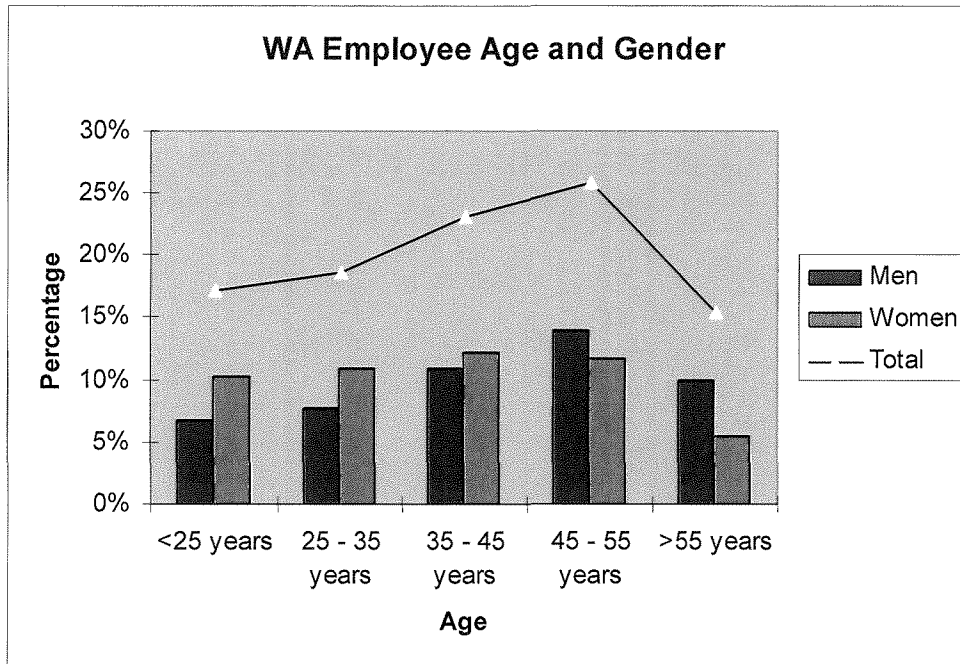


Fig 2: Age

Age	All Employees		
	Men	Women	Total
<25 years	7%	10%	17%
25 - 35 years	8%	11%	19%
35 - 45 years	11%	12%	23%
45 - 55 years	14%	12%	26%
>55 years	10%	6%	15%
Subtotals	49%	51%	
Average Age	40.88	38.25	40.44

Fig 3: Functional Groupings

Age	Corporate			Environmental			Human Services			Engineer/Infrastructure		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
<25 years	5%	10%	15%	6%	6%	12%	9%	19%	28%	6%	2%	8%
25 - 35 years	6%	13%	19%	12%	14%	26%	5%	15%	20%	11%	4%	15%
35 - 45 years	8%	15%	23%	15%	9%	24%	3%	18%	21%	20%	5%	25%
45 - 55 years	14%	17%	31%	15%	8%	23%	4%	16%	19%	25%	4%	29%
>55 years	6%	6%	12%	11%	3%	15%	2%	9%	11%	22%	2%	23%
Subtotals	39%	61%		60%	40%		23%	77%		84%	16%	
Average Age	42.18	39.45	40.53	42.51	37.01	40.29	33.31	37.46	36.49	45.50	39.08	44.44

Attachment 2

WA Local Government Employees – Employment

Fig 1: Nature of Employment

Employment Status	All Employees		
	Men	Women	Total
Full Time	37.5%	20.0%	57.5%
Part Time	2.5%	12.2%	14.7%
Casual	7.4%	19.4%	26.8%
Other	0.6%	0.4%	1.0%
Subtotal	47.9%	52.1%	

Fig 2: Managerial Positions

Management Levels	All Employees		
	Men	Women	
Tier 1 Management	89.6%	10.4%	
Tier 2 Management	94.7%	5.3%	
Tier 3 Management	70.3%	29.8%	