

# History of women in the top job

**Overall, Local Government has a low representation of women as Councillors and Mayors. Of the 1,468 elected Councillors in New South Wales, just 396 are female, with 31 women Mayors and one Lord Mayor.**

Waverley Council is bucking the trend. Currently, nine of its 12 Councillors, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, are women – the highest female representation of any New South Wales Council.

Mayor Sally Betts is joined by Deputy Mayor Kerryn Sloan, Ingrid Strewe, Mora Main, Joy Clayton, Rose Jackson, Prue Cancian, Yvonne Coburn, Miriam Guttman-Jones and three male Councillors. Interestingly, the women are from all political spectrums.

Waverley has had female Mayors for 14 of the past 25 years. Caroline Markham was the first elected to the top job in 1987 and Barbara Armitage held the position for ten years from 1988. Mora Main was elected in 2006, Ingrid Strewe in 2008 and Sally Betts has held the position for the past 16 months.

Mayor Sally Betts said she is proud of Council's track record with female representation.

"In 1995 when I was first elected there were three women Councillors," she said. "Now we have nine."

"Women generally approach decision making with a holistic approach and are able to juggle ideas and concepts of more than one project at the same time, ensuring there is a cohesive outcome to most decisions. However, as long as being a Councillor continues to be considered a 'community duty' rather than a paid profession such as State and Federal MPs, it will be difficult to increase the numbers of women in Local Government."

Mayor Betts said that in the past, Councillors, and particularly Mayors, tended to be retired gentlemen.

"No one gets into Local Government for the money," she said. "It would be helpful if



*Eight of Waverley's nine female Councillors at Council Chambers.*

community minded people didn't have to juggle their regular employment, family commitments and Council duties.

"Males and females differ in that men usually only have to juggle their job with Council while women generally have the extra responsibility of caring for the home and their family."

Councillor Ingrid Strewe said that all the major political parties in Waverley endorsed the best candidates, many of whom have been women.

"You can see this in the past and present female Mayors," she said. "They have come from all political persuasions – Labor, Liberal and Green. "It is perhaps due to Waverley's high level of tertiary educated residents and an equally high level of community participation that women are elected."

Councillor Strewe said that all politicians should be chosen on merit.

"The problem was that, for years, women were not seen to have much merit," she said. "People's attributes are different and in my opinion, what you bring to the table depends on your political

philosophy and personal qualities. There may be a slight difference in adversarial versus cooperative action between men and women, but this perception itself may just be cultural.

"I don't often think about so many of the Councillors being women, but it is fantastic that we are. Many other workplaces in the past have discriminated against women but the people of Waverley simply do not."

Councillor Mora Main agreed that the reason behind the trend is a highly motivated and educated community.

"Swimming at the beaches and walking in our wonderful coastal environment has given many Waverley women the opportunity to remain fit, healthy and engaged with the community," she said. "The running boom of the 70s and 80s – and the locally renowned City to Surf footrace – gave many women confidence in their own right to independence and independent thinking.

"Sometimes in the past a lack of confidence to put themselves forward and rise to the challenge

has hindered women in their political progress.

"Women are responding to over exploitation of the earth's resources and the need for a community focus to achieve a more sustainable living environment. Our survival may depend on a more cooperative approach, often adopted by women."

Councillor Main added that juggling careers, family and recreation can exclude women from political activity in the years between young adulthood and raising young families.

"In addition, career minded women can exclude themselves from outside activities like political involvement as they simply don't have the time and have to work so hard to succeed in the corporate world or the public sector."

Councillor Miriam Guttman-Jones said women bring a different perspective to politics.

"As a whole, women in Waverley tend to be bright and professional and they appreciate seeing women represent them," she said.

"Women today are not just homemakers. They want to make a difference. However, they usually have to be more assertive than men to be noticed and if they are too assertive they are often criticised for it!

"I also think that women are more interested in their local environment and feel this is their way of doing something about it."