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28 August 2008

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

Per email: ewr.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir,

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

Thank you for your letter dated 15 July 2008 inviting our submission to your inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce. We are pleased to provide information of our organisation's experience on these matters.

Our Organisation Profile

At Port Stephens Council we are committed to developing an equitable and diverse workforce which is representative of our community and the region as a whole.

The 2006 Census Data for the Port Stephens Local Government Area shows 51% of the population is female. 50% of our current workforce are female.

This commitment is based, in part, on the need to ensure that our organisation complies with equal opportunity legislative requirements. However, more importantly we are committed to providing a pleasant working environment for all employees by encouraging good working relationships, valuing diversity and respecting differences to achieve our



objective of being an employer of choice.

For us, equity is about fairness. It is about providing everyone with a fair and safe working environment, with access to training and development opportunities. It is about giving everyone the opportunity to use and enhance their individual talents and skills for their own improvement and for the advancement of the organisation as a whole.

Diversity is about inclusiveness. It means that the differences brought to the organisation by people of divergent backgrounds, experiences and perspectives are valued and respected. It means that the contributions brought to the organisation by a diverse range of people are utilised and maximised, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and capability of the organisation.

Achieving improved workplace equity and diversity means identifying and eliminating all forms of discrimination and putting measures into place to overcome the employment disadvantage faced by diversity groups. In our organisation, these have been identified as:

1. People from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

People born in countries other than those categorised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as main English speaking countries (i.e. Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, United States of America).

2. Indigenous Australians

Persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

3. People with Disabilities

This includes anyone with an ongoing disability who has an employment restriction due to their disability and:

- is restricted in the type of work they can do, or needs modified hours of work (either a restriction in hours, different time schedules or flexible hours of attending); or
- requires an employer to provide adaptive equipment, a modified work environment, extra time for mobility or to perform certain tasks, or to make other special work-related arrangements; or
- needs to be given ongoing assistance or supervision to carry out their duties

4. Women

5. Youth

A person who is aged 17 to 25 years

Our Workplace Equity and Diversity Committee is actively engaged in ensuring that as an organisation, we achieve these goals. We have enclosed a copy of our Workplace Eq-

uity and Diversity Plan for your information.

Pay Equity

Pay equity between male and female employees at Port Stephens Council is not an issue from the perspective that our salary systems recognises the expertise, judgement and accountability of each individual position and determines salary levels based on this criteria by linking job evaluation to the local government market.

As a result there is no gender bias in the determination of salary levels of females in our workforce as each individual is paid based on the skills required for the position with reference to our determined market.

The Job Evaluation Team that determines the position of jobs in our salary system consists of an equal number of male and female employees drawn from across our organisation who individually are engaged in a variety of occupations including management, administration, human resource management, trades and civil works positions.

We believe this provides a balanced approach to the assessment and determination of job values within the organisation and limits any gender bias that could otherwise occur.

Greater Female Participation

At Port Stephens Council we are actively engaged in encouraging greater participation by females in our workforce in many different ways.

Our new enterprise agreement provides many flexible working options what are available to all staff to help them manage their family and work life balance. We recognise that the primary responsibility in the majority of cases for caring for family members rests with women and we want to encourage those employees to manage the needs of their personal life whilst ensuring that their career opportunities are maximised.

To demonstrate our commitment to equity and family work life balance, we have included statements of our intentions under a Values, Rights and Commitments section at the very beginning of our agreement where we detail our intent to provide our employees with access to more fulfilling, varied and better-paid work by providing measures to:

- improve skill levels and establish skill-related career paths;
 - eliminate impediments to multi-skilling;
 - broaden the range of tasks which a worker may be required to perform;
 - achieve greater flexibility in workplace practices;
 - eliminate discrimination;
 - establish rates of pay and conditions that are fair and equitable;
 - work reasonable hours;
 - ensure flexibility for work and family responsibilities; and
- ensure the delivery of quality services to the community and continuous improvement

In this section of our enterprise agreement we further detail our commitment to these aims by detailing our commitment to family and work life balance and workplace equity and diversity.

From an organisational perspective we believe that this position is one that is sustainable into the future and provides our best opportunity of attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff to service the needs of our community.

Conditions offered to enhance female workforce participation

Our conditions of employment offer many flexible arrangements in excess of legislative provisions including:

- Paid parental leave of 12 weeks on birth or adoption (available for males and females who are primary care givers);
- Part-time return to work for employees returning from parental leave;
- Access to extended bereavement leave conditions;
- 15 days personal leave per annum without production of medical certificates or statutory declarations;
- Ability to purchase up to 1 year additional annual leave through salary sacrificing arrangements;
- Job share employment for all positions;
- Learning and development plans encouraging upskilling to all areas of the workforce;
- Financial assistance to undertake formal education at tertiary level;
- Flexitime, rostered day off provisions and other flexible working arrangements;
- Grandparents leave;
- Community volunteer leave; and
- Career break leave.

A copy of our enterprise agreement is enclosed for your information.

Whilst like many organisations, women are under-represented in senior management positions when compared to the demographic profile of our region and organisation, we are actively involved in increasing these rates through formal education programs and opportunities to act in senior management roles.

The following table shows our current female vs male participation rates in management positions:

Position	Permanent Appointments		Vacant	Acting	
	Female	Male		Female	Male
Executive Management Team	0	3 (60%)	2	1	1
Section Managers	2 (13%)	10 (66%)	3	2	1
Coordinators	29 (35%)	55 (65%)	0		

To assist with addressing this imbalance we promote a system of employees acting in higher positions to gain experience at higher levels of management with the organisation and encourage sharing of these opportunities amongst our workforce.

We are also about to launch a Women's Springboard program.

The Springboard Women's Development Program enables women to take more control over their own lives by identifying the clear, practical and realistic steps that they want to take and developing the skills and confidence to take them.

It is designed for women from all backgrounds, ages and stages of their lives. The Springboard Women's Development Program is mostly used by women working in non-management roles and at pre-management levels.

The results relate to the objectives each woman sets herself on the first workshop. Many women use the program to get results at work, such as new qualifications, promotions, new skills, a new attitude to change and a boost in confidence.

Improvement of current policies

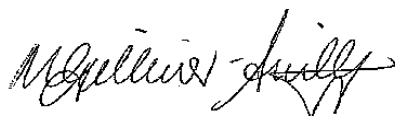
Current legislative provisions in relation to pay equity and conditions generally for the Australian workforce have not impacted on our decisions in relation to employment conditions. What has impacted on us is the availability of suitably qualified and skilled employees in a labour market that is very competitive.

We would caution against legislative reform to bring about wholesale change as for many organisations, the costs and complexities associated with providing more flexible workplaces that are attractive to women could, in fact, be detrimental to increased participation rates. For instance, it is conceivable that smaller businesses, without the necessary critical mass of employees to deal with the complexities which flexible working conditions bring to employment, could seek to employ only those people who do not need or seek flexibilities, therefore having a detrimental effect on female participation rates.

Rather we would encourage educative processes that highlight the benefits of providing a workplace that supports and encourages female participation, focusing on the knowledge and skill retention this will bring to an organisation.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Michelle Gilliver-Smith
Human Resources Manager



Steven Bernasconi
Chair
Workplace Equity and
Diversity Committee

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