Position Statement

# Compulsory Superannuation for Elected Members

The Australian Local Government Women’s Association WA Branch is the peak body representing the interests of women in WA Local Government. The Association seeks to assist in furthering women's knowledge, understanding and participation in the function of local government.

We know that the principal impediments to more women standing as candidates at local government elections are:

* Prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women
* Lack of resources (including financial)
* Motivations such as self confidence
* Access to networks and information
* Lack of role models

A key barrier for women standing for election to local government can be the lack of access to superannuation, with women unwilling to take on more work with insufficient remuneration. Research by the Australian Gender Equity Council shows that women tend to have far lower superannuation balances than men, often due to time out of the workforce caring for family members.

Payment of superannuation for mayors and councillors is an equity measure to address disparities in men’s and women’s superannuation balances, but only if it is made mandatory.

In the announced Local Government Act reforms, the State Government revealed that under the proposed changes, Councils will be able to decide whether to pay superannuation to Elected Members. It is believed that this payment will attract and retain greater diversity among elected members, which it probably will, but only for the Councils that chose to pay Super. Whilst majority of the announced reforms were to help streamline Councils and create more consistency, the decision to allow Councils to choose whether to pay superannuation will create further inconsistencies within Local Government, going against the intent of these reforms to provide greater transparency and consistency in the sector.

The broader workforce does not have the luxury of deciding whether or not to pay superannuation to its workers. In 1992, the Federal Government made super payments compulsory to ensure working people were saving for retirement, reducing the dependency on aged pension payments and the economic impacts that would have due to the aging population.

The cohort most affected by the lack of superannuation in the local government sector (women and younger people) will be the most disadvantaged by the Minister’s current position that Councils should individually resolve to adopt superannuation – or not. This point is on the basis that women and younger people have a lesser voice on many Councils (60% of EM’s are male). Leaving this decision to a minority with a lesser voice and fewer votes (generally), is both inequitable and unfair.

In September 2021, WALGA released a Draft Policy Proposal on Superannuation for Elected Members. Their position at the time was in support of mandatory superannuation payments. In that paper, WALGA highlighted there is potential for payment of superannuation to become a political debate around the Council table, which it clearly did as once the consultation feedback was received back on this paper, the WALGA position was changed in support of allowing Councils to choose as reflected in their submission to the Local Government Act Reform.

A strong case can be made for the payment of superannuation to Elected Members to be a legislative requirement to avoid this becoming a politicised issue at a Council level. If Councils are left to individually adopt superannuation (or not) as under this reform, any subsequent Council could move to remove it by a resolution to do so. It would potentially lead to a situation where Elected Member Superannuation payments could become political lobbying point for people wanting to nominate for Council, and women on neighbouring Councils be provided different benefits.

Whilst the ALGWA WA branch strongly supports the payment of Superannuation to Elected Members, this payment must be made mandatory to avoid any further disadvantage within the Local Government Sector.

We are calling on the Minister for Local Government, Hon. John Carey MLA to reconsider the State Government’s stance on allowing Councils to decide whether to make Superannuation payments to Elected Members and make this compulsory, prevent inconsistencies across Local Government, ensuring the decision to make super payments isn’t polarised during election campaigns and further reducing barriers for women entering Local Government.

**The Australian Local Government Women’s Association WA Branch requests that the Local Government Act 1995 be amended to facilitate the mandatory payment of superannuation to Elected Members in addition to fees and allowances.**