

29 August 2008

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

Dear Madam/Sir

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

I am writing in response to your letter dated 15 July 2008 requesting an insight into Council's experience with pay equity and associated issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce.

As you may be well aware, the general industrial relations framework and industrial instruments used by Kiama Council, and most Local Government organisations in NSW operate, are established at the State level through negotiations between the Local Government and Shires Associations and the relevant union bodies. This negotiating process does not generally have a disproportionate impact on women as pay related issues are negotiated on an industry-wide basis. More recently, with the introduction of WorkChoices, there has been the need for local negotiations, however these are still linked to terms and conditions prescribed by the Local Government (State) Award.

It is, however, fair to say that the industry has grown from traditional stereotypical male/female occupational groups. Whilst this has been recognised and there are efforts made to redress traditional stereotypes, we do experience some difficulties recruiting women into some non-traditional roles, for example Engineering, and men into others such as Community Services.

Kiama Council has recognised this and amongst its EEO strategies has initiated stronger career paths in areas in the Community Services sector which, by comparison with other professional areas, has had a history of being undervalued. Prior to 2004, the Local Government (State) Award provided that Community Services employees who fell into the Professional/Specialist Band worked a 38 hour week whilst most other employees in the Professional/Specialist Band worked a 35 hour week. In 2004, the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW handed down a decision that effectively changed the ordinary hours of Community Services employees in the Professional/Specialist Band from 38 hours to 35 hours per week.

In considering the decision of the IRC, Kiama Municipal Council also decided to apply this unilaterally to all Community Services employees who classified in the Administrative/Trade/Technical Band. In effect this increased the hourly rate of pay of these employees and impacted predominantly on women bringing greater parity between Community Services and other employees.

Notwithstanding, because of their nature, many of the Community Services positions require the incumbents to access motor vehicles which are then offered to them on a leaseback basis. This is seen as an employment-related benefit that is highly sought by many employees through Council.

The level of remuneration of positions at Council is determined primarily by the relative value of different positions to the organisation using our industry approved Job Evaluation package. This approach determines relativity of positions regardless of gender of the incumbent and assists us to overcome traditional inequities.

We are of the view that the legislative framework is generally adequate to provide for pay equity however the challenge is implementing practices to support to intent of the legislation and attracting employees to non-traditional roles. It appears that interruptions to service for women through family responsibilities such as unpaid Maternity Leave may still create some disadvantage in terms of career development as in effect it reduces the length and nature of on-the-job experience of some women compared with men in similar roles. It may be possible to consider implementing paid Paternity Leave to provide greater inducement for men to increase participation in parenting of young children, enabling parents more options in determining who will be the primary carers of children in the early years. Whilst there is much public discussion about extending paid Maternity Leave there appears generally little discussion about the opportunity to implement paid Paternity Leave.

At the local level, Council constantly reviews its policies and practices to ensure that the workplace offers equity to all of its employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our views. Please do not hesitate to contact Council's Manager Human Resources, Russell Park, if you require any additional information.

Yours faithfully

Michael Forsyth
General Manager