



Achieving gender balance in water utilities

Numerous water utilities



The inclusion of women at all levels in the water sector is a priority for Australian water utilities and the Australian Government. Utilities recognise that having an inclusive work environment and diverse workplace is recognised as a way to sustainably respond to industry challenges, including growing customer expectations, climate change and technological capability.

Many water utilities are undertaking specific action to support gender equity including targeted leadership programs for women.

One example is the recent board position process in Victoria where 50 per cent of appointees were women and the number of female chairs increased from three to eight of the 19 boards.

Implementation

Water industry efforts for inclusion of women at all levels in the sector is outlined in the WSAA paper *Tapping the Power of Inclusion and Diversity in Urban Water*. It has sought to boost inclusion and diversity in the workforce. Increased participation and leadership of women is a key target within these efforts.

Similarly the Australian Government has outlined case for women in water through the High-Level Panel with the Women for Water Initiative. The Australian Water Partnership's recent paper *Gender & SDG 6 The Critical Connection* outlines the critical role of women in achieving the clean water and sanitation goal (SDG 6).

Actions being undertaken by water utilities around Australia to help achieve gender equity include:

- Feature profiles of men and women in non-traditional roles, and of employees utilising flexible work practices.
- Include an explicit diversity commitment in job advertisements.
- Request that shortlists for management roles include at least one woman.
- Ask 'if not/why not' in selection decisions to achieve gender-balance across all leadership levels and monitor the pipeline for women leaders.
- Set targets (for example, Sydney Water has a target to achieve 40 per cent female representation of leadership roles by 2020).
- Encourage participation of high-potential women in internal and industry-wide leadership programs.
- Train all leaders to recognise unconscious gender bias and to promote inclusive leadership behaviours.
- Provide reverse-mentoring and sponsorship program for women.
- Promote gender equity in community engagement activities.

The Women in Water Leadership Program offered by the Peter Cullen Trust is an example of a water industry program designed to support women in leadership roles.

Benefit / Outcome

- Increases in the proportion of women in roles traditionally held by males (for example at Queensland Urban Utilities, the proportion of women in civil infrastructure project manager and engineering roles has increased from 10.7 per cent in 2010 to 19.8 per cent in 2016).
- Better gender balance on water utility boards.
- Increased focus on inclusion and diversity, including gender equity.

Further References

WSAA, 2017, *Tapping the Power of Inclusion and Diversity in Urban Water* (wsaa.asn.au/publication/tapping-power-inclusion-and-diversity-urban-water)

AWP, 2016, *Gender & SDG 6 The Critical Connection* (waterpartnership.org.au/publications).

