

**Submission Number: 89**

**Date Received: 2/9/08**

29 August 2008

The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 60221  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Scarlett

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the pay equity and associated issues inquiry. We have considered the terms of reference for the inquiry and provide the following response from the perspective of the City of Whitehorse, particularly from a local government recruitment and retention perspective. Your identified issues are addressed in turn below.

*1. The adequacy of current data to reliably monitor employment changes that may impact on pay equity issues*

Council has in place reporting and analysis systems and legislative requirements (such as Annual Reporting) that enable it to monitor and track employment changes, pay equity issues and mobility issues for its internal workforce. However we are not able to reliably track or benchmark our current performance with readily available data within our sector or industry. Initiatives that often rely on a business case to be developed would be well served by this data, especially information about "best practice" organisations. We don't monitor pay equity between employees based on gender, but we do have in place an Equal Opportunity policy, which is applied across the organisation.

*2. The need for education and information among employers, employees and trade unions in relation to pay equity issues*

This is not deemed to be a major issue for the City of Whitehorse. The Victorian Local Government Act requires Council to educate and inform staff about Equal Opportunity issues through the appointment of an Equal Opportunity Officer in each municipality.

Local Government is already well aware of the need for education and information, but the sector is severely constrained by the provision of funding by state and federal governments that perpetuate

pay inequities. For example the largest areas of pay inequity in local government are between the semi-skilled outdoor workforce and the semi-skilled indoor workforces. At the City of Whitehorse outdoor employees, who are predominantly men, through the efforts of their Union, have negotiated pay rates and allowances that give them a reasonable wage. At the same time Council is constrained in what it is able to pay women that work in comparable indoor semi-skilled roles in work such as aged care or childcare, by the grants it receives to provide these services from the state or federal governments. At the end of the day Council is accountable to its ratepayers for the services it provides, and it is unable to justify substantial subsidisation of one service over another. This grants system severely impacts on Council's ability to address pay equity issues in its workforce.

Council was also involved in a "Flexibility options initiative" jointly with the Australian Services Union in 2007. While this initiative was directed at all staff, it was primarily targeted to women workers, and the initiatives sought by the Union had already been largely implemented by the City of Whitehorse. Pay adequacy rather than equity (anecdotally) is the primary barrier to women taking up the flexibility options available to them. Ironically when pay adequacy issues are largely addressed by women moving to more senior levels in the organisation, there is traditionally less room to negotiate flexibility options due to the demands (real or perceived) of the work and roles, and a cultural belief that women shouldn't seek flexible work options if they are serious about demonstrating their commitment to their career.

In some cases the reluctance to experiment with flexible options at a senior level in local government is based on commitments to community and elected representatives, where it is assumed that a flexible arrangement will not work. Alternatively the assumption may be based on previous experience, where poor incumbent fit in the role, or where the flexible arrangement was an inappropriate match with the role rather than the flexibility itself. There is an opportunity for Council to 'challenge' some of the traditional thinking about how roles are 'structured' at a senior level to enable both the individual needs of women and the business to be met.

### *3. Current structural arrangements in the negotiation of wages that may impact disproportionately on women*

At the City of Whitehorse there are no obvious current structural arrangements that impact disproportionately on the ability of women to negotiate wages. Meetings for Enterprise Agreement negotiations are equally attended by men and women representatives, and are deliberately held at times that are suitable for men and women with family commitments. My personal experience has been that this is not always the case across the sector where some meetings are held

very early in the morning, and therefore preclude attendance for staff with carer commitments before work.

At the City of Whitehorse the highest proportion of the workforce with female participation also has the highest representation on the Enterprise Agreement negotiating committee. Part-time workers are also represented on the committee and these workers are paid for the time they attend the committee. Council also has a commitment to paying flat dollar amounts in the Enterprise Agreement at the lower banding levels that give a higher wage outcome than a percentage increase to the lowest paid workers. In this workforce, the lowest paid workers are often women, who are increasing their wages at a faster pace than the rest of the workforce.

*4. The adequacy of recent and current equal remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation*

The City of Whitehorse believes that there are adequate state and federal legislative provisions for equal remuneration, but these provisions cannot provide for the indirect or unwitting discrimination that can take place at the time of recruitment which can lead to a disproportionate number of men being successful in promotional or higher paid roles. Council seeks to combat the opportunity for unconscious discrimination and stereotyping by ensuring that a woman is always on a selection panel where there are women applicants, but this may not always be sufficient. We also practice merit-based appointment so it should not be an issue during the recruitment process.

*5. 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*

All women at the City of Whitehorse have access to training and development opportunities, and promotion. Council does not currently monitor the adequacy of current arrangements for fair access to training and promotion for women (especially those that have taken maternity leave or sought flexible work arrangements). However Council does make an effort to ensure that highly valued employees, that have been assessed as having high potential, are encouraged to undertake training and development in an effort to retain these employees. In the same way, flexibility options are provided to this group to ensure their retention. All employees have access to training and development opportunities irrespective of their full or part-time status, and this is enshrined in the Award provisions for the local government sector and council's collective agreement.

*6. The need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia*

The legislative reform sought by the City of Whitehorse is more to do with the relative inequities between different professions and occupational groupings that tend to be the domain of women. For example a “relative worth” case for child care workers, or aged care workers which are the primary domain of women workers would be desirable from Council’s perspective as long as any outcome of such a case was adequately reflected in the grants and subsidies offered to council by state or federal government for the provision of these services.

In addition Council would be keen to see an Australia-wide investment at the secondary schooling level in encouraging women into non-traditional roles and careers. Local Government is a large employer of women, but they continue to be segregated into a small range of occupations, and there are relatively fewer women in senior management roles in the sector compared to the total numbers of women workers in the sector. For example over sixty percent of the City of Whitehorse workforce are women, including the Chief Executive Officer, but in the senior management ranks only 32% of these managers are women. This may be partly due to the dearth of women putting themselves forward for these roles, or because of the perceived sacrifices all managers need to make to succeed. These sacrifices may be deemed unacceptable for women who seek work/life balance.

As well as this written submission I will forward this letter to your email address as requested in your letter.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Bennett  
Manager Organisation Development