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 **Sexual Harassment RE VAGO Report**

The Australian Local Government Women’s Association (Vic) is not surprised that nearly one-third of councillors, and more than one in four council employees have experienced sexual harassment. It calls on councils and the Minister for Local Government to strengthen processes for dealing with sexual harassment.

“The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office report on Sexual Harassment in Local Government mirrors the findings of our surveys and shows we need to do more to stamp out sexual harassment and support councillors and council officers” said ALGWA Vic President Mayor Kylie Spears. “It is not acceptable to be harassed at work and we are very concerned that VAGO found that councillors receive less support and have few options to report sexual harassment – something we know is an issue for our members. We call upon the Minister for Local Government to make sure that this is addressed in the soon to be released Conduct and Governance Regulations which will outline Councillors’ Codes of Conduct and processes for dealing with complaints.”

The ALGWA has been actively supporting women who have experienced harassment. It supported Melbourne City Council female councillors in the wake of the Lord Mayor Robert Doyle sexual harassment allegations, and lobbied the Council to include sexual harassment in its Code of Conduct and introduce an independent complaints process. It also successfully lobbied for sexual harassment to be included in the Local Government Act 2020. The ALGWA made a submission to the Sex Discrimination Commissioner’s national inquiry, and met with VAGO at the outset of its audit raising concerns about sexual harassment in local government. ALGWA also hosted multiple session with VAGO to raise awareness through our membership to both councillors and officers.

VAGO received almost 10,000 individual responses from council employees and councillors across 75 councils. In the last 12 months 28% experienced workplace sexual harassment with almost one-quarter being by a member of the public. It affected the mental health of a quarter of respondents.

“Compared to employees, councillors are more likely to be harassed by a fellow councillor or a member of the public and disappointingly, less likely to receive training or know how to access the Council assistance program,” said Mayor Spears. “We call on councils to ensure councillors receive training on sexual harassment and that the soon to be released Councillor Code of Conduct guidelines outline internal and external options for sexual harassment support and complaints,” she added.