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A tourism perspective on female participation in the workforce

**Submission to the
Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues relating to
increasing female participation in the workforce**

By Tourism Alliance Victoria

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CONTACT DETAILS

Anthony McIntosh – Chief Executive Officer

Kristina Burke – Advocacy, Policy and Project Co-ordinator

Introduction

In providing a submission to the inquiry into pay equity and associated issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce Tourism Alliance Victoria seeks to highlight:

- The significant number of women who work in tourism and tourism-related industries, particularly in a part-time or casual capacity;
- The contradiction of flexible working hours made possible by part-time and casual employment; and the lack of benefits, such as leave entitlements, inherent in such arrangements;
- The seasonal nature of tourism, the challenges this brings and the opportunities that may arise.

TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA

Why are we interested in responding?

Tourism Alliance Victoria is the peak industry body advocating for and supporting the development of a professional and sustainable tourism industry across Victoria. The organisation represents the interests of our 1000 strong member network which is made up of tourism attractions, tour operators, adventure and nature based tourism businesses, local and regional tourism organisations and visitor information centres.

Tourism Alliance Victoria work actively with our industry partners- Accommodation Getaways Victoria, Regional Victorian Conference Group, Cultural Tourism Industry Group, Outdoor Recreation Centre and the Young Tourism Network. Combined we reach over 3000 Victorian businesses.

More recently, Tourism Alliance Victoria has been involved in the delivery of the pilot program My Business My People, a Victorian Government initiative aimed at improving workforce planning and development for small and medium businesses. Through this program, it has become apparent that finding and retaining skilled labour are consistent problems for tourism businesses. Bringing mothers back into the workforce after maternity leave is vital for skill and knowledge retention. Re-integration of mothers into the workforce and better support of flexible employment arrangements (such as more affordable and available child-care) are essential for increasing mothers' participation in the workforce.

Part-time and casual employment

The tourism industry is characterised by seasonality and irregular operating hours, thus there are increased levels of part-time and casual employment within the tourism industry. Industry sectors within the tourism industry such as accommodation and food services and arts and recreation services have high proportions of casual employees (i.e.

employees without paid leave entitlements, those who identify themselves as casual workers, or those who receive a casual loading).¹

ABS data shows that the proportion of women in part-time employment is significantly higher than the proportion of men (approx. 44.5% v 14.8% in August 2008)². It was also noted in a November 2006 survey that of 1.8 million employees without leave entitlements, 56% (1 million) were women; of 1.8 million employees who "considered their main job to be casual" 58.5% were female; and of 1 million employees who received a casual loading, 58.3% were female³.

Whilst it can be argued that part-time and casual employment allows women with children greater flexibility to manage family and work obligations, they are also disadvantaged as they are often precluded from entitlements otherwise available to full-time employees. This is confirmed in the ABS report on Casual Employment: "proportionally more female employees than male, particularly from the age of 30 onwards, were without paid leave entitlements (between 25-30%), reflecting the fact that many women work part time hours to balance work with family commitments"⁴.

Pay equity

Gauging pay equity within the tourism industry overall is difficult as the industry comprises a wide range of occupations and employment sectors – transport, hospitality, accommodation, recreation, arts and culture – many of which operate under different awards. However, ABS data from May 2004 indicated high female/male earnings ratios (for full-time adult non-managerial employees) in the sectors of accommodation, cafes and restaurants (0.97) and cultural and recreational services (0.93).

Nevertheless, as noted above, high proportions of part-time and casual employees within the tourism industry imply a higher proportion of female employees. This in turn would point to lower female earnings for the industry overall.

Paid maternity leave

Greater, publicly funded financial assistance for mothers is welcome. Any scheme should be structured in such a way that the administrative burden for employers is minimised. This is especially important for small and medium businesses.

¹ Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008 – Measures of Casual Employment, (accessed 6/10/2008)
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6105.0Feature%20Article2Oct%202008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6105.0&issue=Oct%202008&num=&view=>

² Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, p. 3 (accessed 6/10/2008)
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6105.0Main%20Features3Oct%202008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6105.0&issue=Oct%202008&num=&view=>

³ Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008 – Measures of Casual Employment, p. 6 (accessed 6/10/2008)
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6105.0Feature%20Article2Oct%202008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6105.0&issue=Oct%202008&num=&view=>

⁴ *ibid.*

However, there are also broader issues to consider, such as how mothers wishing to return to work are re-integrated into the workforce and what support mechanisms are in place for them (such as adequate and affordable child-care), so that returning to work, whether part-time or full-time, is a viable and reasonable option, and not one borne out of sheer financial need.

Opportunities

Seasonality is a major challenge for the tourism industry, particularly for small to medium businesses. A co-operative approach to employment within industry sectors, whereby "summer" and "winter" businesses draw from a common pool of employees who are trained in operations across both seasons, merits further investigation. Not only would it provide participating businesses with a stable group of employees across seasons, it would also provide continuity of earnings for employees who may otherwise not have a steady income. Such a scheme could be particularly effective in a sector such as hospitality, where skills are readily transferable.