



Women's Network Hunter NSW

The Women's Network (Hunter NSW) is non party political and aims to provide a supportive, educative forum where women can:

- participate in informed discussion about current issues
- have the opportunity to meet other informed women
- help to increase the number of women in decision making roles in the community and at all levels of government.

President's Report 2009 - Where are the Women? (stand up and be counted!)

In 2009, after two years focused on State, Federal and Local Government elections, the electoral cycle finally paused for the Women's Network. But of course, there is always work to be done to increase the participation of women and in order to meet our aim of increasing the number of women in decision making roles in the community and at all levels of government, we focused on boards and committees.

With 2010 being declared the Year of Women in Local Government, there will hopefully be many more opportunities to enhance the profile of women in this important role, however, we need to ensure we can maintain momentum in areas where we can more immediately achieve steps forward in the participation of women in our community. There are also synergies in addressing both areas of leadership which can advance both causes.

Earlier this year I was appointed to the Joint Ministerial Council on Women in Local Government, and have attended both of the meetings at Parliament House, Sydney, one in May and one in November. Over the next few months with the 2010 year of Women in Local Government coming up, the Joint Ministerial Council is going to be meeting more frequently to ensure we do use the year to help us increase women's participation. The Network will be working locally with all Hunter Councils to try and engage them in this topic!

It was an interesting note that the last meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council was held on the day after Women on Boards had released the results of their survey saying that more women than ever were supporting the imposition of targets and reporting requirements for boards to increase the representation of women. Clare Braund told the group of women who met for the joint Women on Boards Training Session in November 2009 in Maitland, that the feel from many of the women was that they were reluctant to call for targets, but they felt there was no other way to realistically achieve the goal of having women more equitably represented in boards. We have been exemplary in our conduct, we have great training and education, and are great leaders, but the boy's club is just too entrenched without some kind of targets.

This contrasts sharply with the lack of any mechanism for holding Local Government accountable for the diversity of their workforce, or of their council activities. Over 15 years ago I worked on the Sex Data collection project for the Federal Government, and can remember the concerns of computer programmers that adding an 'F' or an 'M' to a database would cause us all to have Repetitive Strain Injury, and would somehow cause programs to become discriminatory because we would use them to exclude men or women. Now we realise these dire predictions have not come to pass, and that reporting against key performance indicators is a vital part of managing all organisations whether it's the government, the not for profit or the private sector!

The Women in Leadership conference I attended in the middle of the year (which I reported in the August newsletter) was also clear about the need to integrate diversity for all women and all men, and indeed all people in an organisation through tracking and reporting with clear lines of responsibility for not meeting targets.

An example of this is that the gains we have made in terms of work life balance are now benefiting both men and women in the work place, and companies who implement them are winning the war for talent. For instance, flexible working hours helps experienced leaders who are in pre-retirement phases and want to fit in a round of golf, or young elite athletes who want a non-sport career, and a whole other groups who may or not be the original target group of flexible work hours (being women having babies and young children). Integrating diversity in management is not a sectional interest. It is about good management, and if we have a diverse workforce, and we set ourselves goals for participation in higher management, boards and leadership positions in our community we may just meet them!

Activities

In line with our aims, we were involved in a number of activities, events and workshops throughout the year, including:

- Supporting in Partnership a number of Hunter International Women's Day Events, including the Brunch in partnership with Maitland City Council, and the Unifem Soiree and the Steel Magnolia's Luncheon in Newcastle.
- In April, the Honourable Jodi McKay MP, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Hunter
- In June, Julie Garland McLelland, a professional company director on career development in non-traditional roles.
- At the June function, we awarded our Annual Women's Network (Hunter NSW) \$250 Scholarship for a Female Student enrolled and completed first year at Maitland Campus in a non traditional area to Amanda Smith.
- In June we took nearly a dozen members to Sydney for the Women Leaders Seminar. A couple of other members joined me at the Women in Leadership Conference at the University of NSW.
- In August, I addressed the Hunter African Communities on the issues involved in building networks and community contacts for women.
- In October, Sue Gould, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Newcastle about some of the challenges she has faced as a woman and the importance of work life balance;
- In October, the Honourable Julie Bishop, MP, Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition.
- For Pink Ribbon day in October, we held our joint function with BPW and heard about the exciting discoveries being made by Dr Kelly Avery-Kiedja at our own Hunter Medical Research Institute. We split the funds we raised from the day between Pink Ribbon and HMRI.
- In November we have held a joint training session with Women on Boards called: Getting Started – a great help for those starting the process of getting onto a board, and great for clarifying your goals and strategies for your board career.
- And at our AGM/Christmas Function we will be hearing from Eileen Doyle, regarding her distinguished career as an outstanding woman in the Hunter.
- On the 24th of November, our Vice President Jann Gardner will be presenting on behalf of the Women's Network at Hunter Women Connect, which will bring together five established women's groups, Hunter Business Women's Network; genX Women; Women's Network (Hunter NSW); Business & Professional Women (BPW) Maitland) and AIOP (Australian Institute of Office Professionals) plus the Hunter Business Centre – in the one place on one night!

In addition to all of these specific events and activities, after our successful grant application for the International Women's Day Time Capsule, a number of Women's Network Members were included in the committee involved in the development of the project. Many members have participated in the project as subjects, and it was launched by the Governor of NSW, Marie Bashir at the newly re-opened Maitland Regional Art Gallery on 19 September 2009.

A large number of our members are now established as leaders in the Hunter community and many others are making important contributions to our community through their everyday work, family or community service. Many of you have been acknowledged in our newsletters, which are archived on our website: www.hunterwomen.org.au. We recognise how hard it can be to make this contribution on top of all the other demands of our various roles, congratulations!

Thank You

I would like to thank our Committee Members and other Network Members who continue to generously give your time to support the Network. All of our Committee Members are very busy women and their contribution is greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Tyrrell's for their very generous sponsorship of wine for all of our meetings and through the provision of raffle prizes.

I would also like to take the opportunity to say my personal thanks to our Executive Members, Vicki Woods, Jann Gardner, Michelle Hunter, Jennie Wilkinson, Olivia Collings, and Glenda Briggs. You have all made an excellent contribution to the Network, and I am sure you will continue to do so in the future.



Jenny Aitchison, President