



City of
Onkaparinga

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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

Dear Sir/Madam

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

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our views to your inquiry into pay equity and associated issues. I have been asked to respond on behalf of our CEO, Jeff Tate.

From a local government point of view, the potential disadvantages to women's workforce participation are not related to pay equity. Our pay and working conditions are tied to our Enterprise Agreements and are equal for all employees, regardless of gender. In our case, we take particular care to ensure gender balance on our Enterprise Bargaining Committees and to provide any training and support necessary to enable full participation by all members.

Since its inception in 1997, our organisation has worked hard to ensure that women are able to achieve their full potential within and beyond our organisation. We have taken some deliberate pro-active steps and, more broadly, have developed a culture which reflects our principle of appointing the best (most competent) person to positions. We feel that we have created a work environment where women can fully participate and expect to access all opportunities as they present. Our integrated approach, *A culture not a project*, was awarded the inaugural LGMA Award for Excellence in Advancing the Status of Women in Local Government in April 2008.

In our experience, a potential equity issue arises for women who take an extended break from the workforce for any reason, for example to have children or take on a caring role. When they do return to work it is often on a part time basis. Although our work arrangements are flexible enough to allow family needs to be taken into account, we recognise that the flip side of such arrangements can mean that part time employees progress/develop less rapidly and/or feel less engaged in the organisation than full time staff. In our agreements we have increased the pace of incremental progression through the classification steps beyond that outlined in the award, to ensure that there was no disadvantage to our part time employees, who are predominantly women.

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We are currently developing a Workforce Plan to assist us with current and future skills shortages and as part of that plan we will examine a range of issues relating to female participation in the workforce and other potential issues related to the attraction and retention of staff.

We have conducted workshops to explore how we can attract women to higher level and less traditional positions within the organisation. These workshops have included representatives from the South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission and some of the major recruitment houses in Adelaide, including an employment psychologist, along with a range of our managers and employees.

As part of our aim to make the City of Onkaparinga a very attractive place to work we explored the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Employer of Choice for Women, but we were disappointed to find this citation was only applicable to the private sector as we feel this type of recognition may indeed assist women choosing their ideal employer.

Again thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely



Kate Harmon
Manager Organisation Development