



The City with Spirit

26 September 2008

In reply please quote:
File 15092

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

Submission No:.....	120
Date Received:.....	2/10/08
Secretary:.....	

Dear Cheryl,

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

In response to your letter dated 15 July 2008, I would like to qualify that any opinion offered comes only from a local government perspective and I acknowledge that the industry is a little sheltered from some topical issues. However, having said this, opinions were sought from a number of female staff in an effort to gain a broader viewpoint.

Specifically, in response to the issues you have raised:

- *The adequacy of current data to reliably monitor employment changes that may impact on pay equity issues – Anecdotally, it appears there is a reasonable amount of research conducted to monitor pay equity issues.*
- *The need for education and information among employers, employees and trade unions in relation to pay equity issues – Education is usually instrumental in resolving issues. Certain occupations and industries, which are traditionally female, attract a lesser pay rate. As this has been the case for generations, it is perpetuated by employers (and other relevant parties) who accept the status quo, without assessing the value of the work being performed. Such pay inequities are frequently unintended and could be alleviated through education which focuses on the issues and provides guidance on how to assess job value.*

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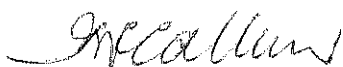
- *Current structural arrangements in the negotiation of wages that may impact disproportionately on women* – Speaking from a local government perspective, there appears to be consensus within the Devonport City Council that this is not considered an issue. Positions are valued according to an objective assessment of their responsibilities. Therefore, both women and men are paid fairly for the work they do.

However, within the broader community, male-dominated industries such as construction and mining are experiencing a rapid growth period. Therefore, employees in these industries are presently in a stronger position in wage negotiations than employees in many female-dominated occupations/industries.

- *The adequacy of recent and current equal remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation* – Unable to comment.
- *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* - Women are frequently limited in the work they are able to undertake. Because of their dual responsibilities as employees and mothers, female employees may not be able to accept roles that require them to work full-time, travel to conferences, attend out-of-hours meetings and the like. Sometimes these requirements are essential to the positions and flexible arrangements are simply not feasible or effective, particularly in supervisory roles. However, government policy requiring employers to give consideration to requests for part-time or flexible arrangements has been valuable in forcing an assessment of the genuine requirements of certain positions.
- *The need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia* – Although legislation often provides the impetus for further education, it should be approached with caution. Despite the best of intentions, most prescriptive approaches have unforeseen consequences, often on small business.

Of course, pay equity is a genuine issue, particularly in some occupations and industries. However, it is important to be mindful that pay disparity is not always a gender issue. Sometimes, it is a matter of choice. A woman may make the choice to have numerous breaks in her career to care for children and perhaps to accept a role with lesser responsibility/salary so that she can achieve a work/life balance. In doing so, she may be satisfied that she is taking responsibility for the choices she has made and the effect would most likely be the same for a man who made these choices. In summary, although pay inequity needs to be addressed, it is important that women are not portrayed as victims of circumstance, when frequently they have made educated choices.

Yours faithfully



Ian McCallum
GENERAL MANAGER