

MEDIA STATEMENT

Research shows local government remains a 'boys club'

July 2010

As Australia's first female Prime Minister settles into the country's most powerful civic leadership position, new research commissioned by the Committee for Perth reveals the 'boys club' is alive and well in local politics.

The latest findings by Professor Paul J. Maginn for the Committee for Perth's FACTBase project shows that despite making up half of the population, women are slamming their heads against a glass ceiling in their bid to become local government leaders.

Committee for Perth Chief Executive Officer Marion Fulker said Professor Maginn's research examined whether and where the glass ceiling of mayoral politics remains intact, cracked or smashed within the Perth Metropolitan area.

"We looked at the historical trends in gender profiles of mayors from 1985 to 2010, revealing that women have found it hard to break through into the top role, and Perth people in particular have been reluctant to vote women into the position of mayor," Mrs Fulker said.

"The research, covering the past 25 years, clearly shows the under-representation of women in mayoral roles was long-term and entrenched.

"We've come off a very low base - there were no female mayors in 1985 and while that had improved by 1991 when women accounted for 26 per cent of all mayors in Perth, it had deteriorated again to 4 per cent in 1997.

"In 2006 women made up 32 per cent of all mayors and the peak was a year later when they made up 36 per cent.

"But we've gone backwards since then with women mayors accounting for less than a third of all mayors (30 per cent) in 2010.

"This means that on average in Perth, women held the position of mayor just 17 per cent of the time over the last quarter of a century - and that makes Perth the worst performing region in metropolitan Australia."

Professor Maginn's research found that Adelaide had the highest average with women holding mayoral positions for 33 per cent of the time, followed by Melbourne and Sydney with 30 per cent and 21 per cent respectively.

Professor Maginn said that while his research showed varying levels of improvement in the appointment of women to senior roles within local government, there was still a long way to go.

“Given that women make up around 51 per cent of the community, the proportion of female mayors in Perth and around the country has been unreasonably low and shows significant under-representation over the past 25 years,” he said.

“While there have been some improvements which have addressed the gender imbalance, the fact remains that it is still very much a ‘boys club’.”

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Attached: FACTBase Bulletin No. 11.

About FACTBase

The FACTBase project is a joint venture between well respected research institution the University of Western Australia and the Committee for Perth, an influential member-based organisation driven by a diverse assembly of Perth’s leaders with a long term view of Perth’s future.

One of the only broad-reaching projects of its kind to be undertaken in the southern hemisphere FACTBase condenses the plethora of databases and studies on the subject of liveability and analyse what’s happening in Perth through words, maps and graphs.

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