

Addressing Representation of **Women** at CEO Level in Local Government



In 2015 LGPro working with Local Government CEOs developed Future Ready - a roadmap to the future local government workforce. Developed in partnership with Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), this strategic document creates a vision for the Local Government workforce of the future and outlines a number of key actions that will contribute to sector effectiveness in the area of highest investment - our people. Achieving the vision requires leadership that is able to build strong organisational cultures, reflective of the changing nature of local government and contemporary. The type of leadership we need to develop should more closely represent the diversity of our workforces and our communities. With Local Government women CEOs comprising only a little over 16% there is a glaring imbalance in the makeup of the most senior administration leaders.

It is LGPro's view that there are three key factors which will together over time influence the demographic representation of women in CEO ranks in Local Government in Victoria. These are:

1. Raising the profile of the issue and providing clear expectations by setting and measuring performance against a target
2. Increasing the number of women in candidate pools by investing in skill and capability development
3. Improving the calibre of decision making by elected officials

These are addressed in turn below.

1. Providing clear expectations by setting and measuring performance against a target

There is merit in the adage that what gets measured gets done. If we were to count the number of women appointees to CEO roles across Local Government at any point in time since amalgamations, the representation has never been greater than 17/79. Given the large representation of women in the wider Local Government workforce, this figure is to say the least, disappointing. While it is often discussed or commented on, no clear statement of intent has been made.

There is an opportunity in the current political climate for the Premier and Minister to make clear statements about their view and ambition for Local Government leadership, and the role that diversity should play. In order to achieve sustainable change, the strategy does however need to be seen to be informed by the sector, and not just imposed on it.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

- The Minister draws attention to the issue through establishing a Ministerial Advisory Panel with associated media campaign;
- The Ministerial Advisory Panel to include representation from:
 - LGPro
 - ALGWA
 - MAV
 - The executive recruitment industry
 - Academic with specialism in the area of women in leadership
 - ASU or other relevant representative union
- Terms of reference for the Advisory panel should be to advise on the establishment of targets and other initiatives to address existing barriers to the appointment of women CEOs in Local Government. It is our view that the scope should be limited to CEO level to make most impact and ensure that the message is not diluted.

2. Increasing the number of women in candidate pools by investing in skill and capability development

It is well underpinned by research, including our own 2008 CEO Development Project Survey that women more so than their male counterparts, will not apply for roles until they feel they have the skills and capabilities to undertake the requirements of the role. We know that there is no lack of highly competent and skilled women already in the sector not to mention women in other sectors. In the 6 years that we have been offering the LGPro Executive Leadership Program (XLP) 54 high performing women graduated from the program.

There are many strategies that could be considered to increase the number of women applying for CEO roles, and these should be explored with the MAP.

In the short term however there is an opportunity for the Minister to give an early signal of her intent by establishing an intentional partnership with LGPro on this issue.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

- The Minister announces that she will establish a Minister's Award of an annual scholarship for a female director to participate in LGPro's XLP

3. Improving the calibre of decision making by elected officials

It is our strong belief that direct and indirect bias is a significant factor in the CEO appointment process and that unless this is addressed it is unreasonable to expect sustainable change. The elected Council is rightly the CEO's employer and the decision on who a Council appoints to be their CEO should be one that is made by them. However it is our view that action is required to ensure that decision making is made on the basis of merit alone, and that matters of discrimination are eliminated.

While strategies to address this should be worked through by the MAP, it is LGPro's view that there would be merit in not only mandating training for those Councillors involved in CEO recruitment and performance management, but also considering establishing a panel of independent advisors to sit on selection panels for every CEO role. Their role would be as an adviser, to ensure that selection is undertaken on the basis of merit alone. Decision making would remain in the power of the Council.

Gender balance in Local Government's elected members is likely to be a factor leading to increased willingness to consider diversity in CEO candidate pools. The work being done in the sector, such as ALGA and the VLGA in conducting targeted campaigns to attract female candidates for council is contributing to this endeavour. The Minister's support of these programs is acknowledged and should be further supported and developed in the lead up to the 2016 Local Government elections.

CONCLUSION

A contemporary sector with strong and capable leadership is in everyone's interests. This will be achieved when appointment at CEO level is made on the basis of merit alone and matters of discrimination are eliminated. LGPro does not support quotas or positive discrimination, but we do support initiatives that level the playing field and work to unpick systemic bias.

LGPro would welcome the opportunity to work with the Minister and Local Government Victoria on this initiative.