

Draft Submission to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equity

(Online consultation 800-word limit)

April 2023

Opening

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing all 128 NSW councils and related entities. LGNSW facilitates the development of an effective community-based system of local government in NSW. The local government sector in NSW employs more than 55,000 people across NSW.

This is a draft submission and is subject to review and approval of the LGNSW Board. Any changes will be advised at the earliest opportunity.

Purpose

LGNSW has a number of policy positions that would improve gender equity, including:

- 1:** That the NSW Government introduce legislation in line with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) to require the public service and councils to plan for, implement strategies for and report on gender equality in the workplace.
- 2:** That the NSW Government fund councils to develop gender equity strategies and programs in consultation with their communities.
- 3:** That the NSW Government continue to invest in training and campaigns for women and other underrepresented cohorts to stand for election.
- 4.** Supporting high quality, universally accessible and affordable early childhood education and care.
- 5.** Funding and resourcing to prevent domestic and family violence.
- 6.** Equitable distribution of arts and culture funding across NSW.

Calls for improved gender equity in the workplace were supported by the following motion put forward by Blue Mountains City Council and unanimously supported by over 500 delegates at the 2022 LGNSW Special Conference:

1. That the LGNSW conference notes that representation of women in elected roles and in senior leadership positions in local government remains persistently low. This is despite many years of strong advocacy from the Australian Local Government Women's Association and its NSW Branch to encourage women to join local government and support gender equity.

2. That the LGNSW conference notes that setting policy and targets to improve gender representation including public reporting and accountability on outcomes helps drive change. However, only a small number of councils have developed a Gender Equity Strategy (these Councils include City of Sydney, Ryde, and Blue Mountains); and

3. That the LGNSW calls on the NSW Government to introduce legislation, such as exists in Victoria through its Gender Equity Act 2020, to require the public service and local councils to "plan, implement strategies and report on gender equality in the workplace", and that the NSW Government provides funding to enable local councils to develop their Gender Equity Strategy in consultation with local communities.

The Victorian *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires the public service, local government and universities to promote gender equality and consider gender equality in their policies, programs and services.

Women are currently underrepresented in leadership roles in the local government sector.

Prior to the 2021 local government election, the Office for Local Government, through the *Stand for your community* campaign, encouraged women, people from diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to stand for election.

This resulted in an increase in female candidates in 2021 to 41.7% and an increase of elected female representatives up from 31% to 39.5%. More than half the councils in NSW saw an increase in female councillors. In 2023, 69 out of the 124 councils now have more women on their council than they did in previous terms. Of these, 27 councils have a female majority. This suggests that investment in strategies to encourage women to stand for election at a local government level do work.

The recent \$5 million investment from the Office for Women for Women for Election Australia will hopefully see further increases in the diversity of elected leaders at all levels of government.

Other successes within the local government sector addressing gender inequities include

The introduction of superannuation for councillors in 2021, and the introduction of audio-visual attendance for council meetings, both of which make elected office more accessible for women who often undertake the bulk of caring responsibilities.

High quality, universally accessible and affordable early childhood education and care is also critical for gender parity in the workforce.

In recent months LGNSW has been advocating for the following measures to address gender equity:

- funding to support councils to implement the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Toolkit for local government.
- council-run early childhood education and care facilities being eligible for all new funding opportunities and grant programs for the early childhood education sector.
- distribution of arts and culture funding (an industry with large female participation) equitably across NSW.

Further information on these initiatives is available in the LGNSW website.