

# Introduction



## Women and decision making

Women make up more than half the world's population and make an enormous contribution in their local communities, yet they remain excluded from, or under represented at, the highest levels of decision making—in government, on boards of management, and in executive positions in both the private and public sector.

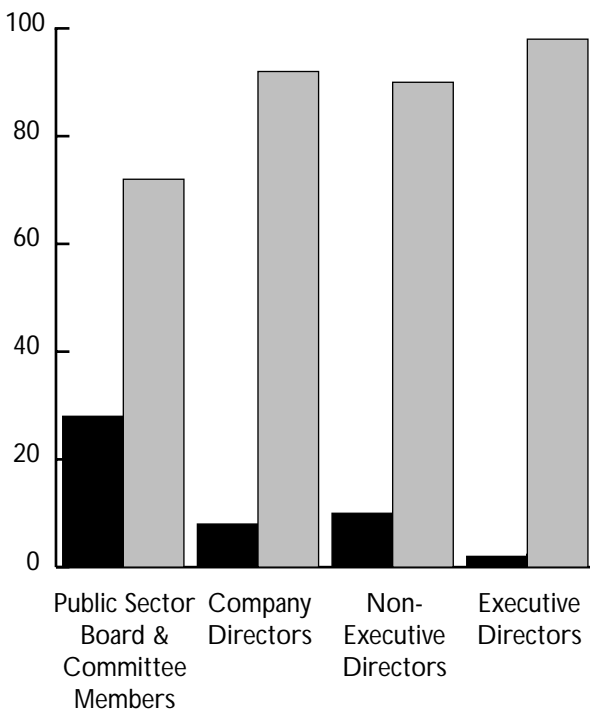
The sharing of power in decision making between men and women, and women's previous lack of visibility at local, regional, state, national and global levels, has become an issue of concern for women, and a key priority area to be addressed by the Government in NSW. Non-government organisations and some sections of the corporate sector have also become actively

involved in supporting greater involvement of women in decision making.

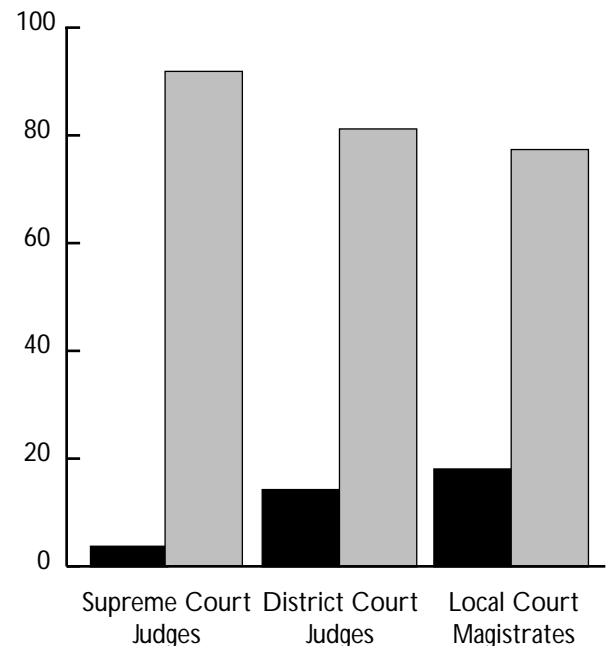
Ensuring that decision makers in our society properly reflect the diverse composition and concerns of Australian society is not simply a matter of social justice or equity, it also makes good political and business sense. It gives women a voice, guarantees a diversity of experience and knowledge, and contributes an awareness of how change can affect and involve people from a variety of backgrounds in our society.

Women who participate in decision making experience the satisfaction of knowing their work can make a real difference, and they provide models and inspiration for other women who are considering taking the plunge.

■ = % women on boards & committees in 1998  
 □ = % men on boards & committees in 1998



■ = % women holding judicial positions in 1998  
 □ = % men holding judicial positions in 1998



## What are decision making bodies?

They come in all shapes and sizes, and relate to all aspects of our lives. Positions may be voluntary or paid, and levels of responsibility for those involved will vary according to the organisation and the position they hold.

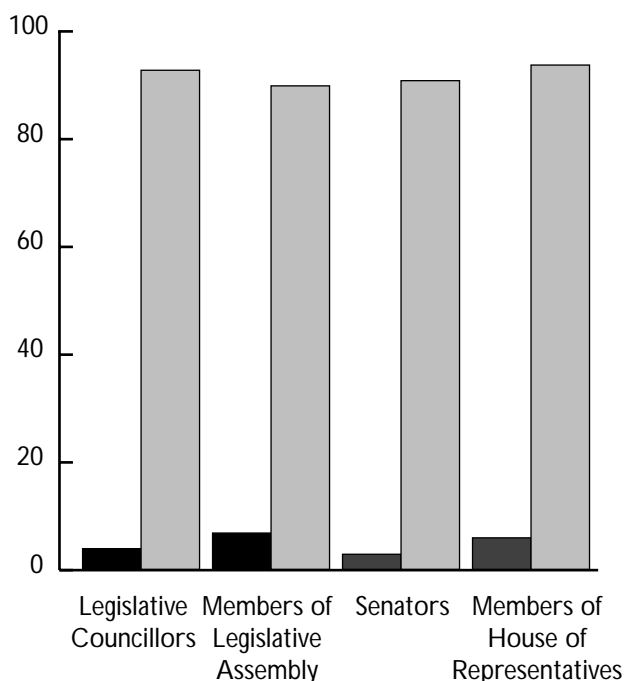
*'I think it is highly appropriate for very strong questions to be asked about why there are not more women, and what is being done to encourage more women, particularly on a lot of the commercial boards that are well paid and could clearly benefit from the experience that women bring with them.'* Clare Petre

*'... the best committees I have worked on have clearly been the ones that have gender equality. The ones that are slowest and need most pushing are the ones that don't have that. Gender equality makes for a better, broader, more realistic committee.'* Clare Petre

■ = % women in NSW State Parliament in 1998

■ = % women in Federal Parliament in 1998

■ = % men in Parliament in 1998



*'Women often bring a broader perspective to decision making, and sometimes men don't even think about gender equity.'* Judy Galloway

## Types of structures

Decision making bodies vary in their overall structure, which may be informal or formal. For example:

- informal groups: individuals getting together informally for a purpose, such as to share information and skills or, perhaps, to take some action;
- incorporated associations: legally constituted organisations that may be part of a statewide group of organisations with representative state and federal umbrella organisations;
- community based organisations: often managed by representatives of different groups in the community with a stake in the issues being decided;
- peak bodies: an umbrella organisation for groups with similar interests, for example, NCOSS (NSW Council of Social Service) is the state based umbrella organisation for community and welfare groups, ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) represents these groups at a federal level;
- public companies, statutory bodies and cooperatives;
- departmental and government committees set up so that representatives of all the various interest groups can come together to discuss policy issues and advise governments or regional arms of government departments—and perhaps even a government Minister directly—about issues of concern.

Some organisations pay board and committee members an annual allowance and some pay sitting fees, that is, an amount for each time they meet. In others, participation will be voluntary, possibly with travel expenses and morning or afternoon tea thrown in.