



Australian Women's Coalition

**Barriers to Women's Employment
Women and Recession Project**



**Cairns
consultation notes**



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INTRODUCTION

The Cairns consultation workshop on the Australia Institute Report, *The Impact of the Recession on Women*¹, was held in Cairns on 21 October 2009, at the Cairns Regional Library. The meeting was facilitated by the Cairns Women's Network, the Australian Federation of University Women Queensland, the National Foundation for Australian Women, the WomenSpeak Alliance, and the Office of Senator Jan McLucas.

Invitations (see Attachment 2) were distributed by the Cairns Women's Network to a wide range of local individuals and groups. A media release was also distributed. (A list of attendees is at Attachment 1; a copy of the media release is at Attachment 3.)

Dr Mary Crawford (Queensland University of Technology (QUT)) summarised the discussions on behalf of the sponsors. The James Cook (Cairns) Branch of the NTEU provided a written submission – see Appendix 1.

An undertaking was given to circulate the draft report to participants for their consideration prior to publication.

There was radio and television coverage of the consultation on the day.

BACKGROUND

Cairns is a coastal city in tropical far north Queensland, the primary commercial and government centre for the Cape York Peninsula. It is situated some 1,400 kms north of Brisbane, the state capital. Population growth is rapid: Cairns has now outgrown Darwin (the capital of the Northern Territory) and has become the 14th largest city in Australia, with a population of 142,000. This contrasts with a population of 16,000 50 years ago.

There has been considerable re-building of earlier low-rise timber buildings in parts of the city, with high-rise hotels and resorts along the waterfront and nearby.

Government services, with retail and hospitality, account for some 50% of employment in the city itself.

In contrast to the immigration patterns 50 years ago which were predominantly of Europeans who went mostly into agriculture, and Chinese who went to the goldfields of the interior and the Cape, the most recent patterns have included Japanese and Hmong from Laos, many of

¹ David Richardson, 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>

whom work in retail or hospitality. There is a significant recent migration from the Horn of Africa, and the population is very multicultural.

According to a local economic development organisation, Advance Cairns:

The region's thriving and modern economy is directly engaged with lucrative Asian markets and, through the tourism industry, is a key contributor to the economic prosperity of Queensland and the nation. The discovery of mineral deposits and the diversification of primary industries in the region ensure a broad base from which industry and private enterprise flourish².

However, at the time of the consultation there were visible signs of economic downturn in the tourism industry as a consequence of the Global Financial Crisis, seriously impacting the tourism and associated hospitality and retail sectors. Direct flights from Japan, and numbers of flights from domestic centres, have been cut, with consequent impacts on the local economy.

There are marked differences in employment patterns between main areas of the region – Mareeba, Kuranda for example.

A 2002 joint research study on vocational education and training (VET) in a region of cultural diversity³ provides some valuable local detail.

James Cook University has a campus in Cairns, and the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE has a number of local campuses in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands.

While the reported current level of unemployment in Cairns is around 13%, Cairns has a high proportion of female employment, reflecting the importance of hospitality and retail associated with the tourism industry. The 2002 study on vocational education and training (referred to above) reported that growth in attendance at university and technical and further education was above national averages. Growth is also reported in health and caring services – which commonly also employ significant numbers of women.

Cairns has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous populations of any city in Australia – around 10%⁴. Aboriginal Australians of the Cairns and Cape York Region are an important element of the community and

² Advance Cairns, 2009, viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.advancecairns.com/tnq-businessclimate.html>

³ University of Tasmania, 2002, *Cairns: VET in an environment of growth and cultural diversity*, viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/files/rolevet2/Cairns.PDF>

⁴ *ibid*, p. 57.

economy. Their levels of unemployment and under-employment in the coast area and the hinterland are concerning.

There is a strong local history of Indigenous struggle against racism. See for example the National Museum of Australia website⁵ entry on the Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League:

The League's first test case concerned the sacking of a taxi driver on racial grounds. With the support of the local Trades and Labour Council, the company was black banned and the driver reinstated as a result.

At this time Cairns was a unionised port town with more than a thousand men working on the wharves, including Aborigines and Islanders. The Cairns Trades and Labour Council, the Union of Australian Women and the Waterside Workers' Federation, of which McGinness was a member, provided both moral and financial support to the League.

The League was formed in 1960 and soon after affiliated with the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA). With the election of Joe McGinness as president of FCAA in 1961, it played an active role in the federal movement. It frequently initiated new campaigns such as the campaign against the Queensland Aboriginal acts and the tuberculosis allowance campaign.

A number of Aboriginal-run health, legal and employment services operate in Cairns, and the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Centre operates out of a purpose-built venue at the base of the Kuranda Range, north of Cairns. Tjapukai is reported to be the largest single employer of Aboriginal people in the nation. The Tjapukai people are one of the Indigenous peoples of the Cairns region, specifically in the area of Smithfield and Kuranda.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ISSUES

Donna-Maree O'Connor, Deputy Director of Tropical North Queensland Institute of Technical and Further Education [TNQIT], gave an introductory statement on the patterns of economic and training activity in the region, and the challenges faced.

Cairns landscape.

- National and state issues affecting women here include the pay gap, child-care issues, maternity leave, school holiday arrangements, hidden unemployment, poor representation on boards, and lack of flexible work arrangements.
- Cairns needs to diversify from being dependent on tourism for economic sustainability. There is currently 13.8% unemployment and business confidence is affected by a number

⁵ National Museum of Australia, n. d. , 'Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League', viewed 14 January 2010, <http://indigenoustrights.net.au/organisation.asp?oID=5>

of large companies declaring bankruptcy. Unemployment usually affects women more significantly.

- Skills shortage is an important issue for the region.
- Changes in Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) arrangements will have had an impact on unemployment numbers for this region due to the high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the number of Indigenous communities
- Distance and remoteness is a challenge, particularly the cost of airfares, cost of living, and lack of services and opportunities in regional and remote areas.
- International visitor numbers have declined.

Government priorities

- There is a need for stimulus money to create infrastructure projects.
- Training existing workers to obtain qualifications is crucial. In terms of qualifications, Australia has a low rate, compared to other OECD countries.
- Job seekers have had to change their expectations, especially in traditional local areas of employment, including mining.
- There needs to be a focus on diversification and building resilient, strong communities.
- Developing partnerships between business/industry and government is a priority.

Tropical North Queensland TAFE

- Although the TAFE is trying to provide different options and choices for women, for example, 'Girls with Spark' (female electrical apprentice program) and 'Tap Girls' (female plumber apprentice program), there is still work to be done to change attitudes in the workplace.
- There is an increase in some training areas, for example hospitality (whereas people could previously get a job with training) and nursing, but there is a decline in, for example cookery and some trades.
- The challenge is how to make training accessible and affordable.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS

- Cairns has the highest unemployment rate in Queensland (13.8%) and this has a disproportionate impact on women who bear the burden of family support. There is also a high level of hidden unemployment and under-employment among women in the region. In fact there were three women in the group of 24 who were seeking work but were not counted in the statistics.
- A key area of concern affecting Indigenous women from the Yarrabah Council was the lack of training programs in their community and the lack of access to employment opportunities within their region. The question of where to deliver training programs was raised, as many training programs were located in Cairns and women living outside of the city would have to travel long distances to receive training. Yarrabah is an isolated remote area and does not have a public transport system making access to training programs difficult for many women, particularly those who have school-aged children.

As a result many women who are willing and able to work can not access relevant training to develop their skills. There is a need to develop programs that will go out to regional areas to provide training, if women are to overcome the barriers to employment.

Also of concern to the women from Yarrabah Council was the consequences of the end of the CDEP which meant there were no longer training programs in the community and people were being forced to travel to Cairns (if they could afford it) to seek training or education.

- The high unemployment rate also had consequences for those women who were already finding it difficult to access employment in the area – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and migrant and refugee women. The issue of remoteness is one that needs careful consideration when offering training.
- Many women admitted to feeling powerless in the current situation as often the work available is lowly paid and on contract. Many women do not have confidence in their abilities and see senior positions differently to men. Their concerns were heightened by the lack of representation of women in decision-making position such as boards and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs).
- Despite this, there are a number of excellent programs being run in the Cairns region. Tropical North Queensland TAFE runs 'Girls with Spark' as a female electricians course and 'Tap Girls' which is a course

designed for women to become plumbers. Both have had overwhelming demand and the girls have achieved excellent results and all who have completed the course are in employment. The Electrical Trades Union also has 10 women electricians and has been urging large companies to employ women apprentices. However, with the economic downturn some who have completed their course have not been guaranteed positions at the companies. It is hoped they will be absorbed by the mining industry.

- Of further concern was the fact that the Federal Government's stimulus package which focussed on infrastructure had not taken the issue of jobs for women into consideration. The vast majority of people employed on all these projects were and are men. People felt this should be brought to the Rudd Government's attention.
- A key issue raised by all women was the lack of access to affordable child-care. Women most affected are those with school-age children who cited the cost of outside school hours care and vacation care prohibitive. In fact some women admitted they left children home alone during the school holidays as they could not afford vacation care.

Many parents found it difficult to find satisfactory child-care places as programs did not have appropriate staff-to-child ratios or age appropriate activities. As a result, mothers did not have many options in their choice of child-care provider and were left unsatisfied with their child-care arrangements. Another issue highlighted was the inability to find places over Christmas and New Year as many child-care providers shut down over this period.

It was also noted that there was a large gap in the provision of care for children with a disability. Many Out of School Hours Care programs do not have trained staff to support places for children with a disability.

Family day care is also no longer an option as the new regulations have made it so difficult for carers that many have withdrawn, and it is no longer a viable option for women in the Cairns region.

- Again it was noted that Education Queensland is offering women (particularly single mothers) casual teaching contracts and they are then being forced to complete the Commonwealth Work Participation Requirement during the school holidays, despite being contracted, if they wish to receive income over the School holidays.

- The issue of pay equity was also raised. Many women identified the long-term consequences such disparity has for both the individual and the community if women do not have a reasonable superannuation scheme. In the first instance it also condemns them to raising children in poverty which has an inherent impact on children, their own health and the way they interact with the welfare system. A simple example given was the inability of many single mothers to fund swimming lessons for young children: yet all children need to be 'water-proofed', particularly in an area such as Cairns.
- Further, because the region is extremely dependent on hospitality and tourism and caring roles for women's employment, job opportunities for older women is almost non-existent. Women are training, and retraining constantly until their 60s, often at a lower level than men, and their chances of employment at the end of training compare negatively to the data for men⁶.

Notes from flip chart

Unemployed Women

- Conundrum – 'over qualified' – the more experienced and more knowledgeable you are, the less valuable you are in the workplace
- Funnelled into aged care

Older women

- They want us to work until we're 67. How many women can't find work at 47, let alone 57?
- Responsibilities to families – children, grandchildren, parents
- Lack of flexible options to 'slow down' e.g. part-time.

Women with caring responsibilities

- Unaffordable child-care
- Part-time single mums have to work during school holidays and vacation care unaffordable – kids left at home alone
- Kids at school early and home alone in afternoon to save on childcare costs

Migrant and refugee women

- Not necessarily aware of rights/access to women's resources
- Access to/ability to self-advocate is blocked by :
 - language
 - culture
 - isolation
 - lack of recognition of qualifications
 - religion

⁶ Ford, Carole, 2006, 'If she were a boy she could do an apprenticeship' *Redress*, vol 1, no 3, Dec, 2009.

- economics
- social capital
- Employment/economic participation is also challenged by the above
- Lack of awareness about
 - systems/structures
 - regulations/protocols
 - social hierarchy
- Sometimes cheap labour – 'scapegoat' for employers
 - fear loss of job
 - fear loss of face in community
 - determination to continue/succeed despite hardship
 - feelings of obligation to Australia – conditions of coming = work
 - dislike for welfare
- Strong desire to work is not balanced with services to support job search/jobs available

Indigenous women

- Same as migrant/refugee group
- Fear of taking higher positions because of views/roles of women in community could be judged – have to be aware of community opinions/backlash
- Respect for women's and men's roles vs right of women to be equal
- Have to consider family (also extended!) and community in taking a job (e.g. morning away?)
- Jobs for your community are not 9–5
- You are the face/voice of your community
- Community have high expectations of women leaders because leadership is male dominated – family/difficult to balance
- Your performance is judged – you are a role model for women in your community

Women with a Disability

- Gaps exist in this region for non-school-age people to train, be employed or contribute to society
- Less likely to be given opportunity to work
- At work – more vulnerable to bullying and harassment
- Current economic climate – first to be moved to casual
- Access to education – difficulty finding and keeping work

POLICY ISSUES

- Employment programs should be holistic to ensure that particular needs of the clients can be met to ensure people especially women are given the support needed to enter/re-enter the workforce.

- Workforce programs should meet all the social inclusion initiatives of the Rudd Government.
- Child-care costs should be reviewed, especially outside school hours care and vacation care be undertaken to examine the way cost prohibits many women from engaging with the workforce.
- The Queensland Government should investigate the regulations for family day care and examine the impact this has on the provision of places and the needs of women to enter the workforce.
- A women's coalition should be formed in the Cairns region to act as an advocacy group for women – in particular in the area of Women on Boards, access to education and training, and acculturation services for women who have limited understanding of the mainstream Australian workplace.
- All levels of government should be lobbied in relation to the impact that raising children in poverty has on the region, and that governments be urged to deliver some programs for children not only in the interests of equity but also as intervention against longer term consequences.
- The Rudd Government should be asked to investigate the gendered nature of workplace participation arising from its Economic Stimulus Plan.

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ATTACHMENT 1

Attendees:

Carole Ford – Cairns Women's Network (caford@qld.chariot.net.au)

Allison Alloway – CWN (Alison.alloway@bigpond.com)

Neisha Keys – CWN (neisha@cepuqld.asn.au)

Waai Ree – MSS (lena@centacarecairns.org)

Olive Tan Davis – MSS (olive@centacairecairns.org)

Najet Charnley – Cairns Sexual Assault Service FPAQ (ncharnelly@fpq.com.au)

Donna-Maree O'Connor – TAFE Cairns (donna-maree.oconnor@deta.qld.gov.au)

Melissa Kulan – Migrant Settlement Service (Melissa.kulan@centacarecairns.org)

Jen Worsley – (jen_worsley@rocketmail.com)

Marisa Wakefield

Isabel Hitie – Diversicare (mas.peninsula@diversicare.com.au)

Cheryl Morgan – (Cheryl.a.morgan@hotmail.com)

Catherine Gunn – Lifeline Community Care (Catherine.gunn@liddq.org.au)

Hilary Whitehouse – JCU (Hilary.whitehouse@jcu.edu.au)

Sue Tomasich – Disability Discrimination Legal Service (ddls@cclc.org.au)

Annette Bewert – Lifeline (Annette.bewert@llcq.org.au)

Natlie Connen – Yarrabah Shire Council (csm@yarrabah.qld.gov.au)

Noralyn Harris, Yarrabah, admin assistant Museum Yarrabah

ATTACHMENT 2

Invitation

Women's Economic Insecurity

Under-employment/ unemployment

Consultation Workshop 'Options for Reform'

Where: Cairns Regional Library Meeting Room 1.

Lake St

When: Wednesday, October 21st 2009

10.00 am to 12.00 noon

Registration: 9.30 am Tea & coffee available

RSVP: by Wednesday October 14th to Michelle:

michelle.whitfield@aph.gov.au

or phone: Carole Ford 07 40392720



WomenSpeak



ATTACHMENT 3

Media Release: Impact of the Recession on Women in the Workplace

Contact: Dr Carole Ford Cairns Women's Network 40392720, caford@qld.chariot.net.au

The National Foundation for Australian Women [NFAW], with support from the four national Alliances of women's organisations, has organised consultation workshops to talk with stakeholders in communities and gather local perspectives on issues of women's workplace participation in a time of recession.

Cairns Women's Network, with support from Senator Jan McLucas, is delighted to be hosting one of only two consultations being conducted outside the capital cities.

The workshop will be held on Wednesday October 21st, from 10.00 – 12.00 at the meeting room at Cairns Regional Library. Invitations have been extended to many women as representatives of their organisation or local community, to consider the short-term and long-term economic security of women in this region.

Cairns has one of the highest unemployment rates of any regional town, but the position of women is often not highlighted by the ABS data surveys. This includes women from many disadvantaged groups, including refugee and migrant women; women with a disability; indigenous women; women with caring responsibilities; women who need training upgrades and women in regions where there are high levels of unemployment and underemployment.

And that certainly sounds like Far North Queensland!

The information gained from community consultation workshops will be collated into a formal response to the report by The Australian Institute, for submission to the federal government.

A few initial findings include:

- women make up 80% of the hidden unemployed
- many women are unable to work due to childcare and other caring responsibilities
- the gender pay gap is still about 17%
- many women are underemployed or work on a casual basis without normal workplace benefits
- lower incomes and disrupted working lives seriously impact on women's capacity to prepare for retirement
- about a third of women workers enter or leave employment each year without being officially recognised as unemployed
- tax rates for women on social security benefits are a deterrent to re-entering the work force, even if a job can be found
- many of the government funded training and employment strategies target males and male industries



APPENDIX 1

SUBMISSION BY THE JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INSECURITY – UNDER EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT. OPTIONS FOR REFORM INQUIRY

Casualisation at James Cook University (JCU) is not as high (around 10%) as at many large metropolitan Universities, where it is reaching as high as 25%. However there is an increasing trend throughout the sector to casualisation, and women are disproportionately represented in this casual workforce. The problems of casualisation and job insecurity are felt most among JCU's academic employees and I will concentrate on these.

Reasons for casualisation:

1. Underfunding of Universities since 1996. Casual labour is cheaper. A casual academic with a full time load costs \$32,200 as opposed to a level B academic on \$70,000. Tertiary education private providers have all casualised labour, quite often teaching subjects developed by permanent staff at public Universities either through contracting arrangements or public/private partnerships.
2. Casual staff members are given less support. Conditions are often poorer than for permanent staff eg sharing offices, second hand computers. They are not eligible for staff development programs such as study leave and their superannuation levels are lower. They are particularly vulnerable to dismissal and are more likely to put up with behaviour by managers which may be unfair, in breach of Collective (Enterprise) Bargains, or even illegal (eg breaching Discrimination Acts). Consequently they feel like second rate employees.
3. Because of the underfunding problem, Universities are less able to absorb the usual swings in student enrolments, which occur across discipline areas as well as generally. A high demand for teachers in one year may result in a huge leap in Education enrolments which might drop sharply a few years later. The recent economic boom caused a drop in expected enrolments because school students were more likely to move into the job market while the current recession is causing enrolments to increase. Casuals give University departments a level of staffing flexibility. However this means that any postgraduate hopeful of an academic career is unlikely to gain that chance, with Universities less likely to hire new permanent

staff or replace those who leave. This is something the NTEU is trying to fix by making an EB claim for 'Early Career Fellowships' (ie. a certain proportion of long-term casuals being able to obtain a 3 year full time contract).

4. The work done is underpaid, with a great deal of preparation, marking and student consultation time simply not remunerated. For example, a casual tutor might be expected to mark essays and exams unrelated to tutorials, or if paid for the marking, will be told that they will only be paid for 15 minutes per essay. Generally for a 2000 word essay, this would be a fair rate only for High Distinction essays. As many of our casual female tutors are very conscientious, they will put in many unpaid hours. A frequent estimate is that they are in fact working for around \$12 an hour. This is obviously a great saving for academic unit budgets and managers are unembarrassed about the gross exploitation of the most vulnerable members of their staff. The NTEU is trying to address this through the current round of bargaining by demanding that marking work of any kind be paid separately from tutorials.

5. High academic workloads in the sector forcing carers out of full time work. 60-80 hour working weeks (including weekend work) are common, particularly in smaller regional Universities who are unable to tap the lucrative overseas student market (Asian students believe metropolitan universities must be the best). Women with carer responsibilities are finding this increasingly impossible and there is a small but growing trend in the sector to academic mothers and other carers moving to part-time and casual work.

Problems associated with casualisation:

Many academic casuals are the traditional postgraduate students willing to put up with a certain amount of exploitation in return for teaching experience for an academic career. However with Universities so badly underfunded, the academic workforce, as a proportion of University staff in every University, is shrinking and as noted earlier full time permanent jobs are hard to find. This means the sector is losing a great deal of its most promising talent, just as the baby boom generation of academics is getting ready to retire. There are some long-term casuals (nearly all women) who continue on after finishing their research degrees; in Cairns, this is because it's difficult for women with their qualifications to find suitable jobs outside the capital cities, and they have carer responsibilities which keep them in Cairns.

Because casuals are teaching-only staff and not paid to do research, they may not continue researching after completing their research degrees. However this destroys their career prospects in academia in the future.

It is easier for casuals to lose conditions if their employment is interrupted. For example, one casual who has been employed by the university for 16 consecutive semesters would have become eligible for long service leave in a further two years, but became ill and had to give up a semester of teaching – thereby losing her LSL. This would not have happened for a permanent staff member.

Other factors threatening job security for women:

The trend in Universities to hire research 'stars' may threaten the job security of women, whose family commitments mean they cannot put in the excessive hours required to keep up with teaching and administration and produce research. The current management claim at University of Canberra's enterprise bargaining is a worrying development. The Vice-Chancellor wants to put all academics on short term contracts and at the end of these contracts, sack all of those who are not considered ready for promotion to Associate Professor level (generally requiring an international research reputation). Work/life balance would be totally destroyed and women with carer responsibilities would be most vulnerable.

Jan Wegner
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