**President’s Report for Australian Local Government Women’s Association (Victorian Branch) (ALGWA Vic) to ALGWA Vic Annual General Meeting held at the City of Melbourne, Melbourne Town Hall Swanston Street, Melbourne on 31 May 2017 at 4.00 pm.**

31 May 2017

It was a privilege to be elected as President of ALGWA Vic on 7 April 2016 at our annual State Conference hosted and held at the Banyule City Council. I followed on from many extraordinary women in the 53 year history of ALGWA Victoria, including Cr Coral Ross and former Cr Pam McLeod, Pam having introduced me to ALGWA Vic not long after I was elected to the Nillumbik Shire Council in 2004. [

I would like to acknowledge our patron the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria and thank the Governor for her support and for undertaking the inaugural patron role at ALGWA Vic.

It has been a productive and busy time from that date in our volunteer roles at ALGWA Vic as we were about to head into the Victorian Local Government elections in October, were establishing our very first State government funded formal ALGWA Vic mentoring program and business plan development, organizing the annual Women’s Mayor forum the ALGWA Bursary Award and undertaking planning for our next State conference.

As mentioned, I was elected in the middle of the State Conference at Banyule City Council. My year started with what was a very successful event at Banyule City Council and I would like to once again thank Banyule City Council, former Cr Jenny Mulholland, Allison Beckwith, Director of Community Programs and her dedicated team and everyone involved at the organization and hosting of the event. As a volunteer organization, we rely on the generosity and support of Councils to provide this event; is it supporting women in local government throughout the State. I would also like to thank the National Board of ALGWA for their attendance and for travelling from all over the country to be part our conference.

On 28 April 2016 we held our 5th Women Mayors forum, hosted by the Deputy Mayor Cr Susan Riley of the City of Melbourne and on 27 April 2017 we held our 6th Women Mayors forum hosted by Danielle Green MP at the Federation Room in Parliament House. Again, we held the forum in partnership with the Victorian Local Governance Association. The purposes of the event -

A reflection on the Mayoral year so far, 5 months in

A chance to review the year and consider actions and a strategy from here

An opportunity to network with other women mayors.

In 2016 as in 2017 the forum was facilitated by Ruth McGowan. Last year the forum featured Maxine Morand, former Victorian Minister for Women and current Chair of Peter McCallum Cancer Clinic, in conversation about leadership, gender and life in politics. The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Local Government, Aboriginal Affairs and Industrial Relations joined the conversation later and shared some of her reflections about local government, governance and gender equity.

This year (2017) we had a panel of Women Mayors in conversation about powerful partnerships and once again The Minister, Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, attended. Both events were also attended by the Hon David Davis MP, the Shadow Minister for Local Government, Equality and Planning.

Thanks to the Board and CEO, outgoing and newly appointed, at the VLGA for partnering with ALGWA Vic for the forum, and to Linda Bennett at the VLGA for all her expert assistance with event management before during and after the forum. Our Women Mayor’s Forum has become an annual event in the Local Government calendar with this year 21 of the record high 32 Women Mayors attending. We are working towards encouraging 40 women to become Mayor’s to reach just over the 50/50 target. An equal number of women and men as Mayor in Victoria, we would like to see that.

On 14 October 2016 we held our annual bursary award for a female officer and increased the value of the award to $1750. The award was announced at an afternoon tea at Parliament House and was presented to Joylene Rydz, Performance and Engagement Officer with Whittlesea Council by our guest speaker Lesley Falloon OAM. On behalf of ALGWA Vic I also thanked those councillors who were retiring and thanked all councillors for their service to their community. This year, as you have just witnessed, we have again given a Bursary award.

I would like to thank the Bursary Committee, Cr Raylene Carr, former Cr’s Barbara Abley, Pam McLeod, Cheryl Bromfield and ALGWA member Robin Matthews for their tireless work in putting the Bursary Awards together and for the difficult task of choosing just one person to be awarded the Bursary.

As I mentioned, Victorian Councils went to election on 22 October 2016 with ALGWA Vic playing a role in the *GoWomenLG* campaign undertaken by the VLGA and funded by the Victorian State Government, in metropolitan and country municipalities. I attended a number of *GoWomenLG* events as a member of a panel in country Victoria, Wycheproof, Wedderburn and Warrnambool and attended the Eastern forum in Metro Melbourne. There were many more held which encouraged women to be re nominate as candidates and nominate as new candidates.

At the election a record 2135 candidates stood for the 637 positions. We are delighted to report that a record 38.1% (or 243) of Victorian councillors are now women – the highest percentage ever elected and means that Victoria now has the highest percentage of women councillors in the country.

All 78 Councils have at least one woman councillor and sixteen have 50% or more women. There was a 14% increase in the number of women elected and at the Mayoral elections a record 32 women were elected Mayor – 40%.

In the 2012 election 34% of those elected were women, which was a five per cent increase from 2008. Just over half of those elected - 323 - are new to local government and 314 councillors were returned.

For me, I was not re-elected, but am pleased to continue on as Victorian President. Having been a Councillor for 12 years it has been a bonus to be able to stay involved in local government . As an immediate past board member of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) MAV President and ALGA Vice-President former Councillor Bill McArthur was also not returned. Bill has been a huge supporter of ALGWA and is a White Ribbon Ambassador and we thank him for his support over many years. We then had some great news when ALGWA Vic Exec member and ALGWA National President Coral Ross was elected Interim MAV President as Bill McArthur was no longer eligible.

Three of the Victorian executive – Metro Vice President Felicity Frederico and Executive officer Helen Harris retired at the 2017 election while former Councillor Meghan Hopper was not returned. All continue on the Executive with Meghan Hopper recently resigning as Secretary.

At the 2016 AGM we have made some changes to the Committee and we will discuss these changes in General Business at this AGM.

The Victorian branch received a $20,000 grant from the State Government to establish and facilitate ALGWA Vic’s very first formal mentoring program. The Victorian Executive awarded the mentoring contract to Leonie Morgan & Associates.

ALGWA Vic contacted the 123 new female councillors offering them a mentor.

There are 20 women Councillors and former Councillors who have volunteered to be mentors and two training sessions have been held. One in December 2016 and the other in March 2017. All mentors have been assigned a mentee.

The program was officially launched at a very special event attended by the Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Local Government, Aboriginal Affairs and Industrial Relations on 17 March 2017 here at the Melbourne Town Hall.

I would like to once again formally thank the Victorian State Government for providing the funding for the ALGWA Mentoring Program and in particular to the Minister of Local Government the Hon Natalie Huchins MP who has shown unwavering support for ALGWA Vic. I would also like to thank Leonie Morgan who has been instrumental in the success to date of the program. We have extended Leonie’s contract until June 2017 to be able to provide substantial feedback from the Mentors and Mentees for the program. We are currently discussing applying for further funding to the government to take the program through to the 2020 elections.

As a volunteer organization for over 50 years we needed to understand how we would be here in another 50 years (if we haven’t received 50/50 gender equality by then!). A component of the funding received from the State Government was for ALGWA Vic to develop a Business Plan for the organization to be sustainable into the future. Cr Coral Ross and Felicity Frederico, Metro Vice President have both approached Swinburne University of Technology with a request for students from the Industry Consulting unit at Swinburne to produce our Business Plan. Our request was accepted and business students in their penultimate semester working in different majors (such as marketing, management, HRM, finance and entrepreneurship) will work on our project in Semester 2 2017. Delivery of the final report will be on 27 October 2017. Felicity will be presenting to the students and will be leading the project. We will be assisted at Swinburne by Dr Viet Le  of Swinburne Business School Faculty of Business and Law. ALGWA Vic is providing an award prize for the students of $1000.00 to the best Business Plan and $500.00 for a runner up. Thanks to both Coral, & Felicity as the project goes forward. We are very excited about what this project will deliver for ALGWA Vic.

In December 2016 the Victorian Government launched a Gender Equality Strategy. ALGWA Vic branch made a submission in relation to the strategy. There is one target of particular note - 50 per cent of women councillors and Mayors by 2015.

Also, of interest is that it is intended to re-establish the Rural Women’s Network.

As President I was invited to be part of the Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, Ministerial Women’s Roundtable and attended its first meeting on 11 October 2016 and then on 13 March 2017 with further meetings to be scheduled during 2017.

The  Roundtable  provides a forum for the Minister  for  Local Government and Local Government Victoria to hear  about  the  challenges  and  opportunities for female Chief Executive Officers  in local government, and to hear expert  advice on plans and actions  to  increase  the  number  of women in senior leadership positions  
within the sector.

Actions to come out of Ministerial Women’s Roundtable to date are the development of a Listen, Learn & Lead Gender Equity Program with grants provided to Councils who want to participate in the program and the development of a Best Practice Guide for Gender Equity in Local Government.

Our main reason for ALGWA Vic’s existence is to support elected women and women who work in local government and from late in 2016 and early 2017 ALGWA Vic supported our Exec member and former President and ALGWA National President Cr Coral Ross. Coral as mentioned, was elected Interim MAV President as former MAV President Bill McArthur was no longer eligible. However Coral’s Council, Boroondara City Council decided not to appoint a MAV delegate, despite being a financial member of the MAV until June 30 2017. This meant Coral could not stand in the MAV Board elections in March.

ALGWA Vic’s position was one of supporting Coral to have the opportunity to nominate for the role of President, in what we deemed to be ultimately based on purely gender, political or personal bias. ALGWA Vic was not supporting any one individual candidate over another during this time.

We have written several media releases, which have had some coverage in the Age, local media, LG Focus and Government News.

Darebin City Council, which has a majority of women councillors, made Cr Ross its MAV delegate. Unfortunately this was not accepted by the MAV. Darebin appealed to the Supreme Court, with Julian Burnside QC, Bill O’Shea, Solicitor and Penny Harris, Barrister who all provided their services Pro bono. Unfortunately the appeal was unsuccessful. The Executive gave full support to Coral and as President I attended all court cases along with Coral at what was a stressful and difficult time.

ALGWA Vic would like to thank Darebin City Council, Mayor Kim Le Cerf and her Councillor colleagues and Acting CEO Phil Shananan. I would also like to thank the legal team in Mr Julian Burnside QC, Mr Bill O’Shea and Ms Penny Harris for their extraordinary commitment to gender equality and fairness during this case.

With the subsequent elections for two of the Victorian local government peak bodies (ALGWA Vic being the third peak body) women were elected as Presidents of the Municipal Association of Victoria (Cr Mary Lalios a member of ALGWA Vic) and the Victorian Local Governance Association. It was great to see both peak bodies electing a woman as President The MAV having only had one other woman as President, for a short time which was during the commissioner era in local government. The VLGA have had a number of women Presidents in the past.

We were delighted that ALGWA executive member Cr Marg Attley was elected President of the VLGA. The VLGA Board now has a majority of women member. Unfortunately the MAV Board has just three women of the 13 members.

As President and on behalf of ALGWA Vic I attended on 11-13 April 2017 the ALGWA Biennial National Conference in Launceston Tasmania called ‘Be the Balance’. The conference was sponsored and organized by the Tasmania Branch of ALGWA. It was a great opportunity to meet people from all over Australia and to gain a better understanding of all things Tasmania. I will provide a written report of the conference at the next Executive meeting on 22 June 2017 and for wider distribution to the membership.

Lastly, the ALGWA Vic State Conference Expression of Interest were sent to all Victorian Country Councils and Warrnambool City Council has been awarded and agreed to hold the 2017 State Conference on 13 – 15 October there. The conference is a great opportunity for all ALGWA members, non-members and local government women and men to attend to be provided with a great line up of guest speakers, along with opportunities for networking, learnings and to make long lasting friendships.

I am confident that the next year will be just as busy and exciting and I would like to thank all of the Executive Committee and in particular our newly appointed Executive Officer former Councillor and ALGWA Life Member Helen Harris whose support, attention to detail, reliability, dedication and commitment has provided me in particular, as well as the other Committee members, with the capacity to undertake our roles at ALGWA Vic. so well.

Helen Coleman

President

Australian Local Government Women’s Association (Victorian Branch)