Good morning everyone

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country and the custodians of the cultural heritage of this land and pay my respects to their elders past and present.*

**I would also like to acknowledge:**

* **President of ALGWA NSW Mayor Marianne Saliba**
* **Honorary National Secretary, Helen Harris OAM**
* **NSW ALGWA Executive members**
* **And all ALGWA members and potential members – which is every one of you!**

It is great to see so many of you here and I thank you very much for inviting me here. I would particularly like to thank your President Mayor Marianne Saliba for her huge contribution to the National Board and thank her personally for the support and encouragement she has given me over the past year. We were a great team in Canberra meeting with Ministers and shadow Ministers.

I must also thank our secretary Helen Harris OAM for her efforts.

I really enjoyed yesterday’s presentations.

Yesterday we heard about import or Man on the moon moment. My man on the moon moment - I am passionate about local government and passionate about gender equity. I have been a Councillor for 16 years (and two days) and Mayor three times – to me it is the most important tier of government. **But** most importantly, I am passionate about supporting and encouraging women – either as officers or as elected officials.

There is an old Irish expression which says that a stranger is just a friend you have yet to meet. I always find ALGWA gatherings are great places to meet new friends - and I hope you have all done that too.

This morning I will talk a little about ALGWA, the local Government #Me Too #Time’s Up moment, the State of the Nation regarding women in local government, and some of the latest research from the UK and Australia.

But first of all – I love the NSW conference slogans: Celebrating rural women; becoming the best you can be; The Road to Gundagui – my first NSW conference was in Ryde – Ticket to Ryde. How clever is that!

Most of you will know about ALGWA, but for those who do not the Australian Local Government Women’s Association was formed 67 years ago. Back in 1951 just one per cent of councillors were women. So the idea was to form an organisation to help and support women in local government.

Now we are national body with branches in every state and the NT. We are a non-party political association and we are **all** volunteers. That includes the National Board and the State executive committees. We offer support and encouragement to both councillors and officers.

Unique – which other tier of government has an organisation like us? We need to capitalise on that. We are very powerful and I think we often do not appreciate this.

We are also part of the National Rural Women’s Coalition. Yesterday we heard from Vivien Thompson and that she represented Women in Agriculture on the NRWC. Well former President Mayor Darriea Turley AM (love the AM) was a previous President of the NRWC. I would like to remind you of ***Honour a Woman*** – a programme to nominate women for honours and I have more cards here.

The current NRWC President – Cr Alwyn Friedersdorff - is from ALGWA and she is currently in New York having just addressed the UN on issues concerning rural women in Australia. For those going to the ALGA Canberra conference in June you can hear Alwyn speak at our annual networking breakfast and bookings are on line.

Yesterday we heard from Sandy Morthan and she spoke about the #Me Too movement and #It’s Time. Well, in the last few months local government has had its own #Me Too time and at ALGWA we have said #It’s Time.

I am sure that many of you know that the Lord Mayor of Melbourne Robert Doyle stood down and subsequently resigned after several complaints of sexual harassment, including complaints from two women councilors.

ALGWA has been very active in this space – supporting the women and calling for change. I would like to thank Marianne here for her support at a National level and advice on the NSW situation.

So, we immediately issued a Media Release, which was widely reported. This was from National and Victoria, but National took the lead. We have demanded changes to the councillor Code of Conducts.

Then, in January the Herald Sun in Melbourne splashed across the front page a photograph of former councillor Tessa Sullivan in a bikini with her son, with the headline **Rob, I’m so lucky to have you.** There were more stories in the rest of the paper with equally suggestive headlines like **Please, Please Pretty Please.**

More stories followed in subsequent days. The Melbourne Age and the Guardian criticized the Herald-Sun.

We decided we had to take a stand. This was victim blaming and would discourage any councillor in a similar predicament from making a complaint. We made a formal complaint to the Press Council and to the Journalist Union as we maintained the authors breached the journalists Code of Ethics.

We are yet to hear from the Press Council although the Journalists Union is going to convene a panel of inquiry.

I also spoke at a meeting of the Melbourne City Council, asking councillors to change their Councillor Code of Conduct. I have appeared on the 7.30 Report; AM, Melbourne Radio and we have been quoted in several newspapers.

We have been in regular contact with the councilors involved.

One of the difficulties is that councils are creatures of State Governments and each State has different rules. However, we have called for an independent reporting and investigation process – at arm’s length to Councils. We have suggested something similar to that proposed in the UK – Commissioner.

This week the MCC released nine pages of the 100 page interim findings. It found against the former Lord Mayor in four complaints. At the MCC meeting on Tuesday Cr Cathy Oke praised ALGWA and was critical of the two Victorian peak bodies for their silence.

This shows the strength of an organization like ourselves. We are agile and we have supported women in local government and advocated on their behalf. I must admit that if we did not do something for this, I am not sure when we would – but I am proud of us for standing up and saying #It’s Time.

Before I talk about the State of the Nation, I do want to talk about another organization we are members of – The Australian Gender Equality Council, an independent national body driving gender equality across all sectors of the community. The member organisations represent over 500,000 women and comprise of a myriad of different industry and sector associations. I am on the Interim Board. It will be launched in Sydney on April 11, and it would be good if a couple of your executive were able to attend. Two of the first projects we will be concentrating on are Superannuation and Child care.

The convener is Dr Terrance Fitzsimmons of Queensland University Business School. He has just completed a really interesting study of Australian Boards. We know that research shows companies which have women on their Board perform better than those without. The Reiby Institute reported that companies with women on the Board out performed those without by 8.7%.

The new research has now gone further and interviewed 60 chairs of the ASX listed companies with women on their boards. This is yet to be published but I can give you a sneak preview.

Having a woman on the Board not only reduces the company’s risk, debt levels and expenditure but a woman also changes Board behavior and performance.

The different perspectives women bring increases debate, plus increases male Board member attendance and preparation.

The male chairs were asked how women board members impacted the Board. They reported five positive and distinct effects that women had upon their board’s dynamics: providing clarity, enhancing debate, challenging views, raising levels of professionalism and enhancing behavioural norms.

Fascinating, but again we all know this don't we?

I have a question. Last month, Feb 6 was an important 100th anniversary. Does anyone know what it was?

It was the 100th anniversary of some women securing the right to vote in the UK.

Next year is an important year for women in local Government – in 1919 Susan Grace Benny became the first women elected to any tier of government when she was elected to Brighton Council in SA.

Australia was the second country in the world where women secured the right to vote and the first country in the world where women could stand for election.

But we are now 61st for political empowerment – below Rwanda, Philippines, Namibia, Mozambique, Lithuania, Moldova and Bulgaria. We do beat the USA!

So what are the latest LG figures? Last year there were elections in the NT, NSW and WA. Some.

The number of women councilors dropped in the NT. 45 of the NSW councils went to election in September. Before the election, 27% of NSW councillors were women. At the 45 councils, 33% of the councillors elected were women, bringing the NSW average to 29.5%. In WA 37% of councilors elected in the half council elections were women.

So, currently, 32.8% of Australian councilors are women. Victoria still leads the country with 38.1%, but WA is now second with 36.21% followed by NT 33%, Qld 32.5%, Tasmania 31%, NSW 29.5% and South Australia 29.3%.

Finally, last year I spoke about the interim report by the UK Fawcett Society on local Government in the UK called *Does Local Government Work for Women?*

You might remember that there was a large survey of all councillors and it showed that one in three women has experienced sexist comments from other councilors and 10% sexual harassment.

Your National Board has decided to conduct a similar survey in Australia – it is 11 years since our last one. Next week I am speaking to the State Presidents of LGPro with the aim of doing a joint survey of councilors and officers.

The UK report concluded that UK Local Government fails women and is “not fit for future”.

I will finish on one quote from the report.

*Why we need Gender Equality.*

“Whilst we make the case for women’s representation and for diversity we must also reflect on the fact that men never have to justify their over-representation. “*Why do we need men in local government*”? is a question never asked.”

Thank You