Revisiting Missed Opportunities
— growing women’s contribution to agriculture

by Alison Sheridan and Fiona Haslam McKenzie

August 2009

RIRDC Publication No 09/083
RIRDC Project No PRJ-000897
Foreword

This report reviews the outcomes and deliverables since the publication Missed Opportunities (Elix and Lambert 1998). It updates the quantification of women’s contributions to the agricultural sector based on 2006 Census data and provides an overview of the various industry and occupational roles women engage in across regional and remote Australia. The report finds that when a relatively full range of women’s on-farm, off-farm, household and community work is considered, it is likely that they contribute over 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities.

Despite women’s significant contributions to agriculture and their regional communities, the report demonstrates that women continue to be poorly represented in formal leadership positions. Through an extensive literature review, interviews with a sample of women who are in formal leadership positions and nascent women leaders, the report explores the reasons for women’s low representation in formal leadership positions in agricultural and regional organisations, with a particular emphasis on the ‘doing of gender’. The report sheds light on the ‘space of betweenness’ women in regional occupy, as their roles often straddle the private and the public, which renders them invisible to those seeking to fill formal leadership positions.

The report concludes with recommendations directed to both the public and private sectors for the ongoing monitoring of women’s representation in agricultural and regional organisations, including strategies for improving the proportion of women in formal leadership roles.

This project was jointly funded from RIRDC Core Funds provided by the Australian Government and funds from the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS).

This report, an addition to RIRDC’s diverse range of over 1800 research publications, forms part of our Rural People and Learning Systems (RPLS) R&D program, which aims to improve productivity, environmental sustainability, and wellbeing in rural and regional Australia through R&D that contributes to building stronger and innovative institutions, communities, group activities and personal capacities.

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Peter O’Brien
Managing Director
Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
About the authors

Professor Alison Sheridan is in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy, University of New England, Armidale, and Professor Fiona Haslam McKenzie is the Director, Housing and Urban Research Institute of Western Australia, Curtin University.

Acknowledgments

This report is the result of the work of many people and we want to recognise them. In the first instance, Professor Leonie Still and Dr Margaret Giles were instrumental in the framing of the project. The authors of the various sections are detailed in the report but we would like to acknowledge their work here too. The team at WiSER, Curtin University of Technology led by Dr Therese Jefferson provided the updated econometric modeling of women’s contribution to agriculture and rural communities and the comprehensive commentary accompanying that. The full report from WiSER is included in Appendix 1. Dr Robyn Mayes from the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, Curtin University of Technology, worked with Fiona to develop the case study of the community in transition. Drawing on their knowledge of Ravensthorpe, she and Fiona were able to build a rich picture of the impact on women’s employment of a resource affected community. The full case study is provided in Chapter 6. We also want to thank the members of the Regional Women’s Advisory Committee (RWAC) who generously shared their stories which helped to shape our recommendations for strategies, as did the wonderful women from Mungindi who, with such good humour, offered their ideas about what would need to happen to enable them to take on formal leadership roles. The members of the Advisory Committee to this project, Jane Fisher, Elizabeth Bennett and Ingrid Moses, together with Dr Lou Conway also provided pertinent observations that contributed to our sensemaking.

Thanks must also go to the Australian researchers whose research on women in agriculture over the past decade we have drawn so much from – Professor Barbara Pini and Professor Margaret Alston.
# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Area Consultative Committee</td>
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<td>ARIA</td>
<td>Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia</td>
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<td>AWiA</td>
<td>Australian Women in Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTRE</td>
<td>Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CMA</td>
<td>Catchment Management Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAFF</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries</td>
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<td>DoTRS</td>
<td>Department of Transport and Regional Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOWA</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency</td>
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<td>FAAW</td>
<td>Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women</td>
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<td>MCA</td>
<td>Minerals Council of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFF</td>
<td>National Farmers Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH&amp;S</td>
<td>Occupational Health and Safety</td>
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<td>RDA</td>
<td>Regional Development Authority</td>
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<td>RIRDC</td>
<td>Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RWAC</td>
<td>Regional Women’s Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAFF</td>
<td>South Australian Farmers Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>VFF</td>
<td>Victorian Farmers Federation</td>
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<td>WiSER</td>
<td>Women in Social and Economic Research</td>
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Executive summary

What the report is about?

This report reviews the outcomes and deliverables since the publication of the *Missed Opportunities*\(^1\) report (Elix and Lambert 1998). It updates the quantification of women’s contributions to the agricultural sector based on 2006 Census data, and explores whether such analyses can be conducted across all industry sectors.

It identifies where women are located across occupations and industries in the Australian paid workforce and examines the reasons for women’s low representation in formal leadership positions in agricultural and regional organisations. It concludes with recommendations for improving the proportion of women in formal leadership roles and enhancing women’s leadership experiences.

Who is the report targeted at?

Policy makers and agricultural and regional organisations, regional women and men.

Background

This report was funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and the (then) Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS)\(^2\). In 2006, when the project was initially framed and nearly a decade on from the initial *Missed Opportunities* report (Elix and Lambert 1998), studies by DoTARS made it clear that little had changed with respect to women’s representation in formal leadership roles within agricultural organisations or within regional organisations more generally (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005a; 2005b).

The aim of this research was to better understand why so little progress had been made, and to provide recommendations for enhancing women’s access to formal leadership positions, to enable the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of regional Australia.

Aims/objectives

The aims of the project were to:

- Evaluate the outcomes of *Missed Opportunities* and subsequent implemented strategies
- Update the economic modeling of the value of women’s contribution to the agriculture sector
- Assess the capacity of existing data collections to allow for the ongoing monitoring of women’s diverse economic activities in rural and regional Australia
- Document women’s roles in rural and regional Australia by occupation and industry
- Determine the extent and nature of the barriers and cultural and socio-economic factors that still affect women’s contribution to rural and regional businesses and services, especially their participation in innovation, leadership and decision making
- Determine the strategic, long-term capacity-building initiatives required for all levels and types of leadership for women in rural and regional Australia.

\(^1\) Elix, J. & Lambert, J. 1998. *Missed opportunities - harnessing the potential of women in Australian agriculture*, Volumes 1 and 2. Eds Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation & Department of Primary Industries and Energy, Canberra. It will be referred to throughout this report as *Missed Opportunities*.

\(^2\) In 2008, DoTARS became the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.
Methods used

Focusing on the micro perspective, we reviewed the literature around women’s experiences in rural and regional leadership positions. We interviewed a sample of women who were well placed in rural and regional leadership positions, and those who were just starting to put their ‘toes in’, to identify the factors they perceived enabled and/or constrained their participation in formal leadership roles.

From a macro perspective, the WiSER econometric modeling commissioned as part of this project has shed light on women’s contributions, both paid and unpaid, to the agricultural sector. Our mapping of women’s occupations by remoteness category has highlighted the many and varied roles women play in the regional and remote communities across Australia.

Taking a wide view, we have placed these perspectives in the context of what we know more broadly about the gendering of management and leadership, both internationally and in the Australian context.

The deep view has come through our case study of a community which has undergone significant change in its economic profile, with agriculture now representing a lower share of the value of production as mining has developed in the area. Through this case study we explored whether women’s career opportunities in their communities improve as the land uses change.

Finally, throughout the research process we have reflected on the trends we have seen in women’s representation in leadership in rural and regional leadership, as well as in management and leadership more generally, as we have sought to add a long view.

The synthesis of these different perspectives informs our recommendations for enhancing women’s representation in formal leadership positions in regional and remote Australia.

Results/key findings

1. While Missed Opportunities was an important resource, documenting for the public record, women’s contributions to the agricultural sector and regional communities, containing valuable recommendations on how women’s representation could be improved, there was insufficient political will to take carriage of the recommendations. Women’s representation in the formal leadership roles within agricultural organisations and selected regional bodies remains disproportionately low, and clustered in those organisations with a local focus, poorly resourced and with little status.

2. The 2006 estimates of women’s contributions to agricultural and regional communities conducted by WiSER show that when a relatively full range of women’s on-farm, off-farm, household and community work is considered, it is likely that women contribute over 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities. This is a very similar finding to the 1998 Missed Opportunities report, which found women contributed over 48 per cent of farming community output.

3. While such quantification of women’s contribution is possible (although difficult) for the agricultural sector, the data mining for replicating these analyses across all industry sectors was constrained by the limited availability of data. ABARE farm surveys provide access to detailed data about unpaid work farm work and paid off-farm work which contain a level of detail not available for other sectors through official data sources. It is more difficult to find data sources that align industry of employment with particular geographic locations in the way ABARE collect data for agriculture. The need for data that are specific both to paid and unpaid work contributions, as well as specific geographic locations, means that the model used in this project cannot be seamlessly transferred to the construction of similar assessments for women working in other industries. In addition, there are strong reasons for tailoring such
assessments to specific studies, industries or locations, rather than adopting a uniform approach. As demonstrated by this report, there is a need for such economic assessments to be understood within the broader context of women’s lives and the distinctive, qualitative contributions they make to their households, businesses and local communities.

4. Women’s participation in the paid workforce is fairly consistent across the different remoteness classes, ranging from 42% in very remote regions to 46% in major cities. The representation across industries in the different remoteness classes reflects the prevailing sex segregation of the Australian workforce, with women most commonly found in health care and social assistance, retail trade, education and training and accommodation. Their representation in management positions, often assumed to be the necessary experience for formal leadership positions, varies between 34-36% across remoteness categories in aggregate, although there continue to be significant differences across industry sectors.

5. There remain significant barriers to women’s access to leadership positions within agricultural and regional organisations. Rather than a ‘glass ceiling’, the metaphor of the ‘labyrinth’ (Eagly and Carli 2007) provides a richer representation of these barriers women face at all levels. Major contributors to the labyrinth continue to be the gendered nature of workplaces and the associated dominance of ‘heroic’ leadership in the context of masculinised organisations, and this is evident in the agricultural sector. These, combined with the continued unequal division of labour in the household, especially in regional and remote Australia where access to services for household support are limited by distance and sparse populations, mean women’s representation in formal leadership positions remains curtailed.

6. For significant change to occur in women’s representation in formal leadership positions within agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence, there needs to be the political will within the public sector to drive change and an enhancement of the absorptive capacity within the private sector to enact the changes.

Implications for relevant stakeholders:

If there is to be real change in women’s representation in formal leadership positions within regional and remote Australia, we need to see commitment from the public sector towards monitoring and reporting on women’s representation and holding current leaders accountable for enhancing women’s progress. Those in leadership positions within public and private sector organisations need to ensure their current gendered practices are scrutinised fully and redressed, to enable women to engage more fully with these important institutions, and to ensure the full potential of the social and economic capital within regional Australia is realised.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are grouped within the public and private sectors:

What must be done within the public sector.

Recommendation 1: Reject gender mainstreaming and re-establish women’s units within government departments where attention is directed towards enhancing women’s opportunities in the workplace.

Recommendation 2: The Australian Bureau of Statistics should be funded to produce (annually) a full set of data detailing women’s contributions to agriculture and regional communities, to help inform and measure progress towards women’s access to formal leadership positions. This can only
occur if peak organisations and government agencies are required to gather and report relevant information.

**Recommendation 3:** The Federal Office for Women and the newly re-established women’s units within the different government departments should be appropriately resourced and charged with the responsibility of ensuring gender analyses are conducted of agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence. Regular reviews and communication of these gender analyses must be funded to ensure the relevant organisations are alert to their practices.

**Recommendation 4:** The Regional Women’s Advisory Council continues to be resourced to enable direct communication to the relevant minister about issues concerning women in regional Australia. Support for the existing women’s networks in regional Australia should also be reinstated and properly resourced to ensure the substantive representation of women occurs.

**Recommendation 5:** Mentoring programs for young women students in agribusiness and rural science awards in higher education should be supported. Any appointee to the board of an agricultural or government related board with influence in regional Australia should be required to mentor a female undergraduate student in a relevant degree for at least one year of their appointment.

**Recommendation 6:** Targeted programs for recruiting women over 45 for board positions should be implemented in any government or quasi government board relating to agriculture and/or regional bodies of influence.

**Recommendation 7:** The ‘space of betweenness’ occupied by women’s activities in regional Australia needs to be recognised by policy makers as important for the ongoing sustainability of their communities. These women’s businesses should be eligible for the business development support more often directed to the ‘exporting’ industries in which men have traditionally dominated.

**Recommendation 8:** Appointment processes for government related boards must be made more transparent.
Enhancing the absorptive capacity of public and private sector organisations to become more inclusive.

**Recommendation 9:** Leadership development activities within agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence identified in the *At the Table* report† (agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies and agricultural companies) must include components where the leaders engage actively with how gender and race are routinely practiced. Doing leads to learning. Such engagement should be a requirement for ongoing participation in boards.

**Recommendation 10:** All board members of the agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence identified in *At the Table* (agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies and agricultural companies) must engage in a mentoring relationship with at least one aspiring woman leader throughout their term. Failure to do so should make them ineligible for an additional term.

**Recommendation 11:** The performance assessment of the leaders of the agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence identified in *At the Table* (agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies and agricultural companies) should include commitment to creating more inclusive workplaces and demonstrated outcomes for creating more inclusive work spaces.

**Recommendation 12:** The agricultural organisations and regional bodies of influence identified in *At the Table* (agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies and agricultural companies) take responsibility for setting targets for women’s representation and report on the progress of these annually to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

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† Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2005b. *At the Table: Getting the best people and making the right decisions for regional and rural Australia.* Canberra: Department of Transport and Regional Services. Throughout this report it will be referred to simply as *At the Table.*
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1998, the national research project, *Missed Opportunities: harnessing the potential of women in Australian agriculture* (Elix & Lambert 1998), funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and the then Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, was released. After a decade of groups such as Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) and individuals writing and reporting about the barriers women face in agriculture and agitating to have women’s role in agriculture more formally recognised, this report made visible the issues surrounding the barriers women faced in accessing leadership positions.

This project generated considerable excitement amongst women in regional Australia at the time as it seemed that, finally, due recognition was being afforded to women’s substantial contributions to both farm output and the social fabric of rural communities. There also seemed, at the time, considerable enthusiasm for the report’s recommendations in public sector circles, particularly in government agencies responsible for primary industries.

The quantifying of women’s contributions to total farm output and their off-farm work, both paid and in volunteer work in community service organisations provided ‘hard’ evidence that women ‘contributed 48% of total real farm income’ (Elix and Lambert 1998, p. 11). The report concluded with a range of strategies identified to ‘assist in increasing the role of women in leadership and management in the sector’ (Elix and Lambert 1998, p. 113). It seemed to those women in agriculture who had been lobbying for many years to have women’s roles recognised that there was scope for real change to occur around women’s access to formal leadership roles in the agricultural sector.

In the decade since *Missed Opportunities* was commissioned, little has changed in women’s representation in leadership positions in Australian agriculture. The lack of change is indicative of the entrenched nature of the barriers women face. As a recent report by DoTARS (2005) noted, women continue to be significantly underrepresented on the boards of rural representative bodies, agricultural commodity councils, agriculture companies and rural industry research and development corporations. Their relative absence in other, ‘visible’, rural and regional leadership roles has also been highlighted (Haslam McKenzie, Sheridan et al. 2005; Eady 2008).

In light of the changing environment which regional and remote communities face – the ageing of the population, mobility of the population, significant economic costs to individual farms and communities as a result of climate change, economic turbulence – that women have continued to be overlooked as leaders in their communities limits the potential for communities to thrive into the future. There is evidence that women play an active role in effecting successful change within rural communities (Shortall 2002), so their absence from leadership positions debilitates the regional communities and industries more generally.

This project, jointly funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and the (then) Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS) is a timely opportunity to reinvigorate the quest for enhancing the capacity of regional Australia to face the future in a truly inclusive and innovative manner, by more fully understanding women’s current roles in regional business and services and the factors limiting their further participation in formal leadership roles.

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4 Elix, J. & Lambert, J. 1998. *Missed opportunities - harnessing the potential of women in Australian agriculture*, Volumes 1 and 2. Eds Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation & Department of Primary Industries and Energy), Canberra. It will be referred to throughout this report as *Missed Opportunities*. 
1.2 Objectives of the project

The catalyst for this project was the call by RIRDC for expressions of interest in evaluating the outcomes of *Missed Opportunities* and updating the economic modeling of women’s contribution to agriculture. In planning for this project, we identified the importance of extending the focus of the original report beyond women in agriculture. Women living in regional and remote Australia are not only active in agriculture – they are represented across all industry sectors and occupational roles to varying degrees (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007).

As was touched on in *Missed Opportunities*, it is clear that women contribute significantly to the economic well being and sustainability of regional communities through their paid and unpaid activities in a range of industries and occupations. Their critical roles in health, education and professional services and small business are often overlooked in current economic development activities. Indigenous women, in particular, are rendered invisible. While women have taken on a broader range of economic and leadership roles in their regional communities, there continues to be a paucity of research regarding these roles.

Through the process of tendering for the project, the outcomes agreed were to:

- evaluate the outcomes of *Missed Opportunities* and its subsequent implemented strategies
- update the economic modeling of the value of women’s contribution to the agriculture sector
- document women’s roles in rural and regional Australia by occupation and industry, with a particular focus on how the growth of mining in regional and remote Australia may be impacting on women’s participation in paid work and their career opportunities
- assess the capacity of existing data collections to allow for the ongoing monitoring of women’s diverse economic activities in rural and regional Australia
- determine the extent and nature of the barriers and cultural and socio-economic factors that still affect women’s contribution to rural and regional businesses and services, especially their participation in innovation, leadership and decision making
- determine the strategic, long-term capacity-building initiatives required for all levels and types of leadership for women in rural and regional Australia.

A variety of both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in tackling these objectives. Given the significant work that has been done relating to women in leadership generally in Australia and internationally, as well as that focusing specifically on women in agriculture, including a number of government-sponsored reports, we conducted an extensive literature review, trawling the existing work to identify key themes.

We also drew on existing, publicly available data to describe women’s roles in rural and regional Australia data. At the most detailed level, WiSER updated the econometric modeling conducted in *Missed Opportunities* to quantify women’s contribution to the agricultural economy. ABS data from the 2006 Census were then explored to chart the occupational and industry distribution of women across rural and regional Australia, by remoteness indicator. The data comparisons are extensively detailed in Chapter 3.

In the primary research conducted for this project, a sample of ‘successful’ women’s stories were collected and analysed in light of the major themes to emerge from the literature and we developed a case study of a community in which agriculture and mining now co-exist, exploring women’s experiences. Together, these data sources have shaped our thinking about what strategies can be implemented to achieve real change to women’s representation in leadership positions in rural and regional Australia.
1.3 Focus on regional and remote

As we reviewed the literature surrounding women’s roles in agriculture and in regional communities we recognised there was some slippage in the language around rural and regional, and that we, too, were guilty of this. There is some inconsistency in the descriptors for the sub-groups of the population who live outside the capital cities in Australia. Terms such as metropolitan/non-metropolitan, urban, rural, regional and remote are often not defined, or have been defined differently in different classifications. Consequently, confusion can easily arise unless it is made clear which classification is being used in each instance (Haslam McKenzie and Lord 2002).

A classification approach that has had increasing utility is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems. This provides useful guidelines by classifying localities by their ‘remoteness’, defined as the distance along road networks to service centres (a hierarchy of urban centres with a population of 5,000 people or more). The ABS has developed a Remoteness Structure based on the ARIA scores.

The Census is the principal Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical instrument that collects data for every geographical location in Australia. To avoid confusion about what we are describing, we have drawn on the ABS Remoteness Structure. This classification groups Census Collection Districts into five broad classes of remoteness which share common characteristics in terms of physical distance from services and opportunities for social interaction. ‘Remoteness classes cut across state and local government boundaries, enabling a better understanding of the patterns of socio-economic experience across Australia’s regions’ (Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics 2007, p. 2).

The concept of remoteness is based on the road distance from any point to the nearest ABS Urban Centre in each of five population size classes. The population size of the urban centre is used as a proxy for the availability of a range of services. These classes are:

- Major Cities of Australia – any location within a short distance of an urban centre of more than 250,000 persons
- Inner Regional Australia
- Outer Regional Australia
- Remote Australia
- Very Remote Australia – is usually more than four hours’ drive from a range of services and is generally inaccessible by ordinary car (which implies a non-bitumen road).

Two thirds of Australia’s population is located in major cities, with the other third spread across regional and remote Australia. The population distribution is presented in detail in Table 1.1 and has been mapped across Australia in Figure 1.1. Our research focus is on women’s activities in the regional and remote classes as defined by the ABS. In comparing remoteness areas with discrete Indigenous communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007), it is clear that most Indigenous communities are located in very remote Australia.
Table 1.1 Remoteness class by population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner regional</th>
<th>Outer regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very Remote</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (’000)</td>
<td>13 636</td>
<td>4 359</td>
<td>2 097</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>20 602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of total</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>growth 2001-2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (000 km²)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>1 021</td>
<td>5 646</td>
<td>7 704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop density</td>
<td>950.2</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(persons/ km²)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2005–06 (Cat 3218.0)

We have chosen to use the term ‘regional and remote’ in this report to be consistent with the ABS classifications, but acknowledge there are sections of the report where the term ‘rural and regional’ will still crop up as we are drawing on material that uses this term.

Figure 1.1 Remoteness areas, Australia
1.4 Women’s contribution to agricultural industries and regional communities

In Appendix 1 of this report, we present the updated modeling and discussion of women’s contribution to agriculture and regional communities, drawing upon the previous Missed Opportunities economic module (1998) and updating it to reflect recent literature and data collections. While the model developed in the 1998 report has been used as the basis for much of the following analysis and discussion, differences in data sources and availability since the 1998 report mean that a simple rerun of the original model with updated data was not possible or appropriate.

This means there are some differences in the model and results. In most cases the assessments of women’s contributions to the agricultural sector are not directly comparable. Specific details relevant to both the model and data are discussed throughout Appendix 1.

Despite some limitations of comparability, the two models provide significant points of commonality. Both models serve to highlight women’s continuing and significant contribution to agricultural industries and communities. By updating the assessment of women’s contribution to the agricultural sector, the analysis contained in Appendix 1 addresses three main issues.

Firstly, it provides a more recent assessment of women’s contribution to both on-farm and off-farm work in rural and regional communities. This aspect of the discussion reflects women’s contributions both directly to on-farm activities and their paid work both on- and off-farm and within farm households.

Secondly, it updates assessments of the contributions of women’s unpaid labour to household, community and volunteer activities in rural communities. This aspect of the model reflects women’s unpaid contributions to rural and regional communities.

Thirdly, it provides an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages associated with methods of developing such valuations and contrasts the estimates arrived at by different methods.

Although the literature on farm women’s economic and social contributions has grown significantly since 1997, gaps remain in our understandings of the determinants of farm women’s work, particularly their contributions to unpaid and paid work on farms and in farm households. The available literature does, however, confirm the previously identified links between women’s patterns of paid and unpaid work across a range of on-farm and off-farm activities. A review of post-1997 literature suggests that the modeling approach adopted in Missed Opportunities in 1998 remains a valid approach for replication in 2008.

As emphasised throughout the full report by WiSER (see Appendix 1), the results from the two modeling exercises must be treated with caution and lack direct comparability. The need for caution derives from the limitations of constructing monetary assessments and the lack of direct comparability stems from the use of very different data sets. The interest in comparing the two sets of results is that very similar findings have resulted from both modeling exercises, as shown in Table 1.2.

The 2006 estimates show that when a relatively full range of women’s on-farm, off-farm, household and community work is considered, it is likely that women contribute over 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities. This is a very similar finding from Missed Opportunities in 1998, which found that women contributed over 48 per cent of farming community output.
Table 1.2 Comparison of estimated contribution of farm women to the Australian economy, 2006 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996 Estimates</th>
<th>2006 Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farm women $m$</td>
<td>Farm men $m$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-farm income</td>
<td>4,042</td>
<td>10,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-farm income</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household work</td>
<td>8,172</td>
<td>3,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer and community work</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,783</td>
<td>14,674</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewed from this perspective, there is little difference in the aggregate value of output from men’s and women’s contributions, although the composition of their total contribution differs.

**The inescapable policy implication is that men and women are equal partners in the viability of agricultural activities and communities.**

This report recognises that women in non-agricultural industries also make important contributions to regional and rural communities. For this reason, an assessment was made of the extent to which available data facilitate the construction of similar assessments for women working in other industries in rural and regional Australia.

Unfortunately it is more difficult to find data sources that align industry of employment with particular geographic locations. In addition, ABARE farm surveys provide access to detailed data about unpaid farm work and paid off-farm work which provide a level of detail not universally available through official data sources.

The need for data that are specific both to paid and unpaid work contributions as well as specific geographic locations means that the model used in this project cannot be seamlessly transferred to construction of similar assessments for women working in other industries. In addition, there are strong reasons for tailoring such assessments to specific studies of industries or locations, rather than adopting a uniform approach.

As this report demonstrates, there is a need for such economic assessments to be understood within the broader context of women’s lives and the distinctive, qualitative contributions they make to their households, businesses and local communities.
1.5 Women’s continued under-representation in formal leadership roles

In evaluating how successful the Missed Opportunities recommendations had been in increasing women’s representation in formal leadership roles, we found that women’s representation had not increased significantly over the past decade, although there were some examples of agricultural organisations where more progress had been made than others.

The barriers to women’s access to formal leadership positions continue, but we recognise this entrenchment is not unique to the agricultural sector. While there appeared to be some progress and apparent openness to confronting the barriers in the two years immediately following the release of Missed Opportunities, this has stalled. Over the past decade we have seen the demise of the political will and necessary resources to deal with women’s continuing inequality in the workplace, not just in Australia, but internationally (Gatrell and Swan 2008). This appears to be made on the erroneous assumption that women have ‘made it’. Yet all the data on leadership positions continue to point to their gross under representation.

In reviewing the literature around leadership, with particular attention to the work already done on leadership in the agricultural sector, it is clear that the gendered constructions of the workplace and leadership role specifically, continue to be major barriers to women’s access, not just in the corporate sphere (Sinclair 2005; Sinclair 2007) but also in agricultural and regional organisations (Alston 2000; Sheridan, Pini et al. 2006; Pini 2008).

Instead of the metaphor of the ‘glass ceiling’ used so commonly in the 1990s, there is now a greater appreciation that the obstacles to women’s leadership are not clustered around the final hurdle into senior management. Rather, they are the result of discrimination that continues to operate at all levels of organisations. Eagly and Carli’s (2007) labelling of these multiple barriers as a ‘labyrinth’ does seem more apposite in light of our deeper understanding in the late 2000s of the barriers women face.

The richness of the labyrinth metaphor lies in how it conveys the complexity of the barriers, while it allows for the reality that some (few) women do navigate it. This is the case with women in leadership positions in agriculture and more broadly in their regional communities.

In trying to better understand how these women have navigated the labyrinth, we interviewed a sample of ‘successful’ women. Our analyses of their stories, and those of nascent women leaders in a remote community, combined with our extensive literature review and the case study of a community where agriculture and mining are now co-existing, has helped shape our recommendations for the strategic, long-term capacity-building initiatives required for all levels and types of leadership for women in rural and regional Australia. But we are not prepared to just leave the labyrinth alone. Through our analyses of women’s stories, we also identify where attention needs to be directed structurally.
1.6 Recommendations for change

As with all projects, there is an expectation for outcomes, deliverables, metrics (i.e. measurements) and timetables – what funding bodies reasonably expect from their investment. Whether we can be so prescriptive will depend on the political will behind the funding – will there be sufficient resources devoted to enacting the recommendations?

In our final chapter we provide the full details on the recommendations we have developed over the course of this project. We have grouped the recommendations in terms of those we see are ‘do-able’ within the public sector; and those that relate to private sector organisations.

1.6.1 Recommendations for the public sector

Re-establishment of the women’s units

It is time to re-establish women’s units within state and federal departments to directly address issues relating to women’s substantive representation (Childs and Krook 2006). These units will be the vehicles by which accountability about women’s representation in formal leadership positions can be monitored across the states and will be important resources to support the development of the ‘absorptive capacity’ of organisations – they can be the bridge between the external information and its implementation.

Routine data collection

Resources must be invested in ensuring routine collection of data that can be easily accessed for quantifying women’s contributions to agriculture, and where possible other industries in regional and remote Australia.

Conducting gender analyses

A useful aid for enhancing the absorptive capacity of organisations for change is the very concrete step of conducting gender analyses of these key organisations. Pini et al. (forthcoming) propose a framework which can be employed to make explicit the gendering of governance structures. We recommend this model be applied more broadly to organisations relevant to regional and remote Australia, to better understand how gender plays out within these organisations for the purposes of then countering it. If there really is the political will to better understand how leadership opportunities are shaped, then such analyses need to be resourced.

Resourcing of the Regional Women’s Advisory Council (RWAC)

The role of the RWAC as a conduit to government for issues relating to women in regional and remote Australia should be recognised and supported within the federal government. RWAC should be seen a prime vehicle for drawing attention to problems experienced by women in regional Australia, and given adequate resources, an important mechanism for developing solutions to these problems.

Mentoring young women

Mentoring programs for young women interested in careers within agricultural and regional organisations should be adequately resourced and implemented across the rural science and agribusiness-related university programs across Australia.

These mentoring programs should formalise a relationship between women in their final year of studies with a senior manager in one of the entities identified in At the Table. These are – agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies, agricultural
companies, regional development boards, area consultative committees and catchment management authorities.

The benefit of such programs would be the exposure of these young women to the possible paths and formal leadership roles that can be pursued and the removal of the mystique from these roles. This will be an important activity for supporting women in the early, idealistic, phase of their careers.

**Targeting older women for recruitment to government boards**

Given the continued unequal division of labour in the household in regional Australia, concerted effort on the part of government departments/policy makers, to implement affirmative action directed at older women should be pursued. Women’s skills/roles should be made more visible through the more extensive data collection processes recommended above.

As we have demonstrated in this report, it’s not that these women are not trained; they are trained, able and experienced, but currently they are not recognised. One example of an effective program for older women was developed in the Progress WA Program (Haslam McKenzie 2001a). This program aimed to give older women confidence through self-discovery, self-improvement and self-motivation.

Such programs should be implemented more widely across Australia as a means of capturing the potential of those women who are ready to creatively reinvent themselves in the latter stages of their careers.

**Making visible the ‘space of betweenness’**

As women’s roles often span the private and the public, and so do not conform to what is normatively prescribed as the experience necessary for leadership roles, there continue to be structural barriers to their recognition.

It is time for this to be redressed.

How absurd it is to think experience with a tractor prepares men for the various leadership roles in their associations (Pini 2008) yet the 49% of the value of output in farming communities contributed through women’s paid and unpaid work is discounted?

As detailed in Chapter 4, the site of regional women’s business activity, often focused in the services and retail sectors, has been overlooked by policy makers. Support for business development provided by governments is often predicated on the requirement that the business be an ‘exporter’. This must change and the endogenous development opportunities from women’s activities must be recognised by policy makers.

A further dimension to this is the need for women’s representation in formal appointments to government boards to be appropriately compensated. While direct travel costs may currently be recognised, there is a failure to recognise that time away from their business needs to be compensated too.

**Ensuring transparent appointment processes for public boards**

The lack of transparency around appointments to government boards is an ongoing issue that must be addressed. Following Edwards (2006) review of appointment processes for public sector boards, we reiterate the need for ensuring transparent appointment processes for public boards.
1.6.2 Recommendations for the private sector

Review of leadership programs

Rather than take as given the ‘women as deficit’ model, it is time to directly address the (limited) leadership skills of those already in formal leadership positions within the agricultural and regional organisations identified in Missed Opportunities and At the Table. Given the resistance to change evident over the past decade, it is time to address the absorptive capacity of these organisations.

As we noted from the innovation literature, key players need to be able to recognise the value of external information, assimilate it, transform it to be meaningful in their own context and apply it. An important dimension to this will be openness to change, which we believe will come through a greater capacity for self-reflection (reflexivity – see below). We understand that such self-reflection is unlikely to come readily to those who are in privileged positions, so there must be a requirement for all new and continuing board positions in these organisations, to engage in professional development designed to enhance these skills.

For those ‘leading’ private sector organisations within the agricultural sector or regional communities identified in At the Table, we recommend that participation in such professional development that is clearly linked to enhancing reflexivity and critical engagement with gendering processes should be part of the board’s performance assessment, and acted on appropriately.

Demonstrated reflexivity

Those in leadership positions need to be actively engaged with being reflexive about how they routinely practice gender and race. This should be a requirement for ongoing participation in boards; that they engage with an organised program of renewal (Haslam McKenzie 2001a) which is more than a token attendance at a program. There needs to be demonstrated outcomes of their professional development. They must be accountable for enhanced equity.

Mentoring of younger women required

One of the performance indicators for such a commitment to enhancing equity must be participation in a mentoring relationship with at least one aspiring woman leader throughout an agreed review period.

Targets for women’s representation

As per the recent recommendations in the Female FTSE Report 2008 (Sealy, Vinnicombe et al. 2008), we are recommending that the companies identified in At the Table be responsible for setting targets for women’s representation. The recommendation for targets is recognition that the progress has been too slow. Waiting for the ‘pipeline’ to deliver is no longer credible. While we recognise that numerical targets are not sufficient to enact change, if our previous recommendations are followed, then targets may be realised as the structural changes will have occurred.
Chapter 2: Evaluation of Missed Opportunities outcomes

2.1 Background

The release of Missed Opportunities in 1998 was significant in its quantification of the contribution women made to the agricultural sector and regional communities more generally. In its efforts to move beyond the readily quantifiable roles related to paid work, by quantifying in economic terms the nurturing roles, the ‘gofering’ roles, the support roles that women take on, and the volunteering in their communities, Missed Opportunities recognised this ‘social glue’ as an important factor in the ongoing sustainability of communities and agricultural industries.

Without this ‘social glue’, the functionality of businesses, organisations, and communities would fail, at great cost to agricultural industries.

There is no doubt Missed Opportunities was a great contribution to the public record around women’s contributions. For this report, we have updated the econometric modeling of women’s contributions, which can be seen in full in Appendix 1, for the purposes of once again making visible women’s significant contributions to the agriculture sector and the surrounding regional and remote communities.

But what was not apparent following this strong foundation was the political will to act on the findings. Missed Opportunities was a valuable tool, detailing steps that could be taken within government related organisations as well as the private sector, but after the initial excitement following its release, there was little will within the public or private sectors to value this external information, assimilate it, transform it to be meaningful in their own context and apply it. Instead, the shift to gender mainstreaming led to the focus on women all but disappearing by the late 1990s, and as we have seen in Australia, and internationally, a plateauing, and in some cases, decreasing representation of women in formal leadership roles.

As the Sex Discrimination Commissioner concluded from her recent Listening Tour (part of the 2008 Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984) whilst there are far fewer examples of overt gender-based discrimination in Australia, ‘our progress towards true substantive gender equality has clearly stalled’ (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2008).

2.2 Key themes from Missed Opportunities

In Missed Opportunities, the constraints surrounding women’s limited access to leadership positions in agriculture were identified as being similar to those experienced by women more generally in the corporate world, and were summarised as:

- ‘The culture within the sector, which is seen to be male-oriented and unwelcoming, or even exclusive of women as leaders and managers
- The competing demands of work within the sector and family responsibilities, the overwhelming burden of which still falls to women
- The extent to which women’s self-perceptions or lack of confidence inhibit their progress to positions as leaders and managers within the sector’ (Elix and Lambert 1998, p. 114).
This list can be seen to capture, in order, the organisational, the social and the individual factors limiting women’s access. Somewhat disappointing was the focus on the individual factors – ‘women’s self-perceptions or lack of confidence’ as inhibitors to their progress – as this is based on an overly simplistic view of the category ‘women’ and in many ways reproduces the stereotypes which the study was aiming to dispel.

There is a significant body of research that has now built up detailing the importance of contextual, structural and organisational constraints on the intertwining, and complexity of, life and career choices (Benschop 2006).

This complexity is captured in the metaphor of a labyrinth that Eagly and Carli (2007) have drawn on in framing the barriers women face in accessing senior management. Their rejection of the glass ceiling metaphor is based on the implicit assumption that there is a single barrier facing women as they try to enter the most senior ranks. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue this is too simplistic, as there are multiple barriers that women face at all levels of their professional endeavours (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion concerning the labyrinth).

2.3 Review of strategies for change from Missed Opportunities

The range of strategies identified in Missed Opportunities focused on:

- grower and producer organisations – local branches, state and national organisations
- government agricultural agencies
- agriculture related R&D organisations
- agribusiness.

Having identified these constraints and where action should be taken, strategies were suggested for achieving change in women’s representation. These included:

- selection on merit, with merit being more broadly defined than has traditionally been the case for senior management positions
- selection criteria which encompass not only agricultural and traditional business management skills, but also communication and other social skills, as well as ensuring a diversity of representation, reflecting the range of interests in a vertically integrated industry
- replacement of traditional interview processes for selection, with a range of interview, presentational and other processes which explore the communication, problem-solving and other skills of the applicant
- selection panels which encompass diversity of views required in senior positions
- training for decision-makers to make them aware of the potential for judgmental bias in their approaches to recruitment and selection and assist them in addressing those biases.

Each of these recommendations concerns changing current practices within these organisations. Part of the brief of this project was to assess how effective these strategies had been. At the macro level, a simple answer is ‘not very’ if one looks at the continued numerical dominance of men in the leadership roles in those organisations identified in Missed Opportunities as where change should happen – grower and producer organisations (at all levels), government agricultural bodies, agricultural research and development corporations, and agribusiness.

Elix and Lambert (1998, p. 90) reported that ‘less than 20% of boards of management and Executive Committee positions are held by women’. Similar figures were reported for staff management positions within agricultural organisations. As reported in At the Table, and from a review of the
2006/2007 annual reports of these organisations as presented in Table 2.1, it is clear that little change has been effected.

Table 2.1 Women’s representation in rural and regional bodies, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural and regional bodies</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>CEOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural commodity councils</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and development corporations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural representative bodies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural companies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we elaborate later in this chapter and again in Chapter 4, numerical representation should not be the only measure employed to assess the outcomes – rather we need to extend our analysis to how substantive representation of women occurs. However, as a starting point for assessing how effective the recommendations for change have been, they are very illustrative. It seems there has been no significant change in women’s representation.

Following Missed Opportunities, further work was done by Dimopolous and Sheridan (2000) in Missed Opportunities: Unlocking the Future for Women in Agriculture, Stage 2 Report.

The focus of the Stage 2 report was to apply the ‘strategies identified in Stage 1, and other agreed change management strategies, in two case study organisations, in order to identify those strategies most likely to succeed’ and to ‘utilise the outcomes from the case study activities to develop ‘best practice’ models for increasing women’s input and influence in organisations within the sector review of two case study organisations’ (Dimopoulos and Sheridan 2000: 3). Their case study organisations were the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) and the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF).

In 1999, women’s representation in the VFF appeared to be one of the highest within the sector. Their case study explored the effectiveness of the Women’s strategy employed by the VFF which was based on many of the recommendations of Missed Opportunities - Stage 1.

The Missed Opportunities - Stage 2 case study described how in the implementation of the strategy, the Steering Committee attended to regional activities and agreed that the focus should be on community, not women. While it was women members who were recruited to organise the forums, and there was commitment to providing venues and catering ‘suitable for women’ including the provision of childcare, there was clearly a decision not to draw attention to the focus on women. Surprisingly, this rather telling shift was not considered by the authors of the report to be problematic.

The support of the VFF President was seen as a major contributor to VFF’s commitment to making their processes more inclusive and the apparent success of the VFF’s efforts. In the report it was noted that there were some immediate changes to women’s representation as a result of these efforts. While the increases in women’s representation have been sustained, and the VFF continues to have one of the highest levels of representation of women in office bearing roles among Australian agricultural organisations, the momentum has not been ongoing. See Table 2.2 for the representation of women in office bearing positions in the VFF in 1999 and 2008.
Table 2.2 Women office bearers in the VFF, 1999 and 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Women as % of office bearers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Councils</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodity Councils</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch Presidents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch Secretaries</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a: While there are 221 branches, 12 of the presidential positions and 14 of the secretarial positions weren’t filled at the time of data collection.

Before we leave the analysis of the numerical representation, it is worthwhile reflecting on the efforts of the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF), which is the peak national body representing farmers and, more broadly, agriculture across Australia. Alston (2003, p. 476), reporting on her study of women’s representation in the Australian rural context noted that in 1998 ‘the National Farmers’ Federation, has only one woman on its 30 member board’. In 2001, Anna Cronin was CEO of the NFF and they were articulating a goal of 30% representation of women on Council and Committees by 2005 (Cronin 2001). With this goal in mind, a review of the number of women on NFF Council in 2008 is disappointing, with only one woman among the 18 Policy Council members, no women among the seven NFF board members and one woman among the four member executive management team, and she’s not the CEO. Plus ça change…

2.4 Gender mainstreaming

In reviewing the effectiveness of the strategies identified in Missed Opportunities, we are cognisant of the policy environment which followed its release. While the report contained many sensible recommendations consistent with best practice at the time, these were not supported through clear accountability for delivery of better outcomes for women. At the same time as the report was released, there was a gradual dismantling of women’s units – or the ‘women’s machinery’ (Maddison and Partridge 2007, p. 35) in the public sector.

Following the 1995 UN ‘World Conference on Women’ in Beijing, there was a growing momentum internationally for gender mainstreaming. The focus of gender mainstreaming was away from women’s supposed disadvantage to mainstreaming gender across organisations (Alston 2006, p. 123). This direction change was, it seems, in response to the apparent failure of women-focused policies to address gender disadvantage.

With the demise of the women’s unit within the Federal Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), and in many of the state departments of agriculture, it seems there was a step back from the commitment to effecting change in the representation of women in agricultural organisations.

Alston (2006) attributes this disappointing result to the poor understanding of what gender mainstreaming is by those charged with its responsibility. While the National Rural Women’s Secretariat was established in 2002 by the Office of Women ‘to support input from rural women into government policy’, the loss of formally recognised women’s units in the government agricultural departments, as a result of gender mainstreaming (Alston 2006), has meant a reduction of continuing resources available to draw on in implementing any of the strategies, as well as a symbolic loss of commitment to ‘women’s issues’.

This is reflective of the broader trend in the Australian labour market, and internationally, of a stepping back from equal opportunity policies designed around specific targeted groups to the more generic managing diversity policies (Strachan, Burgess et al. 2007; Gatrell and Swan 2008). A prime example of this was the watering down of the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 in the late 1990s to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999.

Alston (2006, p. 143) warns about the dangers of gender mainstreaming, noting that while ‘[a] move to gender mainstreaming would appear to be a positive initiative … there are huge gaps between rhetoric and action at national levels.’

A significant problem with the gender mainstreaming approach has been the failure to support the ongoing collection of data monitoring women’s contribution to agriculture and regional communities more generally, so well begun with Missed Opportunities. In the current public policy environment that depends on evidence-based information, this would have provided the necessary ‘facts’ to underpin strategies and policy development and implementation that had the potential to ensure the Missed Opportunities recommendations were brought to fruition. We did not see this happen.

Clearly, the shift to gender mainstreaming because of the apparent failure of women-focused policies to address gender disadvantage has itself been a failure. The period in which the women’s policy units operated saw more numerical progress in women’s representation than has been the case since their demise. That women’s progress had stalled and was even going backwards was raised at various points in the past few years, and there have been some ad hoc responses to calls for more attention to be refocused on women’s representation. These are reviewed in the following sections.
2.5 Key themes from DoTARS’ reports relating to women in leadership

In November 2004, the then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. John Anderson MP, noted that ‘leadership development activity had not translated into significant numbers of women on bodies of influence’ (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005b, p. 1).

Quantifying this through the report, *A Snapshot of Women’s Representation in Selected Regional Bodies*, it was clear little had changed in women’s leadership on regional and rural bodies since *Missed Opportunities in 1998*. This prompted an inquiry into women’s representation on rural and regional bodies of influence in Australia, led by Senator Judith Troeth, with the terms of references focusing on:

- ‘the position of women in decision-making positions in rural and regional Australia
- factors assisting and impeding the board participation of women in bodies of influence in rural and regional Australia
- strategies for industry and governments aimed at increasing women’s representation for the longer-term sustainability and competitiveness of rural and regional Australia.’(Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005b, p. 1)

Through this inquiry, agricultural commodity councils, rural industry research and development corporations, rural representative bodies, a sample of publicly listed agricultural companies, and government and/or semi-government bodies such as area consultative committees (ACCs) regional development boards (RDBs) and catchment management authorities (CMAs) were identified as capturing important leadership roles in rural and regional communities. As such, they reflect the very entities which were seen to be the vehicles for change identified in the original *Missed Opportunities* report.

Table 2.3 summarises women’s representation in these rural and regional entities. There are some leadership roles where women are seen to be more welcome. In particular, the more local the focus of the body, the more accessible the roles have been for women. For the ACCs and RDBs the emphasis on ‘facilitating’ lends itself to being more open to women (Sheridan, Pini et al. 2006), as such activity is consistent with the linking of the public and private – work traditionally seen to be the domain of women (Midgley 2006). Women’s representation is highest in those organisations formed to promote greater self-reliance in local communities, with women making up:

- 28% of the members and 20% of the CEOs of ACCs (government sponsored regional development organisation);
- 25% of RDB (state and community-based economic development organisation) members and 16% of RDB CEOs
- 26% of members and 15% of CEOs of CMAs.

It can be argued that these roles occupy a “‘space of betweenness’ linking [the] public and private” (Staeheli 2003, p. 818) emerging from the new rural governance policy making directed at promoting local solutions for local problems.
Table 2.3 Women’s share of board positions in rural and regional Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural and regional bodies</th>
<th>% women members</th>
<th>% women CEOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural commodity councils</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and development corporations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural representative bodies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural companies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional development boards</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area consultative committees</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catchment management authorities</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Transport and Regional Services (2005a)

In contrast, for those organisations with a less ‘local’ focus – the agricultural councils, the R&D corporations, rural representative bodies and publicly listed agricultural companies – there are significantly fewer women as board members or as CEOs.

These organisations, with their decision making relevant to shareholders returns (agricultural companies), influence over policy making through representation of interest groups (agricultural commodity councils and rural representative bodies) and control over the allocation of resources for research (research and development corporations), and their domination by men, provide clear examples of the integration of hegemonic masculinity with economic power (Connell and Wood 2005).

As Pini (2006) has demonstrated, gendered understandings of what is considered meritorious for leadership in rural and regional entities has often worked against women’s access to these roles. Women’s involvement in service-oriented businesses represents a major impediment to their appointments. Such businesses are not valued in the same way as the businesses in which men are traditionally found, and it is the case that experience in ‘masculine’ business activities has often been deemed relevant for board appointments.

Connell (2005, p. 1810) provides rich analyses of numerous cases where organisational cultures that are heavily masculinised and unwelcoming to women are maintained; even in places where there is active opposition to gender-equality. This is not confined to metropolitan locations. As Pini’s work has shown, there are many examples of such resistance within the agricultural sector (Pini 2003; Pini 2005a; Pini 2005b).

In the broader regional context, it is also evidenced by the recent efforts of a Chancellor of a regionally based university to remove the University’s long held policy to ensure there is representation of women on decision-making committees. So determined, it seems, was this Chancellor to be free of this ‘constraint’, he sought external legal opinion as to whether such a policy was legal.

What is especially interesting about this example is that it occurred in the public sector, which has historically been more active than the private sector in promoting gender equity, and yet even in this domain, there is now the sense that there is an undermining and, in some cases, dismantling, of the hard fought policies of the 1980s and 1990s.

Another arena for regional leadership is that of local government. While local government collects only three per cent of total tax, largely through its system of rate collection (a form of property tax) and is granted another three per cent from the Commonwealth, it plays an essential role in regional communities as ‘it is the tier of government with the greatest interest in locality-based development’ (Eversole and Martin 2005: 59).

It is at this level of government that women have made most inroads, not just in Australia but internationally (Tickell and Peck 1996). Women have increased their representation six-fold since
1980 when they held only 5 per cent of elected positions (Pini, 2005). This trend has been explained as a function of the relatively powerless nature of local government vis-à-vis the other arms of government, and because it has generally been associated with social-welfarist objectives (Tickell and Peck 1996).

As can be seen in Table 2.3, women’s share of elected mayoral positions (equated by the Department of Transport and Regional Services to the Chair’s position for the other boards) varies across states from a low of six per cent in NSW to 28 per cent in the Northern Territory. Women make up on average only six per cent of the most senior management appointments (CEOs).

Table 2.3 Women’s representation on local governments: excluding capital cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional LGAs</th>
<th>Women Mayors (N)</th>
<th>Women Mayors (%)</th>
<th>Women CEOs (N)</th>
<th>Women CEOs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Transport and Regional Services (2005b: 16)

This tracking of women’s representation in regional bodies of influence provides evidence of the poor outcomes following from Missed Opportunities and the need for attention to be re-focused on women’s participation in leadership roles.

The recommendations for change contained in At the Table tended to focus on the need to provide more training for women. This sort of approach harks back to the ‘blame the victim’ approach of much of the affirmative action activities in the 1980s (Sheridan 1998), and which has been quite soundly critiqued for its failure to recognise the systemic biases within organisations. As Eveline and Bacchi (2005, p. 504) note, ‘addressing women’s immediate needs through a differences approach can and often does simply entrench the status quo, by categorizing women as ‘needy’, or by allowing the asymmetrical relation of power and advantage between women and men to disappear from the analysis’.

It is, however, an easy response to the complex problem of the systemic barriers to women’s access to senior management positions. But misdiagnosing the problem as women’s lack of training will not make the labyrinth of leadership any easier to navigate. As the recent evaluation of existing leadership training for women in rural industries determined, ‘over the past ten years, thousands of women have participated in government funded and/or subsidised leadership development programs, awards and scholarships’ (Eady 2008, p. 16), yet very few of them have been able to access the traditional leadership positions.

Our conclusion is that ‘training’ women is not a sufficient condition for change to occur.
2.6 Conclusion

A significant outcome of Missed Opportunities would have been the systematic collection of data about women in regional and remote locations which, if necessary, had the flexibility to allow women to report their participation in several industry sectors as well as at least their formal leadership roles.

In the current public policy environment that depends on evidence-based information, this would have provided the necessary ‘facts’ to underpin strategies and policy development and implementation that had the potential to ensure the Missed Opportunities recommendations were realised.

We did not see this happen. Rather, there have been various ad hoc responses to data collection pertaining to women’s representation in leadership positions in the intervening decade, each pointing to the continued poor representation of women in formal leadership positions within agricultural and regional organisations.

On reflection, it is not difficult to understand why Missed Opportunities and At the Table failed to make a significant difference. They both recommended that structural changes be made to a variety of key positions in public and private peak organisations. Clearly, this would have required a substantial change in thinking and practice and no doubt would have threatened long term power and leadership cohorts.

If business and government were truly committed to the implementation of the recommendations, significant time, incentives and other resources were required to enact the recommendations from Missed Opportunities and embed the principles in organisational design and structure and we did not see this happen. The only area where we have seen sustained attention and resources being directed is to developing women’s leadership skills, with the focus very much on women’s deficiencies, rather than addressing the tougher issues around the gendered nature of the workplaces and leadership in particular.

In the next chapter, we more fully expand on women’s participation in the paid labour force in regional and remote Australia to demonstrate the breadth of roles women play in their communities.
Chapter 3: Women’s representation in employment in regional and remote Australia

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we begin by reviewing women’s numerical representation across industries in Australia, with a focus on their representation in professional and management roles. Both these occupational classifications, by definition, capture high skill levels and experience.

These employment patterns provide us with a means of elucidating the breadth of roles women perform in regional communities, to complement the insights gained through the updated econometric modeling contained in the WiSER modeling. While we, too, count the bodies, we also recognise that numbers by themselves are not sufficient.

As the WiSER modeling of women’s contribution to farming communities demonstrates, the current measures used in national accounting conventions fail to capture the multiple dimensions to women’s contributions.

We extend our analysis to go beneath the patterns of numerical representation to consider how the concept of community contextualises women’s position, and the means by which the ‘naturalness’ of men’s continued dominance of leadership positions is maintained. In particular, we propose the concept of the ‘space of betweenness’ as a useful lens for understanding women’s position in regional and remote Australia. For, in spite of the findings in this report showing that when a relatively full range of women’s on-farm, off-farm, household and community work is considered, women contribute over 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities, they remain relatively invisible in formal leadership roles.

3.2 Women’s industry representation across remoteness boundaries

The Australian labour force remains one of the most sex segregated in the OECD. While women’s representation in the paid workforce has increased significantly over the past three decades, with women now making up 46 per cent of the paid workforce, the industry profiles remain segregated by sex. In absolute numbers, the four industries in which women dominate nationally are, in order, health care and social assistance, retail trade, education and training, and accommodation.

These patterns remain remarkably consistent across remoteness boundaries, with the only differences occurring in remote and very remote locations where agriculture, forestry and fishing is the fourth largest employer of women and in very remote communities where the industry which employs the largest number of women (and men) is Public Administration and Safety (see Table 3.2.1).
Table 3.2.1 Women’s Industry representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner regional</th>
<th>Outer regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very remote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health care and social assistance</td>
<td>522 194</td>
<td>150 788</td>
<td>64 596</td>
<td>8 989</td>
<td>4 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>404 121</td>
<td>122 524</td>
<td>54 200</td>
<td>7 413</td>
<td>2 367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>332 829</td>
<td>95 054</td>
<td>45 086</td>
<td>8 114</td>
<td>3 575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and food services</td>
<td>209 514</td>
<td>71 852</td>
<td>36 751</td>
<td>6 141</td>
<td>2 334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety and administration</td>
<td>187 247</td>
<td>45 604</td>
<td>24 251</td>
<td>4 422</td>
<td>4 784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>11 313</td>
<td>30 108</td>
<td>33 455</td>
<td>7 406</td>
<td>3 261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Women’s representation as professionals across remoteness areas

As can be seen in Table 3.3.1, women are represented across a range of occupational groups in regional Australia, with more than 25 per cent of employed women in regional and remote Australia found in the management and professional categories, the occupations often drawn from, for formal leadership roles (Sheridan and Milgate 2005), apparently making them well qualified to hold key leadership positions according to current common expectations. This represents a significant shift in their occupational representation of thirty years ago (Houghton and Strong 2004).

Table 3.3.1 Employed women in regional and remote Australia, by occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational group</th>
<th>Proportion of employed women in each occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers and administrators</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professionals</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons and related workers</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced clerical and service workers</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate production and transport workers</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary clerical, sales and service workers</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers and related workers</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professionals are distinguished by their skill level, which is defined as a function of the range and complexity of tasks performed. The skill level is measured by the level of formal education and training, the amount of experience necessary to perform the task and on-the-job training. Professionals can be found across all industries. Nationally, women make up 54 per cent of all professionals. Women’s representation as professionals across remoteness boundaries can be seen in the following tables. The industries in which professionals dominate are education and training (N = 434 431); health care and social assistance (N = 376 371) and professional, scientific and technical services (N = 306 570). The former two are where women professionals are most likely to be found across all remoteness areas, although the clustering becomes more obvious in outer regional and remote areas. While nationally these two industries employ 60 per cent of women professionals, in outer regional Australia this rises to 79 per cent, 70 per cent in remote Australia and 64 per cent in very remote Australia.
Table 3.3.2 Distribution of professionals by industry, Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female Total</td>
<td>Female %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>27.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>4012</td>
<td>24.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>23123</td>
<td>29.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services</td>
<td>4048</td>
<td>26.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6270</td>
<td>26.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>15067</td>
<td>35.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>19109</td>
<td>49.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>4202</td>
<td>49.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, Postal and Warehousing</td>
<td>5966</td>
<td>22.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Media and Telecommunications</td>
<td>23836</td>
<td>40.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and Insurance Services</td>
<td>38506</td>
<td>36.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services</td>
<td>4737</td>
<td>35.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>105004</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support Services</td>
<td>23682</td>
<td>60.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration and Safety</td>
<td>65232</td>
<td>48.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Training</td>
<td>29363</td>
<td>67.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>283475</td>
<td>75.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services</td>
<td>12036</td>
<td>44.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>12332</td>
<td>38.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described</td>
<td>6068</td>
<td>36.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>3513</td>
<td>51.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>955861</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3.2 Distribution of professionals by industry, Australia
Table 3.3.3 Professionals by industry, Major Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>1259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>2619</td>
<td>7976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>19203</td>
<td>43777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services</td>
<td>3123</td>
<td>8378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>5303</td>
<td>14577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>13874</td>
<td>24206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>15603</td>
<td>16172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>3399</td>
<td>3420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, Postal and Warehousing</td>
<td>5140</td>
<td>15224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Media and Telecommunications</td>
<td>20214</td>
<td>30391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and Insurance Services</td>
<td>34584</td>
<td>61340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services</td>
<td>4059</td>
<td>7220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>90065</td>
<td>174291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support Services</td>
<td>19102</td>
<td>12813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration and Safety</td>
<td>48725</td>
<td>51199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Training</td>
<td>205894</td>
<td>100973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>204489</td>
<td>71978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services</td>
<td>9645</td>
<td>11489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>10041</td>
<td>14899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described</td>
<td>5087</td>
<td>9018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>2634</td>
<td>2688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>723345</td>
<td>683288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3.3 Professionals by industry, Major Cities
### Table 3.3.4 Professionals by industry, Inner Regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1675</td>
</tr>
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### Figure 3.3.4 Professionals by industry, Inner Regional
### Table 3.3.5 Professionals by industry, Outer Regional

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### Figure 3.3.5 Professionals by industry, Outer Regional
Table 3.3.6  Professionals by industry, Remote Australia

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<th>Industry</th>
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<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<td>6649</td>
<td>39%</td>
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Figure 3.3.6  Professionals by industry, Remote Australia
Table 3.3.7  Professionals by industry, Very Remote Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female Total</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td><strong>4436</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3025</strong></td>
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</table>

Figure 3.3.7  Professionals by industry, Very Remote Australia
3.4 Women’s representation in management across remoteness boundaries

In the following tables we present the distribution of women and men in management positions by industry in aggregate for Australia and then we break it down into the different remoteness categories. We have focused on management positions as it is common for formal management positions to be used as a proxy for competence in leadership roles.

To begin, we can see that in aggregate across Australia, women make up 34 per cent of managers. In unpacking the composition of these statistics, we can see that there is a patchiness to women’s representation in management across industries. In unpacking women’s representation in management further, we can see that their representation across industries highlights some interesting patterns.

As can be seen in Table 3.4.1 and Figure 3.4.1, the industry sectors where women have the largest share of management positions are health care and social assistance (65 per cent), education and training (56 per cent) and accommodation and food services (48 per cent) – industries traditionally associated with ‘nurturing’, which can be seen as highly feminised and which are often discounted as training grounds for leadership positions. What is interesting to note here is that in terms of absolute number of women managers by industry, agriculture, forestry and fishing is clearly the dominant industry outside the major cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female Total</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>413640</strong></td>
<td><strong>34%</strong></td>
<td><strong>788622</strong></td>
<td><strong>66%</strong></td>
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</table>
In those industries more closely associated with ‘masculinity’, for example, construction, mining, electricity, gas, water and waste services, we see women’s representation in management ranging between a mere 10 and 17 per cent. The average earnings in those industries associated in which men dominate are significantly higher than for those in which women dominate (ABS 2007b) These patterns reflect the continued horizontal and vertical sex segregation\(^5\) of the Australian labour force.

In considering management positions by regional classification, what we see is a remarkably consistent pattern across the categories. While it is often assumed that regional and remote Australia are more conservative than metropolitan locations, when considering women’s representation in management across the different locations, there are no significant differences.

\(^5\) Horizontal sex segregation relates to the division of women and men across different professions, while vertical sex segregation captures the under-representation of women in the most senior positions of the hierarchical structures within organisations and the continuing wage gap between women and men (Benschop 2006)
### Table 3.4.2 Managers by industry, Major cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female Total</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td><strong>269178</strong></td>
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### Figure 3.4.2 Managers by industry, Major cities

![Graph showing managers by industry](image_url)
### Table 3.4.3 Managers by industry, Inner regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female Total</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td>17342</td>
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<td>3332</td>
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<td>1506</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78000</strong></td>
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<td><strong>66%</strong></td>
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### Figure 3.4.3 Managers by industry, Inner region
### Table 3.4.4 Managers by industry, Outer regional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
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<th>Male</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>6190</td>
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<td>644</td>
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<td>48.24</td>
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<td>43.09</td>
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### Figure 3.4.4 Managers by industry, Outer regional

[Manager percentages chart]

- **Male %**
- **Female %**
### Table 3.4.5 Managers by industry, Remote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<th>Male %</th>
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<td>10.61</td>
<td>89.39</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>522</td>
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<td>Construction</td>
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<td><strong>66%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 3.4.5 Managers by industry, Remote

[Bar chart showing the distribution of managers by industry, with males and females represented by different colors.]

- **Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing**: 28.97% female, 71.03% male
- **Mining**: 10.61% female, 89.39% male
- **Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services**: 16.84% female, 83.16% male
- **Construction**: 10.26% female, 89.74% male
- **Wholesale Trade**: 20.04% female, 79.96% male
- **Retail Trade**: 50.95% female, 49.05% male
- **Accommodation and Food Services**: 51.87% female, 48.13% male
- **Transport, Postal and Warehousing**: 28.63% female, 71.37% male
- **Information Media and Telecommunications**: 48.57% female, 51.43% male
- **Financial and Insurance Services**: 41.47% female, 58.53% male
- **Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services**: 45.80% female, 54.20% male
- **Public Administration and Safety**: 34.74% female, 65.26% male
- **Health Care and Social Assistance**: 71.85% female, 28.15% male
- **Arts and Recreation Services**: 53.38% female, 46.62% male
- **Other Services**: 47.12% female, 52.88% male
- **Inadequately described**: 38.57% female, 61.43% male
- **Not stated**: 34.26% female, 65.74% male
Table 3.4.6 Managers by industry, Very Remote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
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<th>Male Total</th>
<th>Male %</th>
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<td>54.88</td>
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<td><strong>7044</strong></td>
<td><strong>64%</strong></td>
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</table>

Figure 3.4.6 Managers by industry, Very Remote
Through excluding the statistics from the major cities from the total, it is clear that the four industries in which women play significant roles in management in regional and remote Australia are health care and social assistance, education and training, accommodation and food, and retail trade. These are rarely showcased as fertile ground for formal leadership positions, nor do they generally gain much recognition in the local business community (Conway and Sheridan 2005). As such, women’s opportunities for being recognised in these roles and seen as ‘leadership material’ is very limited.

Figure 3.4.7 Managers outside of major cities by industry
3.5 Women’s representation in management in agriculture and mining

In the following table and figures, we present women’s representation in management across regional and remote locations in total, as well as focusing on the agricultural and mining sectors specifically, reflecting the interest by the funding partners in better understanding the implications of these two sectors for women’s employment.

Women are increasingly involved in the Australian mining and resource extraction industries. They represent approximately 18 per cent of the minerals industry workforce, but just over 3 per cent of employees at mine sites and minerals processing operations. They are rarely recognised for their contribution to the industry except for their care in driving large mining vehicles, thus reinforcing their more ‘gentle’, feminine attributes. Women in mining have no political status or representation in government, regional or industry organisations (Australian Government Office for Women and Minerals Council of Australia 2007).

Table 3.5.1 Women in management in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Mining; and Total by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mining</th>
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</tr>
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<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21.21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50 268</td>
<td>29.65</td>
<td>1 117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in Table 3.5.1, women’s representation in management across all industries is about 34 per cent, with agriculture, forestry and fishing being slightly less at 29.65 per cent and mining significantly lower at 11.55 per cent.

In terms of understanding the impact of the industry on regional and remote communities, it is also interesting to reflect on the absolute numbers of women involved in management positions in each industry.

Clearly, agriculture, forestry and fishing is significant in terms of women’s employment across regional and remote Australia, with 46 684 women employed in management positions outside of the major cities, as compared to just 427 women employed in management roles in the mining industry outside of the major cities.

With a more than a hundred-fold difference in the representation of women in management in agriculture, forestry and fishing in regional and remote Australia compared to those in mining; it seems the focus on women’s roles in agriculture will be relevant to a much larger share of the regional and remote population.
When we break up the statistics by regional location, we see little change in the patterns.
Figure 3.5.3  Women's representation in management, Inner regional

Figure 3.5.4  Women's representation in management, Outer regional
Figure 3.5.5 Women's representation in management, Remote

While mining may have once grabbed the headlines thanks to its value to GDP and exports, as an employing sector it is very small. As technology increases, it is likely to become even less so.
3.6 Gender, community and regional development

Application of a concept of community that recognises the variable terrains of power and discourse (Liepins 2000a) in regional communities provides a useful theoretical tool to assess gender relations, with particular reference to the barriers women face in agriculture and in accessing leadership positions in this environment.

This concept allows for the location of gender within the meaning of community, with the practices of community and within the spaces and structures of community. It also allows for a way of investigating ‘rural’ lives and notions of community as negotiated processes, involving heterogeneous populations, diverse meanings and contested practices (Liepins 2000: 339).

Beer, Maude and Pritchard (2003) in their research on regional development agencies, identified ‘the politics of parochialism’ as a major impediment to the effectiveness of these agencies. Conway’s work (2008) subsequently supported their findings. Community and regional development demands consideration of a wide range of policy issues but while a regional development agency’s experience and purview is limited, it is unlikely that optimum solutions and outcomes can be achieved.

It has been argued that, in the United Kingdom, the emphasis on direct competition, the priority given to the private sector, and the preference for large-scale projects have reinforced male power within the policy-making process, favouring particular masculine working practices and values (Little and Jones 2000). This was reinforced within our own recent work on the gendering of regional development agencies within Australia (Sheridan, McKenzie et al. 2008).

In Australia, women have demonstrated an interest in a diverse range of issues, through their own organisations, which espouse a different agricultural setting, including a more critical concern for health and the environment because of their traditional caring and nurturing roles (Alston 2003). O’Toole and Macgarvey (2003) in their research on women in leadership in Victoria argue that the emphasis on culture, heritage and environment as marketable resources in community economic development has had a feminising impact on the process of economic development, and has implications for women’s visibility and leadership outside of traditional support roles they have held.

The history of the Women in Agriculture movement has had a marked impact on the critique of the social and discursive contexts of farming, increasing public awareness and debate about the range of farm knowledge beyond the dominant economic and scientific approaches (Liepins 1998). The lack of inclusion of these ways of thinking in the policy context means that ‘[T]he possibility of a wider vision incorporating the environment, land management, social issues and the interconnectedness of people, communities and the earth is lost’ (Alston 2003, p. 486).

This way of theorising focuses on difference between the genders, which has been critiqued as being a dichotomous approach and serves to polarise and to categorise gender as unchanging and static.

The gender issues addressed in this literature review have been acknowledged in other counties as well. The maintenance of established patriarchal power relations, shoring up traditional masculine identity is evident in the United Kingdom (Little and Jones 2000).

In Ireland the increase in part-time farming and women’s increasing off-farm work, linked to falling farm incomes and reduced subsidies and women’s participation in rural development policy and practice has been noted (Shortall 2002). Additionally, the social custom of patrilineal land transfer continues to have currency (Shortall 2004) in the Australian and Irish contexts, and in Australia, the justification of Aboriginal dispossession adds a further layer of complexity in terms of private property.

Despite the pursuit of equality strategies in both contexts, individual property rights fundamentally shape the socio-cultural role of women in the farm family, the way their farm work is accounted in
farm statistics, the language of farming and women’s position in farming organisations (Shortall 2004).

The trend of out-migration of young people since 1986, and in particular that of young women, continues to impact on regional development (Jamieson 2000; Eversole 2001; Haslam McKenzie and James 2002). It has been suggested that reliance by governments on market-based and community self-help solutions is not sufficient to provide a future for rural communities faced by these levels of out-migration (Warhurst 1990; Higgins 1998; Tonts, Davies et al. 2008).

Instead it is argued that there is a need to address human capital (access to education, training and employment), institutional capital (government and non-government services and infrastructure) and social capital (strong networks) to facilitate a future for these communities (Alston 2004; Tonts, Davies et al. 2008). The emerging gender imbalance is not a healthy sign for regional communities.

Two themes that have emerged from this development are:

- that youth has emerged as a priority for leadership positions in rural communities, but within a masculine framework
- an apparent focus in public policy on the inclusion of women in governance and leadership roles to counter decrease in funds for rural and regional areas, which has previously been discussed.

As a consequence, leadership programs directed at both young people and women have proliferated over the past decade (Eady 2008). At the same time, there continues to be, as Emily Harris noted in her recent article on women’s experiences in the Mungindi region, a failure to recognise and value women’s multiple contributions to their communities.

In interviewing women in her community, Emily describes their response to the recent recommendation from the “Skills: Rural Australia’s Needs” report that rural women need to participate in rural skills training to improve the plight of the farmers. She notes one woman disputed the assumptions embedded in the report.

“Our women are already highly skilled – it’s just that there is no recognition of the skills they have”.

This statement resonated well with the group as a whole. Margaret is in her mid forties, married to a local farmer/contractor, and has four grown children. She has been an integral member of the community for years, and has successfully coordinated an annual art show as well as a highly-regarded music festival. Despite the fact that running these committees requires great skill, Margaret has no “formal qualifications” in the eyes of any researcher. She is undoubtedly worthy of a Diploma in Human Resource Management, or a Certificate of Grant Writing (after completing approx. 20 grant applications a year for the past few years) – however if a survey were taken she would be deemed ‘unskilled’. When other women her age were ‘skilling’ themselves Margaret was performing other ‘unskilled’ jobs, such as bringing up her children.

Ann-Margaret is employed as a childcare nurse at the local hospital. She is also a trained mid-wife. She is married to a local farmer and has two children in the local primary school. Her response to the recommendation that rural women need to participate in rural skills training to improve the plight of the farmers was: “our women are already highly skilled – it’s just that there is no recognition of the skills they have”.

‘To do this has required endless and tiring community and fund raising work. The real concern these women have is if they are all ‘trained’ to be farmers or farmers helpers, who will do the charity work, who will run the local show, the local race day? Who will co-ordinate Meals on Wheels, or keep the local CWA Branch alive?’ (Harris, 2008; unpublished, p. 3)

The failure to continue to systematically measure women’s contributions to their communities from the foundation so well built in Missed Opportunities is symptomatic of the broader failure to grasp the importance of the ‘social glue’ which sustains regional communities. In this report, we have updated
the values from the 2006 Census and demonstrated once again that women contribute 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities. It is imperative that this be an ongoing task.

3.7 Who's assumed to be leadership material?

While much of the research into women’s leadership roles has focused on the corporate sector (Sheridan 2002; Still 2004) and the public sector (Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment 1998; Rindfleish and Sheridan 2003), in recent years there has been a growing interest in women’s experience of leadership in the agricultural industries (Alston 1995; Liepins 1998; Alston 1998b; Haslam McKenzie 1999; Alston 2000; Pini, Brown et al. 2003; Pini 2005a).

A common theme across these Australian studies is the gendered nature of organisational practices and leadership (Sinclair 2005); a theme that reflects similar findings internationally (Martin 1996; Wajcman 1999; Fenstermaker and West 2002; Powell and Graves 2003). Poststructural critiques of management provide a consideration of leadership as being socially constructed. ‘How one leads, what is expected of a leader, what one attributes as characteristic of male or female leaders are fluid, contextual and subject to change’ (Pini 2003, p. 201).

Amanda Sinclair provides a significant body of work critiquing the prevailing model of heroic leadership, in which she makes visible ‘the collective but largely unconscious images of leadership’ (Sinclair 2004, p. 9) that carry such weight in our society. In particular, she describes the leadership archetype of the ‘lone frontier settler who is stoic but resolute in the face of hardship.

Such an image renders improbable a garrulous, emotionally expressive or more collectively oriented leader – women and many migrants from more group-based societies instantly struggle to earn respect in this contexts’.

While Sinclair writes about the corporate sector, the dominance of this image is particularly strong in the rural context. Pini (2005a, p. 74) provides a rich description of the rural and agricultural images that continue to pervade the Australian psyche.

‘Traditional hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity play a central role in these images. At centre stage is the determined strong-willed individual the ‘man on the land’ - heroically, aggressively and stoically fighting the vicissitudes of nature to provide for his family, community and nation. Much further downstage is the ‘good wife’ who is equally strong and hard working, but whose focus is domestic life.’ Pini (2005a, p. 74)

Pini acknowledges there has been some challenge to these images, thanks to the work of feminist rural sociologists such as Alston, Panelli and we would add, Pini herself, and farm women activists, for example, the two national bodies, Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) and the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women (FAAW), but they are difficult to shake.

Pini’s research with women in leadership positions in agriculture provides important insights into how women who had ‘made it’ navigate their way through the spaces that are deeply ingrained with hegemonic masculinity. Pini (2005a) describes the keen awareness that these women have about the balancing they do between being perceived as too feminine, while at the same time not coming across as too masculine. Her tagging of these women’s gender performances, which balance both masculine and feminine self-presentation, as the ‘third’ sex, reflects the complexity of their performances.

‘Women’s claim to leadership in agriculture involves a contradictory performance. It does not simply require women to magnify some aspects of femininity. It also requires them to magnify some aspects of masculinity. Being an agricultural woman leader requires the reification of on-farm skills and expertise. It also requires one to be objective, desexualized and rational, unencumbered by domestic and household chores. Gender performance for these agricultural women is thus highly complex and precarious – while displaying masculine characteristics,
they are nonetheless required to present themselves as not completely devoid of softness, sexual attractiveness and conviviality. There is consequently a fragile balancing act for the woman agricultural leader as she manages her sexuality, dress, intelligence, speech, emotions and knowledge to be feminine enough but not too feminine.’ (Pini 2005a, p.85)

The strategies undertaken by women leaders (Pini 2005), especially in their performance as a member of the ‘third’ sex, require that they amplify a range of normative traits of femininity. This emphasis on difference as providing the key to women’s newfound niche in the realm of leadership has been accepted at many levels including industry and government.

This seems to suggest that any other type of leadership is not acceptable and therefore problematises the performance of leadership which, as Pini indicates, at times, encompasses masculine self-presentation. The current discourse of the feminine advantage in leadership relies on the very qualities that have served to stereotype women in the past, and which is seen as secondary to the masculine. This poses challenges for women and the sector in addressing women’s lack of success as leaders in agriculture.

In this way, women adapt to a masculinised context, and this is women who are ‘censured and sanctioned for not performing gender appropriately in culture’ (Pini 2005a, p.86). It also perpetuates the notion that men and masculinity are the norm (Pini 2003), and that women’s role is merely complementary to the role of men as leaders.

The difficult process women face in managing their performance in the workplace has been considered for many years, with Deborah Sheppard’s early work (Sheppard 1989) being reinforced in many studies since (Brewis, Hampton et al. 1997; Weyer 2007). For instance, Fels (2004) illustrates the experiences of women at the corporate level where their capacity to be ‘real’ women is assailed if they speak as much as their male colleagues in a work situation or compete for high visibility positions.

Since 1992, the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation has worked to develop and maintain a network of leaders from agricultural sectors who have demonstrated an ability to think, act and influence strategically and negotiate with a wide diversity of stakeholders; the idea being that when a leadership or board opportunity arises, there is a cadre of skilled, networked potential leaders who are available and equipped to take the opportunities.

Women and other marginalised groups have been encouraged to participate in the thorough training programs, but, while some female graduates have been appointed to boards, more male than female graduates of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation have achieved that outcome.

Pini (2002) evokes research demonstrating that, as with urban discourse of management, rural discourses are constructed in terms of hegemonic masculinity. ‘The agricultural leader is one who is strong, determined, aggressive, risk-taking and knowledgeable’ (Pini 2005a, p. 77). And this construction of masculine identity permeates the construction of masculinities in agri-politics.

There is no corresponding congruence between constructions of femininity and leadership, as there is between masculinity and leadership. At the institutional level, men view themselves as natural leaders, and women, despite their major input to agriculture are still viewed in stereotypical ways (Alston 2003; p. 478). Feminists have critiqued the discourses of sameness and difference; a critique that has not been applied to the issue of leadership in agriculture.

The discourses of sameness and difference tend to accept the notion that men and women are fixed homogeneous categories with no facility for effective challenges to unequal gendered power relations (Pini 2003). These categories are further problematised because they have included a stereotypical category of women leaders as typically, older, white, middle-class, property owning and Anglo-Saxon, while excluding others, such as Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young women and girls. It has also categorised men so as to exclude men who do not conform to dominant agricultural masculinities (Haslam McKenzie and Lord 2001).
O’Toole and Macgarvey (2003) have identified a growing shift in gender relations at the local level in South West Victoria, as women shifted their involvement in local economic development from auxiliary roles to greater involvement in decision-making processes in the community. This is aligned with the shift in focus to alternative and small-scale forms of economic activity that can supplement the more conventional rural economic enterprises.

Where women have experienced success in high levels of management, the value of networks and business contacts including high levels of education have played a significant role (Sheridan 2002) in breaking through the fixed categories and stereotypes describing women’s roles as leaders.

The increased visibility of women in Australia as farmers during the 1990s has not translated into access to leadership positions, and it is common for a small coterie of particular women to be members of several boards and therefore give the appearance of greater representation by women (Pini 2005). Despite a wide range of evidence that women face numerous barriers in achieving leadership positions in agriculture, there remains a strong resistance to acceptance of this fact.

Implicit in many formal leadership roles in rural and regional Australia are the assumptions that business experience is necessary to be a leader (Alston 2000), and that the reason for women’s poor representation in these roles is their lack of such experience (Alston 1998c). Such assumptions clearly warrant challenging given women’s employment profiles and business experiences in rural, regional and remote Australia.

As we saw above, women are represented across a range of occupational groups in regional Australia, with more than 25% of employed women in regional and remote Australia found in the management and professional categories, the occupations often drawn from for formal leadership roles (Sheridan and Milgate 2005), apparently making them well qualified to hold key leadership positions according to current common expectations.

Despite this, the distinction between the natural and legitimate roles of men in the economic sphere and women in the social sphere as carers and community builders is constantly being played out in our regional communities.

With respect to their role as small business owners, Houghton and Strong (2004) provide one of the few studies into women’s business in rural and remote Australia. Through a national survey, interviews and focus groups, they found that the businesses owned and managed by women had a significant impact on their local economies, in terms of both employment and incomes, and extended the breadth of a region’s business mix.

For women in many communities, these businesses provided a strategic vehicle for diversifying the income sources, and provided a greater variety of end uses for locally grown commodities (Houghton and Strong 2004), which can be argued to be a key contributor to regional development. Similar findings were reported by Oberhauser and Pratt (2004) in their work in South Africa where they found that women’s collaborative economic activities were not only beneficial for their individual well-being, but also created positive outcomes for the economic and social well-being of their communities.

The beneficial flow-on effects of women-owned businesses were also evident in a recent study in a regional community in Australia (Conway and Sheridan 2005), with all participants reporting they employed local business services to support their businesses.
3.8 Regional women occupying a ‘space of betweenness’

In comparing women business owners in regional and remote Australia with their urban counterparts, one of the few differences found was that 17 per cent of the rural, regional and remote women reported that a key motivation for their decision to start the business was bringing their experience and qualifications to their community (Still and Simmons 2005).

More of the regionally-based business women than their urban counterparts cited the natural integration of their business and the region in which it was situated as important to them. In light of the pressures experienced in rural and regional communities, it seems that many women have responded to the challenges by drawing on their strengths to contribute positively to their communities to ensure their sustainability. Their business activities are diverse and often deliver the only service-type functions in small communities but as service oriented businesses, their contributions are often overlooked.

Still and Simmons (2005, p. 13) noted that ‘where on-farm women were once ‘invisible’…. it seems that the work and contribution of women’s non-farm activities are now invisible’ primarily because the women are sole traders, are in functional service areas not delivered by men and have little time to participate in broader policy and economic activities of communities.

It seems to us the term of ‘space of betweenness’ has a particular relevance here in describing women’s economic involvement in their communities, through their linking of the private and the public, which is so critical in regional communities. For these women, there are multiple dimensions to their location in a ‘space of betweenness’; they are not only women, and so in the pervading ideology of western market economies often constructed as ‘non-economic’ (Midgley 2006), they are often involved in (service) roles linking the private and public (Staeheli 2003) and they are also in the (physical) space between the city and the farm gate.

This combination renders much of their activity invisible and, as we argue, can go some way to explaining women’s continued poor representation in formal leadership roles in their communities.

In their discussion of the gendered dimensions to innovation, Blake and Hanson (2005) challenge the common assumption by policy makers that innovation equates to ‘technical innovation’, and so precludes service oriented innovation. This privileges the areas in which men dominate in terms of ownership and employment.

This is not only representative of how innovation is valued, but is relevant to which businesses more generally are recognised as ‘significant’ in regional areas, and so visible to policy makers. Lovering (2001) critiques the prevailing assumption that regional business is significant if it is an exporting business. As he notes, most people earn their income through serving the needs of their neighbours in some way.

He further argues that ‘the scenario of “local production for local needs”, especially at the regional … scale, deserves to be rescued from its almost total … neglect’ (Lovering 2001, p. 351). In failing to value women’s businesses, policy makers are not recognising how these businesses may be enhancing the wider development of the region (Rees 2000).

Internationally, women have been identified as a largely untapped pool of entrepreneurial talent (OECD 2003). It seems that one of the reasons for them being ‘untapped’ in regional economies is their limited visibility. Between the farm gate and the city, little attention has been focused on women’s contributions to their local economies. That women’s economic activities do not replicate the traditional businesses in regional locations – that is, primary production – but are primarily service oriented, may be a contributing factor to their oversight.
The close association of hegemonic masculinity with production and management in western economies is well established (Connell and Wood 2005). In the neo-liberalist discourse pervading regional development (Shortall 2002), and the masculinist discourse surrounding regional development (Pini 2006), women’s businesses, with their service orientation, linking as they often do the public and the private, are not recognised as ‘real’ businesses. This is highlighted by the comment of a male member of a regional development body (Sheridan, Haslam-McKenzie et al. 2008), where he unreflexively reinforced the stereotypes inherent in the masculinist discourse of business when he noted:

‘I mean they [women] are more into health services whereas I, as a bloke, am probably more about thinking of economic development; of what new industry …’

His association of women with health services and men with economic development reinforces a common dichotomy between women’s and men’s work, which works to the disadvantage of women’s business activities, because unlike male business owners in their communities, women continue to be constructed as ‘non-economic’. This discursive regime renders them invisible, ‘locked in the subordinate, under/devalued position vis-à-vis the “core” economy’ (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003, p. 151).

As with the exclusion of female entrepreneurs from formal and informal networking in the United Kingdom described by Carter (2000), the consequences of this invisibility are profound. For instance, most of the networking support provided by regional development agencies in the United Kingdom has been directed to manufacturing businesses, rather than to the service sector where women’s businesses are likely to be found (Rees 2000).

Similar patterns are evident in Australia where Grant and Rainnie (2005, p.174) found that regional development grants were less likely to be allocated to industries in which women dominated (for example, retail, community services, health and education), than for those in which men were traditionally found (agriculture and manufacturing).

Examples of women’s businesses not being seen as ‘important’ were provided by the women participating in focus groups held to explore women’s experiences as business owners in a regional community (Conway and Sheridan 2005). The participants spoke of their efforts to become part of the local business groups. One woman recounted her experience of attending the local Chamber of Commerce meetings.

‘When I was there, they only seemed to be interested in people that were actually trading outside of [name of town]. So if your business was concentrated in [name of town], in the area, then they weren’t really interested.’ (Unpublished)

Another made reference to the scheduling of the Chamber’s meetings not being suited to retailers’ hours.

‘I joined the Chamber of Commerce thinking it would be a good network but the majority of people in it are not actually business people anyway. If they are, they’re professional business people who don’t open till 9.30 or can slip in and out of offices. But when you are a retailer there is no way you can just walk out of the door. It is something I have found difficult. There is also a predominance of men, and I think it is the women like me who can’t make it straight after work with dinner to cook or something else. There was no consideration for times, and as for a lunchtime meeting, it is crazy. It amazes me, the thinking, especially the Chamber of Commerce, I think we need a chamber of actual working type people who have their own business.’ (Unpublished)

A consistent theme to emerge from the focus groups of local business women was that that these businesses, focused as they are ‘on serving the needs of their neighbours’ (Lovering 2001, p. 351), were not to valued or recognised by local business groups.
Another of the women who owned a professional services business (which has been nationally recognised though industry awards) cited the local credit union as a positive example of where she was taken seriously, unlike her experience with other financial institutions.

‘I think the reason I like the Credit Union ... is because they took me seriously in business. I don’t often think of myself as a woman in business, I think of myself as being in business and making it work. I think of the people, my staff, the people I’m creating a livelihood for. I feel a great responsibility for their financial welfare at the point when they work for me. When I think of being treated as a woman in business, it has been financial institutions; they have wanted to talk to my husband or wanted his signature. And he knows stuff all about my business. And thank you that’s how it shall remain because that’s how it works.’

(Unpublished)

There are many instances of women’s businesses developing in response to a perceived gap in their regional communities (Conway and Sheridan 2005; Still and Simmons 2005). One woman described how her private nursing service had developed over a 17-year period, now employing 44 staff (Conway and Sheridan 2005). As she noted, the ‘bulk of our work has become the government purchasing services from us’; services which were previously provided through the community health system but which were now outsourced. In describing her motivation for establishing her business, she almost apologetically described it as:

‘... ideological, at the beginning and it still is....I still have this vision that you can actually have all the ideals that you once had when you wanted to be a nurse and put that into practice, and really put your money where your mouth was, in terms of ideals, in what you thought. So I decided how you could still maintain those ideals. It sounds a little corny now but at the time it was more like putting love into action.’ (Unpublished)

In this narrative, the shifting boundaries between the public and the private create a tension for the woman. Her business was based on the provision of caring services, and she wanted to do this in a manner that was consistent with her personal values. In framing her comments as ‘a little corny’ it was as though she felt her motivation wasn’t as legitimate as others. This was reinforced through her description of how the business developed when she recounted that:

‘The biggest loan I got at the beginning was $500 which was used for three fax machines and the answering machine. I sort of did everything by hand. I think if I had been a clever business woman I could have done a lot better than I have done.’ (Unpublished)

Given that she had been in business for 17 years and was one of the most significant employers in the town, her apparent sense of not being ‘clever’ may be symptomatic of the difficulties women face in having their business recognised. In some ways she replicated this discounting of her own business in describing the men who also let space in the building in which her business was now based. While she spoke of them as being very supportive of her, she noted that ‘their businesses were so different from mine – they were importing stuff’ (authors’ italics).

These businesses were not, however, employing nearly as many staff as her business was, and yet she saw their businesses as in some ways more ‘serious’ than hers. Further, she described how others didn’t take her business ‘seriously’, so she had to draw on the men she shared the building with to have to ‘speak on my behalf’.

Another of the women had run a training company for the past decade, from which she derived much satisfaction from seeing the ‘graduates’ of her programs employed in the town.

‘I guess I am in the type of businesses where I don’t think you are going to make instant money, it’s just not that type of business. So long as I can get there, have a wage, and feel I am doing good. I guess the satisfaction of knowing that most people who do the courses get jobs, and that people who do something with me are successful. So there are those types of brownie points.’ (Unpublished)

While her business had been long standing, she noted her experience of accessing finance was more difficult for her than a man running a business. She recounted how when she had sought a loan for $4000, the response from the bank manager had been:
3.9 Conclusion

It is evident that women who aspire to be leaders and decision makers in the agricultural industry and regional and remote communities are often trained and have the necessary skills and experience to be leaders.

Our review of women’s representation in professional and management positions across industries and remoteness areas highlights the range of skills women exhibit through their labour market participation, which combined with the WiSER modeling of women’s participation in agricultural industries and their communities more generally, demonstrates the profound contributions women make to the economic and social well being of regional and remote Australia.

Yet despite their significant contributions, women’s representation in formal leadership positions remains limited.

It should not be the case that the quantification reported here and in Appendix 1 should be major projects done on an ad hoc basis. Rather, this information should be readily available on an annual basis.

The evidence provided in this chapter indicates that proximity to private space and the local milieu is feminised, and consequently not valued as being important or significant, regardless of its usefulness or importance to the individual and/or family or functionality of the community. Inevitably, women’s work activities are less likely to fit the traditional commercial frameworks.

Women’s businesses are often located in a “space of betweenness”, straddling the private and public domains and more likely to be serving local needs rather than establish broader scale and traditional business enterprises. The local concerns are perceived as less structured and formal and therefore less important, requiring ‘feminine’ skills and concerns rather than the more global, masculinist perspectives.

There remain significant cultural and structural barriers limiting women’s opportunities, which we canvass more fully in the next chapter.

… we might be able to get this through for you. I said what do you mean, “might”?, that is what you are here for. He said they don’t really like lending to single women.’ (Unpublished)

Another who had a retail business incorporating a small nursery, which had been operating for many years noted that while she measured the success of her business in terms of the ‘financials’, which were important as her business was the family’s only source of income, there was a more personal dimension to her satisfaction.

‘I’m still very much a gardener and anybody who wants to come in and talk plants or whatever, I’m happy to spend the time doing that. I try to source new plants, or plants that I have a special interest in, and to find somebody who shows that interest is always a great satisfaction.’ (Unpublished)

Her private interests happily meshed with her public role. Her long-running business (and her skills in running it) was not, however, recognised through the local business groups.

These women’s stories shed light on the ‘space of betweenness’ these local business women experience in their communities, and provide a basis for better understanding their limited access to more formal leadership roles as such ‘betweenness’ is not valued within the prevailing discourse around what real business is.

Yet as seen in the economic modeling done by WiSER in Appendix 1, when a relatively full range of women’s on-farm, off-farm, household and community work is considered, it is likely that they contribute over 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities.
Chapter 4: Women’s limited access to leadership

4.1 Introduction

Women’s limited progress into senior management and leadership positions over the past decade has been documented not just within rural and regional roles in Australia, but across the corporate sector.

Internationally, the plateauing of women’s representation in management has been recognised, with Canada, Norway and Australia being the most noticeable examples (Davidson and Burke 2004). The most recent report by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (2008) shows women’s representation on Australian boards and in executive management positions has, in fact, fallen between 2006 and 2008.

As noted in Chapter 2, the review of women’s representation on regional bodies of influence highlighted women’s relative absence from formal positions of authority, despite their varied roles in regional and remote Australia as seen in Chapter 3. The focus on board positions as a proxy for leadership is, of course, contentious. While we realise that leadership can be manifested in many informal roles (Sinclair 2005), we engage with it here as it is a metric that is being employed by relevant policy makers.

In this chapter, we draw on a broad range of literature to help shape our review of women’s absence from formal leadership positions.

In the first instance, we briefly canvass the arguments for women’s greater representation in leadership, and conclude that despite these arguments, women’s access to formal leadership positions continues to be limited. We reflect on the limitations of many of the arguments for more women in leadership positions, as they unreflexively assume women’s presence in formal leadership positions will make a difference.

We employ Eagly and Carli’s (2007) metaphor of a labyrinth for the difficulties women face in accessing senior positions, including women in regional and remote Australia. While recognising its limitations, we see merit in this descriptive tool.

Following a brief discussion of the importance of understanding gender as a verb, making explicit our understanding of gender as the result of social practices that are continuously being produced and reproduced through workplace structures, cultures, practices, policies, procedures, conversations and evaluations, rather than as a pre-existing absolute before one enters the workplace, we review the more nuanced understanding of the gendering of management and leadership which now exists.

Fundamental change to institutions and gendered modes of assessing worth will be essential to enabling greater participation by women in formal leadership in regional and remote Australia.

4.2 Why more women in formal leadership?

The issue of women’s representation on boards (which can be seen as the most senior levels of management) has attracted increasing attention in recent years. Still (2006) summarises the arguments commonly made in favour of women board members, especially non-executive ones, as; the increased diversity of opinion in the boardroom; improving the organisation’s image with stakeholder groups; their provision of strategic input on women’s product/market issues and company direction; improving
the constructiveness of board processes and deliberations; their influence on decision making and leadership styles of the organisation; women’s capabilities and availability for director positions; insufficient numbers of competent male directors; and providing female role models and mentors to the organisation’s female employees (Burgess and Tharenou 2002).

It has also been argued that women contribute to better governance, reducing CEO dominance due to their ‘power sharing’ style (Bradshaw, Murray et al. 1992), while as non-executive directors they contribute an independent view to the board (Fondas 2000).

A demographic case has also been made. With the aging of the male pool from which most board members are drawn, there is likely to be a curtailment of the number of board directorships held by men as board membership requirements and greater understanding of the workings of any particular organisation increase.

All of these arguments seem credible on the surface. However, the current state of representation suggests that they are not sufficient in themselves to improve the situation for women. As Bell and Berry (2007) point out, despite decades of diversity research and anti-discrimination legislation, women remain significantly under-represented in key organisational positions.

In the Australian context, the EOWA Census has shown us that ‘Australia now lags all other reporting countries in percentages of companies with at least one woman Executive Manager’ (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency 2008, p. 10). Another example of women’s disadvantage in the paid workforce continues to be the gender pay gap, which is a visible expression of value and worth (McGregor 2004).

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, the gender pay gap continues to pervade all OECD countries, and Australia is no exception.

**Figure 4.1 Gender pay gap in median earnings of full-time employees, 2004 or latest year available**

Underpinning the Missed Opportunities recommendations is an assumption that decisions about who to employ and how to identify high performers, ‘recognising people as a valuable resource’ (Elix and Lambert 1998, p. 110) is a highly rational set of decision processes, uninflected by the messiness of the subjective position. What has become clearer in the past decade is the fallacy of this assumption.

While the “diversity making good business sense” argument has been employed in this context, it has not substantially influenced the processes and/or decisions about who makes a good leader, as evidenced by the homogeneity of those in leadership roles. Nor does it recognise the potency of the everyday doing of gender, and how this influences who is identified for formal leadership positions.
4.3 Problematising expectations about women and leadership

Implicit in the commonly presented arguments for why there should be more women in leadership, is the assumption that there is a relationship between the numbers of women in leadership positions and beneficial outcomes for women as a group. Underpinning such assumptions is the implicit acceptance of the view that if there is a ‘critical mass’ of women in influential positions, women’s opportunities will open up.

Based on Kanter’s work in the 1970s, the notion of critical mass relates to a number, between 15-30%, that has been framed as the point at which women can affect the culture of a group (Kanter 1977). Questioning of this has come from a range of perspectives, for example, whether more women elected to political office pass legislation which benefits women (Childs and Krook 2006) while from a management perspective this is framed in terms of questioning whether having more women in senior management positions leads to more opportunities for women in those workplaces (Mavin 2008).

From a political perspective, Childs and Krook (2006, p. 21) challenge this assumption, arguing we need to more closely inspect this ‘as higher proportions of women do not always translate into gains for women as a group, while smaller proportions of women are sometimes very effective in bringing new issues to the political agenda’.

A theoretical clarity needs to be exercised in addressing this problem to ensure that there is not a confounding of a focus on macro-level behaviour (what do ‘women’ do?) rather than micro-level behaviour (what do specific women do?).

‘As it is commonly understood and operationalised, the concept of ‘critical mass’ makes two problematic first-order assumptions: first, that (all) female representatives want to act for women, and second, that the percentage of women present is the key determinant of women’s legislative behavior. As a result, the impact of women’s presence is too often simply ‘read’ from women’s bodies in an essentialist and reductive manner. In so doing, it elides women’s bodies and feminists minds by uncritically inferring that the difference that female representation will make is a feminist one. Further, even when it can be established that particular women wish to act for women, focusing solely on number so women overlooks the politics of the policymaking process, whereby it is often difficult to find a straightforward correlation between attitudes and behavior. Consequently, while women may want to make a difference, they may be prevented from translating their preferences into policy outcomes by various features of the political context.’ (Childs and Krook 2006, p. 22).

From a broader perspective, we need to be conscious of this in assumptions that a critical mass of women in leadership positions will fundamentally change the environment in which individual women operate.

In untangling the conflation of women’s bodies with the representation of women, Childs and Krook (2006) proposal that the focus should be not be on when women make a difference, but on how the substantive representation of women occurs has been acted on in this report. The attraction of this approach is that the counting of women’s bodies assumes that only women can act for women, while the scrutiny of how the representation occurs allows for a deeper understanding of the gendered structures that operate.

4.4 From glass ceiling to labyrinth

A recent article by Eagly and Carli (2007) in the Harvard Business Review, reframes the problems women face in accessing leadership positions from the metaphor so popular in the 1990s of the ‘glass ceiling’ to that of a labyrinth.

Their review of the extensive literature that has grown up around women and leadership leads them to conclude that the obstacles to women attaining leadership are not clustered around the final hurdle as
the ceiling metaphor suggests; rather, they argue women’s limited progress to senior positions is the result of the sum of discrimination that operates at all levels of organisations.

The crux of their argument – that social structures continue to limit women’s opportunities at all levels of management – has been well recognised within the gender and management literature. A double bind continues for women because as women, they are still expected to shoulder the nurturing roles of child rearing and maintaining the home, while corporate expectations that paid work has primacy for those aspiring to senior management continue to pervade the workplace.

Such values reinforce the gendering of the career models uncritically accepted within organisations as the ideal. For those women (and few men) who seek to manage their work and family responsibilities through part-time work, their career opportunities are greatly curtailed (Sheridan 2004).

Even if a woman is able to navigate these competing forces, she is under constant surveillance as she seeks entry into traditionally male roles. Constant self-monitoring of her performance is required if she is to manifest the masculine traits deemed necessary for ‘good’ management (tough, rational, decisive) while simultaneously demonstrating enough ‘feminine’ traits not to be dismissed as ‘unnatural’ (Sheppard 1989).

Eagly and Carli’s use of the term labyrinth appeals to us because to successfully navigate a labyrinth ‘requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead’ (Eagly and Carli 2007, p. 64). We believe this metaphor has utility for the purposes of our analyses and recommendations, as one of the aims of this project is to assist those women who want to take on formal leadership roles.

But one of the risks of accepting this metaphor too literally is that it may be seen to imply that it is up to the individual women to navigate the barriers, rather than the barriers themselves having to be challenged. We are certainly not advocating that this is case. At the forefront of our analysis is the focus on the gendered organization and the gendering of management and leadership as we believe that making these dimensions of the labyrinth visible to existing leaders is a necessary precursor to the recommendations for change we proffer in our final chapter.

We are also pragmatic in our views, recognising that a better understanding of the gendered nature of organisations may also assist those women choosing to navigate the labyrinth as it stands.

4.5 The doing of gender

The importance of recognising the centrality of gender as an organising principle in all social systems – work, politics, the family, everyday interaction, economic development, education, law (Brush 2003) – cannot be overlooked in any analysis of why there are not more women in leadership roles.

While the Missed Opportunities strategies are consistent with much of the more general strategies identified and promoted in the women in management literature, it can be argued that they underrate the role gender plays in the social subordination of women. As West and Zimmerman (2002, p. 23) note, ‘gender is a powerful ideological device that produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and constraints that are predicated on sex category’.

West and Zimmerman’s (1987; 2002a) ‘doing gender’ has generated much work on how gender is enacted through interaction. A person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others (West and Zimmerman 2002, p. 6).

Since their groundbreaking work, the gendering processes within organisations have been well-documented by feminist researchers, including the formal polices (for example, the job descriptions and evaluations, benefit provisions and work-family policies), and through routine work practices and
interactions, captured in the informal work practices, the symbols that sustain cultural images of masculinity and femininity, the everyday social interactions that reinforce patterns of dominance and submission between men and women and the individual expressions of gender identities that occur within the workplace (Meyerson and Kolb 2000; Martin 2004).

Even where there are higher proportions of women evident in leadership roles, uncritically inferring that the difference these women will make is a feminist one is too easy a trap to fall into (Childs and Kook 2006). Rindfleish and Sheridan (2003) have shown how little action individual women in senior management and leadership positions in corporate Australia have taken to challenge the existing organisational structures and practices that support hegemonic leadership.

While the assumption has been made that increasing women in leadership positions will lead to the inclusion of more diverse views in decision making, if the women involved are in fact ‘social males’ (Blackmore 1999: p.192) or they see the price of their inclusion in the most senior ranks as conformity with the masculinist norms and culture (Mavin 2008), the scope for difference to be manifested is limited.

Pini (2005a) demonstrated this in her study of agricultural organisations, and our earlier work on women and men in regional development organisations also pointed to the inadequacy of numerical representation as a means for capturing how gender is performed within organisations (Sheridan, Haslam-McKenzie et al. 2008). From our analysis of the practicing of gender on regional development boards we concluded that while the number of women on the boards/commissions had increased significantly over the past decade, this did not equate to a simple process of women’s interests being better represented.

Rather, we found a complex, and in many ways contradictory, picture of how gender is enacted and reinforced within the regional development agencies (Sheridan, McKenzie et al. 2008). Profound change in the ‘way things are done’ is unlikely to happen if the dominant discourse remains highly masculinised. Like Morley (2005), we firmly believe that the token inclusion of women as managers without a commitment to feminist politics and an understanding of the doing of gender stands in the way of more profound equity transformations.

The notion of ‘body counting’ and an emphasis on it can detract from an examination of the gender relations that underpin rural policies, while giving the impression that gender inequalities are being addressed (Shortall 2002). It can result in the ‘add women and stir’ policy approach, which does not address the need to analyse, deconstruct and reject the predominating masculine norm. Focusing on women’s under-participation can be at the detriment of other important strategies. A key question here is: How can policy work more effectively to address a destabilisation of the male norm?

A range of gendered processes and factors that actively exclude women within the agricultural industry have been identified (Pini 2002; Alston 2003; Pini 2006). These factors include lack of support, the conduct, time and location of meetings, masculinist culture, women’s multiple commitments and lack of relevance/interest, with the first factor being the most significant. The following processes have been identified specifically:

- The practice of some farmer bodies allowing members to hold leadership positions for unlimited periods
- The lack of transparent selection processes
- The way decisions are made in relation to selection criteria
- The narrow selection criteria which exclude and/or devalue alternative experiences
- The ‘old boys’ network’ used to select candidates in some organisations
- The reliance of some organisations on seniority as a key selection criteria
• The practice on some boards of relying on member organisations to nominate candidates and that these candidates are overwhelmingly or exclusively male

• The location and timing of meetings

• The lack of EEO and affirmative action strategies

• The lack of commitment from the top of organisations for gender equity (Alston 2003, p. 479).

It seems all of these have continued, despite the recommendations from the original Missed Opportunities report.

We know from the broader gender and organisation studies literature, succession planning can often reinforce gendered patterns of leadership. Kanter’s (1977) work on homosocial reproduction, or like promoting like, has been identified as a continuing, pervasive constraint to challenging gendered patterns of leadership (Still 2006). Thus, scrutiny of succession planning in regional governance institutions may provide insights into the limited presence of women in leadership roles.

This has relevance at the farm level too:

‘[a]lthough there have been social changes that have seen farm women increasingly take a more equal role in farm management, it is evident … that women are primarily seen as dependents, either as a wife or daughter, and most are excluded from inheritance of the land. Daughters are provided with a good education as compensation’. (Barclay, Foskey and Reeve (2007, p. 58)

Alston (2003) argues that serious attention must be given to organisational structures and processes that result in a grossly inadequate representation of women, and that acceptance of these processes needs to be challenged. Conway (2008, p. 51) sums up the literature on the issues as ‘pointing to clubbiness, … the binding of like-mindedness amongst business men’.

It can also be argued that women’s negative experiences of involvement in the agricultural sector have been understated, as a result of what has been referred to as the social intelligence about hidden events (Westrum 1982), whereby women may not report all negative experiences, holding back on information for a number of reasons. If this is the case, then the current situation with regard to women’s roles in leadership is more of a concern than seems apparent.

Pini’s (2008) case study of a farmers’ association paints a rich picture of the doing of gender. She demonstrates how daily interactions reaffirm women’s work allocation to the local and everyday, and men’s place at the level of the district and the strategic. Conway (2008, p. 45) too, explains that ‘given the regional location is bound by a cultural history that locks it into paternalistic patterns of operating, then consideration of the gendered nature of representation is an important consideration in regional governance’.

The continued prevalence of such distinctions in the minds of men and women suggest that future strategies must impact on basic attitudes toward the ‘doing of gender’. One step in this direction is to move beyond ‘body counting’ (Pini 2006, p.406) and simple quantification according to sex, to more relevant pursuits which target the underlying concepts that govern thinking patterns and attitudes.

The need to move beyond ‘body counting’ is further reinforced by research that indicates women in senior management in the private sector have not used their roles as a means of challenging gendered structures (Rindfleish and Sheridan 2003). As noted by Childs and Krook (2006), we cannot assume that change to gendered structures will come about as a result of increasing numbers of women in formal leadership positions.
4.6 Conclusion

Women’s absence from formal leadership positions reflects the gendered nature of organisations and careers. The doing of gender inflects opportunity structures within organisations across all areas in Australia, leading us to agree that the labyrinth metaphor proposed by Eagly and Carli (2007) is a better means of capturing the constraints women face than the historically popular metaphor of the glass ceiling.

Employing gender as a verb enables a deeper understanding of the constraints to greater participation of women in formal leadership roles. It helps us to move beyond simple body counting as a means of measuring the substantive representation of women, to consider how day to day interactions, routines and practices continue to normalise men as leaders, while reinforcing women’s subordinate position.
Chapter 5: Making sense of women’s experiences

5.1 Introduction

‘The lens of privilege … requires women in leadership to consider their position, to better understand how and why they came to be in that position and how they can use that position to challenge and transform exclusive images of leadership into more inclusive ones’ (Blackmore 1999, p.35).

Since Missed Opportunities was released in 1998, we have seen little change in the numerical representation of women in agricultural organisations (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005a), nor have we seen a shift in the gendering of these organisations (Pini 2003; Pini 2005a).

But there are some women who have navigated the labyrinth and taken on leadership roles in their communities, their industries and their professional associations. One of the aims of this project was to explore their experiences of leadership over the past decade as a means of identifying the factors that may constrain, and also facilitate women’s access to formal leadership roles.

A sample of these women is captured in the Regional Women’s Advisory Council (RWAC) whose members were chosen on the basis of:

- living and working in regional Australia
- expertise on key issues facing regional rural and remote communities
- being closely connected with a range of community groups
- having the personal qualities to contribute effectively to problem solving.

Not all of these women were involved in agriculture; they were drawn from a diversity of locations across non-metropolitan Australia, with different backgrounds and at different stages of their lives.

We have interviewed a sample of these women, as well as a small number of other women who represent diverse leadership roles in rural and regional Australia. In this chapter, we consider the major themes to emerge from their responses as a basis for making sense of the barriers women face (the critique) for the purpose of identifying the strategies (the generative) that may enable greater inclusion of women as leaders in rural and regional industries in future.

An interesting dimension to the analysis is the comparisons we make between those women who are well connected (having been appointed to the RWAC) and those who are nascent leaders in their communities. This latter sample provide insights into the barriers as they see them which, when read in the context of the commentary of those women who are ‘there’, enable some creative connections to be made between these experiences.

As well, we report on the work of Emily Harris (2008) whose qualitative case study highlights the changing environment for agricultural communities which are not directly ‘resource affected’ but increasingly face the challenges of skills shortages.

Harris’s analysis of the assumptions embedded in Recommendation 4 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry inquiry into rural skills training and research ‘that the Australian Government coordinate programs with State and Territory Governments and industry aimed at enhancing the contribution of women to Australian agriculture and to facilitate their participation in
rural skills training from the recent inquiry into skills shortages in rural Australia’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2007) points to the continued failure by policy makers to recognise and value women’s existing contributions to their regional communities.

Suggesting that up skilling women is the answer to rural labour shortages implies there are many women with ample time on their hands to direct to filling the ‘skills shortage’.

With the WiSER modeling showing that women’s contribution to farming communities is 49 per cent of the total value of output, we have the evidence to challenge such simplistic analyses. As Harris concludes in her critique of the recommendation:

‘[W]hile women are obviously well-placed to fill the gap, and are unquestionably capable of doing so, this is perhaps not the best long-term solution. Good bush communities are generally a result of tireless, voluntary work by women. Increasing their involvement in farm work will mean losing them from this community work’ (Harris 2008).

In the final section of this chapter we consider the women’s career development model proposed by O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) in making sense of the women’s stories.

5.2 Interviews with ‘successful’ women leaders

The RWAC was created in 1999, with Cathy McGowan appointed as the first Chair (1999-2001). With three-year terms, the Council has been reappointed twice since then. The second (2002-2005) and third councils (2006- ) have been Chaired by Anne Dunne. The purpose of the Council is to provide independent feedback and advice to the Australian Government from women in regional Australia.

With the change of government in 2007, there was no sitting of RWAC in 2008.

We interviewed eight members of the Council about how they were appointed to RWAC, their experiences on it, how they saw their roles influencing regional policy and how they were received within their communities. The key themes to emerge from their responses were:

• the lack of transparency around the appointment processes
• the importance of connections and of being a ‘known’ brand
• the time the role required, which was time they were out of their business, and away from families
• the supportive environment which this committee represented and the value of mentoring they received through this committee
• the influence the Council had
• the individual benefits they accrued through the visibility of the role and the connections made
• the limited recognition they received locally.

As well, we have drawn on a presentation by Joanne Grainger who was a speaker at the Mungindi Women’s Forum (11 September 2008). The focus of her presentation was the sharing of her ‘story’; how she had managed to access her grower association at a local level, and then navigate the various levels to now be the Chair of Cotton Australia and the only woman Council member of the National Farmers Federation (2007/2008).
5.2.1 Lack of transparency around the appointment processes

There was general consensus among the women on RWAC that the processes for their appointments were not transparent. None of the women were able to say, definitively, how they had been appointed. While many assumed they had been appointed because they had recently attracted some state or national recognition (which relates to being a known brand, see below) they acknowledged that the processes by which they were appointed were not apparent to them.

This point will be returned to later as the ambiguity about what is required to be invited to such formal leadership roles is one of the issues raised by the nascent leaders as to why they haven’t pursued formal leadership roles more actively.

Returning to the response of the RWAC women. One noted:

‘I am yet to find very many committees at a federal or state level where it’s really transparent as to why your name is suddenly one of the suggested ones on a list.’

This was echoed by others’ responses:

‘because nobody’s ever actually explained how I came to be there … I received a phone call and was invited to be on it’

‘I was always perplexed by that...”

Another one said she had followed up with the Chair, asking her:

‘“How did I get here?” And the reason I asked is because we wanted to see transparent and open processes for appointment of people to boards and we couldn’t find one for ours. She said, “I don’t know and no one’s going to tell you”.

This lack of transparency around appointment processes resonates with findings from the ARC Linkage project, Regional Boards: Understanding the impact of gender diversity on board performance (Sheridan, Haslam-McKenzie et al. 2008). From the interviews and surveys of women and men board members of state based regional development commissions and boards, it was concluded that:

“The political nature of the appointment process, and the lack of transparency around how board/commission members are selected, is a significant impediment to why there is not more diversity. The selection criteria are not clearly defined, nor are they explicitly seeking to capture diversity; rather they reinforce existing elites. Those people who are already well-connected, with high profiles in their communities, who can commit the time to what are essentially volunteer roles, are those who are most likely to be appointed to the boards/commissions. Men and women have been able to meet these criteria, although it does seem that for women the bar is a bit higher, with their competence not being assumed so readily.” (Sheridan, Haslam-McKenzie et al. 2008: 16).

This is not to imply that the women believed that any of those appointed were not up to the role. As one woman noted:

‘Every one of them had the ability to put forward what they needed to get across. Certainly they were all able to tell the story that they needed to tell on behalf of the people in their regions.’

In contrast, Joanne Grainger perceived her trajectory to the role as Chair of Cotton Australia as more transparent, as she became involved through her local her grower association, where elections are held through the various levels:
'There was an opportunity to become involved in the local grower association and I brought a lot of things to it that men couldn’t. I then applied to be a Director of Cotton Australia as it was the only way to get off the local association.'

Her use of humour here to frame how she then moved through the different levels of the association typically downplays her own role in preparing for this. The work of Pini (2008) and Alston (2000) has demonstrated how difficult women have found it to be elected through the ranks of grower associations.

5.2.2 Importance of being a ‘known’ brand

All of the interviewees assumed their high profile had been instrumental in their appointment to RWAC. One woman had won a national award and she noted:

‘I don’t know exactly what got me onto RWAC, but I’m assuming [the award]… would have been the catalyst for them to have a look at me … at where I’ve been and what I’ve done’.

One member recounted her history of being involved with council, the region’s area consultative committee and chairing the regional development authority in her local area. She noted that the then Minister for Transport and Regional Services was her local member.

‘I’m assuming that perhaps he may have put my name forward’.

Another attributed her membership to a series of events in which she had participated, including speaking at one of the Women on the Move Forums, which included the then Chair of RWAC, while others were about reports she had done detailing women on farms. She noted:

‘… after that I got a phone call saying “you’ve been nominated, would you be prepared to participate?” Now those events are quite disparate in time but when I try to work out how on earth did I get there, that seemed to be the only way I could work it out.’

This finding is not unlike the experiences of corporate women who have been appointed to boards, where they report that it is not only their knowledge, but also their contacts, and being a ‘known brand’, that facilitates entry (Sheridan 2002). From other work in the corporate sector, it was found that significantly more women than men attribute their appointments to their high visibility (Sheridan and Milgate 2003). In practical terms, as one of the RWAC members noted, this means:

‘You have to be noticed by someone. That’s the main thing.’

5.2.3 Time commitments of role

An issue that was raised by the younger women interviewed, concerned the time commitment their participation involved. This issue was also one of the five factors identified by Pini (2002) in her analysis of the survey responses from women explaining their limited involvement in Canegrowers.

In the interviews with the RWAC members, this was expressed in two ways – costs to their organisations, and costs to their families.

With respect to costs to organisations, the following two quotes exemplify the sorts of issues facing women employed full-time in other roles, balancing the demands of RWAC:

‘I would like to continue to be involved in this … all the debate and discussion and idea generation but it is certainly a challenge for my organisation to support … support my time

*Canegrowers is the peak representative body for Australian sugarcane growers.*
away because the remuneration … the sitting fees are generally inadequate, they don’t cover
the time that you actually dedicate to the job. They don’t even cover your travel time really;
they just cover the time that you’re sitting and meeting. So financially it’s something that you
might not necessarily always be able to afford to do.’

‘There was probably a 20-day commitment in total, with a lot of reading etc. which you can do
on planes etc. and they were very good at paying … they paid a sitting fee which I was told
was quite good, was higher than any other women’s council in Australia, but it still didn’t
cover not being at work. It was good and they paid for your flights which was good. So the
main issue was really just being away from your business or your work or whatever you were
doing for a number of days at a time.’

In considering the opportunity costs to her participation, another noted that the ‘daily rate government
can offer on advisory committees is a third of my daily rate’. She would not consider further
government committees because of this.

With respect to the costs to families, these were not reported by the individuals with small children
themselves, but raised by women whose children were now older, but who could see the difficulties
women with younger children faced attending meetings. The sharing of the family responsibilities
between a younger woman and her partner was noted admiringly by one of her colleagues. For
example:

‘Well, luckily I was past the tiny children stage but if you were there … [a member] bought her
babies with her and her husband looked after them and that was fantastic. They really had to
commit to quite a large number of days and full-on work every time parliament sat and then do
phone links between meetings and then attend other forums between meetings’.

The hidden costs of such participation were recognised by Alston (2000) in her research into women’s
representation in leadership positions in agricultural organisations, and they continue to factor into the
decision-making as to whether to accept an appointment. For the RWAC participants, they determined
the benefits outweighed the costs.

Alston’s caution that ‘this may be a deterrent for many able rural women and men who do not have the
means to put themselves forward for representative work’ (2000: 113) is timely to heed, as the primary
reason why the nascent women leaders reported for not seeking out formal leadership positions was
time.

5.2.4 Supportive environment and mentoring

A key theme to emerge from each of the interviews with RWAC participants was the supportive
environment which it offered. Unlike the exclusionary cultures of agricultural organisations that
Alston’s work revealed (Alston 2000), where sexual harassment continued, and women felt isolated,
reinforced by Pini in her analysis of women’s experiences in agricultural organisations (Pini 2005a)
and local government (Pini 2005c), these women were all highly complementary of the RWAC
culture.

‘It was a wonderful council – and we hope still is a wonderful council. It really was a very
uplifting experience and very, very interesting and we had such direct contact to our leading
ministers in the Australian government.’

‘It’s a really comfortable and well-supported environment in which to learn what the rules of
engagement were because you often step into those things and you have no ideas what to say
or do. But the women around the table were terribly supportive and really wanted you to do
well and backed you up with positive comments and support.’

‘Even though I’ve only known these women 18 months, I miss them terribly when we don’t
see each other every three months. We email each other whenever something happens in our
lives, we all email each other and then back come the congratulations…’
The relationships developed through their Council membership were seen to be highly beneficial, particularly from a mentoring perspective. A number of examples were given where the women described how they had sought advice from their fellow members.

‘When I was asked you know to be on the [X] Committee, I actually rang [the chair of RWAC] and had a talk to her about how to bring it up with my organisation, how to convince them to allow me to have the time, and also to get her feedback on whether or not she thought that I would be … you know would actually contribute to that … and she was really good at giving me that positive feedback about you know conceptual fields and yes you’d be fine in fitting into the role, but also on talking with me about how to bring it up with my organisation and with my chairman to get him onside and what to say and what not to say.’

Another compared her experiences on RWAC with her other board experiences. She described how she has observed that:

‘women get to a certain point and then it stops for them. And I now clearly see why it stops … because the behaviour is disgraceful of some of the board members … there’s so much powerbase stuff there …’

In contrast, she described how at RWAC:

‘… the women around that table, no one was there for their own power. So they were there to share the power and just get into it.’

It may be pertinent to keep in mind here, though, that the powerbase of such a Committee, being an Advisory Committee, with no direct staffing or budget responsibilities (although it could access some significant funds), is fairly thin. The role it played in influencing policy is interesting to consider.

5.2.5 Influencing policy

In many ways, the appointment of the first RWAC in 1999 and its continuation was contrary to the gender mainstreaming approach taken within government departments. In its advisory capacity to the Deputy Prime Minister, with its focus on women representing women in regional Australia, the Council is somewhat of an anomaly as it was not seeking to obfuscate women.

That said, several of the women interviewed noted that, how much they were consulted, depended upon the interests and willingness of the person who was Deputy Prime Minister at the time. Some consulted and enacted the advice provided more than others. It was also apparent that some of these men valued women’s issues and unique perspective on regional Australia more than others.

While not well resourced, all the women interviewed claimed it did have direct access to policy making. Their responses indicate that Examples were given where recommendations had been made to the Deputy Prime Minister, and they were enacted.

‘With telecommunications and child care specifically, I know that we’d communicated and presented to him during a time when he was making various decisions. So it was amazing to be able to see the feedback we’d presented to him in press releases in the following weeks. I was, not actually humbled, but a little in awe that we actually did have that much influence.’

‘We were answerable to the Deputy Prime Minister. The format was that he would give us two topics to research prior to the meeting and we would then use our networks to gather information and opinions in relation to those topics and feed back to him.’

‘… the first two topics we presented to him [Deputy PM] on the drought and single desk and wheat marketing arrangements. They weren’t traditionally women’s issues alone, they were rural issues … they were topics that really engaged him. And these topics are usually set by his office … which were obviously ones that tickled his fancy; that were things he was needing some feedback on and then we would also add other things to it.’
Without wanting to be too critical, this description does raise some issues in our minds about the process. While it was framed as a means by which issues facing regional Australia could be raised, it seems there may have been more direction exercised about what government wanted to be informed about, than it being genuinely open to any of the matters exercising regional women. Having to stick to the ‘rules’ of play, seems evident from this comment:

‘It was more trying to stick to topics or issues that he’d be quite happy to listen, rather than bringing up an issue that we knew, or the Chair thought, was a bit celestial and we didn’t have enough background on it, or it wasn’t the right political time to be raising it.’

5.2.6 Individual benefits

There were also benefits accruing to these women as members of RWAC. Not only did they gain through their relationships, which they all acknowledged, they also learned more about the workings of government and influence, and their increased visibility gave them opportunities more broadly.

‘That process, governance issues, just the ability to practice conceptual thinking, strategy and working through here’s the problem, here’s some opportunities and then thinking about possible solutions at that much bigger scale.’

‘I learned a lot about government bureaucracy and how difficult it is to get decisions made in federal government. I learned that there aren’t transparent and open processes, which I knew I guess so that just re-confirmed that. And that it is about who knows who and (pause) and how well they’re engaged with one another.’

‘And there have been benefits in my professional development.’

‘A number of our women have had appointments as a result of RWAC’.

The benefits reported by members of RWAC, resonated with those experienced by the elected members of the Farmers Union, albeit to a lesser degree, which included ‘access to new forms of social and cultural capital as these men had access to international and national travel, stayed in quality accommodation and met with senior government, business and industry leaders’ (Pini 2008: 78).

Through her roles in her local grower association, and community activities, Joanne Grainger was successful in gaining a scholarship to the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) course, which she believed was very valuable.

‘I received a scholarship to the AICD course. The nomination required me to reflect on my experiences, which was authenticating to me that what I’d done was worthwhile. This does help your self worth. Assessing needs and weaknesses and finding the opportunity to address them are really important.’

She further explained her involvement in leadership roles as a result of her own agency. As she explains it, she puts her hand up.

‘I continue to put my hand up for things … I enjoy the activities around the leadership role.’

5.2.7 Infallibility not required

One of the interesting themes to emerge from the RWAC responses, and Joanne Grainger’s presentation, was the acknowledgment by the women that they weren’t the expert at everything. There were some areas they felt able to contribute effectively, while other areas were beyond their immediate experience or knowledge. Working as a team on the council allowed them to articulate their different strengths.
‘I knew absolutely nothing about wheat or the Australian Wheat Board so I wasn’t able to have any input into that. And also childcare was one that I’d never had an issue with, because my children are grown up. I had never experienced difficulty with childcare and I’d never utilised childcare as such. So, I wasn’t really able to have input into those and yet there were things like water and telecommunications where I had some fairly useful input into.’

Mentors can play an important role in taking the mystique out of positions that may seem out of reach. There is considerable research demonstrating the valuable role mentors can play in enhancing the opportunities for women to advance into more senior positions (O’Neill 2002; de Vries, Webb et al. 2007).

The evidence for the benefits of formal mentoring programs for women is now well established (Ragins, Townsend et al. 1998). For younger women, the Lucy Mentoring Program developed by the NSW Office for Women, and now running across six universities in NSW has provided opportunities for final year students in business, economics, accounting and law programs to be mentored by working professionals.

The Lucy program was available to students at the University of New England for the first time in 2008. The focus of ‘Lucy’ as implemented at UNE was to enhance women graduates’ understanding of the professional and leadership opportunities available to them in regional contexts. The benefits the young women participating recounted, point to the importance of learning how things work. Their mentors were able to take the mystique out of the roles they were observing and gave them a sense of their own capacity to make a difference.

5.3 Insights from women not (yet) in visible leadership roles

For those women who are not in visible leadership roles, there were some interesting themes to emerge from their responses, which reinforced the findings from other studies as to the barriers women face. In responding to the request to describe one barrier that would need to be removed for them to take on more visible leadership roles, the most common response was time\(^7\).

In exploring the issue of time further in the conversations with the respondents, there was a clear message that the common catch cry of the ‘skills shortage’ has an immediate impact on their time. With limited labour to assist on farms now, the costs are being felt in terms of participating in off-farm activities, especially if they are not paid.

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<th>Table 5.3.1 Barriers to visible leadership roles</th>
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\(^7\) The full set of responses is available from the authors.
As Emily Harris notes in her recent reflection on the concerns of women interviewed in north west NSW, ‘for many families the Sunday tennis days at the neighbours, are a thing of the past. Today’s farmers often work seven days a week. Many are running highly intricate businesses, which require endless paperwork, endless adherence to government regulations, endless “tickets” to legally enable workers to operate machinery, and endless OH&S requirements’ (Harris, 2008, unpublished).

That many women lacked the confidence to take on the roles reflects a theme identified in Missed Opportunities and may be understood with respect to the common perception that you need to have physical experience on the farm to be able to contribute to leadership within the associations. Pini’s work with Canegrowers highlights the prevalence of the view that women’s experiences of farm work are not valued.

Jacinta: ‘As far as the Farmers’ Union goes I feel as though for a woman to be in it they have to be actively involved in the field and everything in the field work … I do all the bookwork. Really, probably nothing goes on in the farm I don’t know about, but I would never feel that I was a candidate for leadership because I think you have to actually be out and experience it.’ (Pini 2008, p. 75)

As Pini points out, there is no obvious correlation between being good with a tractor, or getting your hands dirty, and leadership skills. ‘The conflation of manager with farmer is thus powerful in regulating who can be a leader/manager in the Farmers Union and who cannot’. (Pini 2008, p. 75)

5.4 Women’s career development phases

In making sense of the successful and nascent women leaders’ responses, it is useful to consider the model of women’s career development proposed by O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005). From their study of women career experiences over the life course, they identified a three-phase, age-linked model:

- the idealistic achievement phase
- the pragmatic endurance phase
- the reinventive contribution phase.

The application of this model to the context in which regional women work is insightful, as it offers opportunities to reflect on how to work with the reality of women’s lives and careers in regional Australia.

The idealistic achievement phase is generally linked to early career women (ages 24-35), who see themselves as being in charge of their careers and able to take strategic steps to ensure career progress.

The pragmatic endurance phase is generally related to mid-career (ages 36-45), where women are doing what it takes to get it done, as they manage multiple responsibilities (work, home, community).

The final phase, related to advanced career (ages 46-60), they called reinventive contribution, as women reconceptualise and reclaim their careers as ‘opportunities to contribute and to be of service to others without losing sight of themselves in the process’ (O’Neil and Bilimoria 2005, p. 184).

The women’s stories reported in this chapter suggested they endured the change of focus for their work related activities (i.e. their careers), and saw this as a matter of necessity because of the location and lack of domestic support services that may be available to their city counterparts to help manage the work-family balance.

Their location also affected their careers as their lives had become a mixture of paid-work related activities and non-paid community services, spanning as they did the private and public domains, operating in a ‘space of betweenness’. Their activities were, however, vital to the ongoing robustness
of their communities as can be seen by the WiSER modeling which found 49 per cent of the value of output in farming communities was through women’s paid and unpaid work.

For a number of the women, the intersection between the endurance phase and their reinvention phase was brought into relief with their children leaving home. One very able woman in her late 40s who had raised four children, been active in the family business and had overseen a series of successful local events, recounted how she had lately realised it was her time now:

‘I said to [friend], was I asleep? I sort of felt like I woke up, and thought what about me? What am I going to do?’

There was a real sense of excitement for some of these women as they saw themselves now able to contribute and be of service to others. One woman reflecting on the options for her ‘career’ now, how she could reinvent herself, commented that:

‘I do want to be on the board of directors, but I want to be on a board of directors on the not for profit because … it’s not about money and it’s not about status. I actually feel like – I’ve said this is a feeling I have very deep inside. I’m in a very privileged position now in my life … so now I feel – I’ve got a lot of energy and I want to give something back.’

This sentiment was one which was common among the women interviewed on regional development boards in Australia (Sheridan, Haslam-McKenzie et al. 2008). These women, most of whom were aged in their fifties and sixties, found their participation on these boards a means for their own careers to be reinvigorated through ‘serving’ their communities. The satisfaction they attained through these roles helped them to reframe their careers, and as the RWAC stories demonstrate, such roles can enable further opportunities to open up.

Further, in heeding the potential for reinventive contribution for women at a time when the traditional male career model suggests is the phase-down stage, agricultural and regional organisations can reap the benefits.

5.5 Conclusion

From the interviews with ‘successful’ women leaders, and those who are contemplating taking a more active role in formal leadership activities, there are some interesting insights into the ‘labyrinth’.

That there continues to be a lack of transparency around the appointment of board positions, even those appointed by government such as RWAC, does not readily enable access for those who are not well connected. It can foster a mystique around what the roles actually entail, whereas those who have ‘made it’, recognise that infallibility is not required.

The unequal division of labour within the household remains a barrier for women’s greater participation in leadership roles in regional and remote Australia, where even if an individual is in a financial position to afford it, domestic support is increasingly difficult to access as labour shortages are endemic in regional and remote communities.

For women whose children are older, there is scope for them to take on a broader range of roles, and many are eager to embrace a ‘creative reinvention’ in their careers.
Chapter 6: The Shire of Ravensthorpe, WA: How Women Experience a Rural Community in Transition

6.1 Introduction

What follows in this chapter is a case study prepared by Robyn Mayes and Fiona Haslam McKenzie of a community in transition, where mining has emerged as a significant industry where traditionally agriculture had dominated.

From our earlier review of women’s patterns of employment in Chapter 3 it is clear that the popular perception of mining offering significant employment opportunities needs to be reconsidered. While we do not claim generalisability, we offer the case of Ravensthorpe in Western Australia – a community in transition – as a site for exploring how women’s opportunities for careers and leadership may be affected by a shift in economic activity within a region.

What is striking from this case is how the women in farming perceive greater opportunities for career development within the mining sector, yet the reality for those women interviewed in the mining industry does not seem to live up to this.

Even within mining there continues to be a sex segregation of tasks. Common to women in both the farming and mining sectors in the case study, and resonating with the stories from the previous chapter, are the constraints for women’s career development related to child care and household responsibilities. These constraints have meant that for those historically involved with agriculture in the region, more men than women can access off-farm work in the mines.

In both industries, we see the traditional gendered division of labour sustained, and neither industry appears to be challenging the gendered norms embedded within their work practices, career opportunities and notions of what experience is required for leadership.

6.2 Background

There are numerous mines that are either planned or are under construction throughout Australia but particularly in Western Australia and Queensland in what have, until now, been regions dominated by broadacre agriculture.

While these mining ventures usually bring new jobs, infrastructure, people and opportunities to their host community, previous work (Mayes 2008; Findlay et al. 2000; Clements et al. 1996) shows that management of the social dimension of economic change is often overlooked and the benefits are therefore substantially compromised. This social dimension informs the scope of economic benefits and environmental impacts, just as it determines the potential for inclusive, vibrant communities in which all residents can thrive.

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8 This case study was prepared in mid to late 2008. It is noted that in late January 2009, BHP Billiton announced that the Ravensthorpe nickel mine would be closed because of the falling nickel price, with an estimated job loss of 1800 workers (http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/21/2471514.htm).

9 A Case Study for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, HCC06-30, prepared by Dr Robyn Mayes and Professor Fiona Haslam McKenzie.
Drawing on comprehensive research undertaken in the Shire of Ravensthorpe on the Southern Coast of Western Australia, this case study will focus on the experiences of two groups of women from a community, that until five years ago was dominated by broadacre agriculture, but now has considerable mining interests operating within the Shire boundaries.

In particular, the work and social experiences of women who are long-time residents of the community are compared with those of women who are recent arrivals, demonstrating the complexity and importance of social dimensions in regional economic development and community management.

The case study begins with contextual information situating this small, isolated rural community. Key demographic and labour force information from three Census is compared showing how the community has changed in key areas after construction commenced of a large residential nickel mine.

Then, drawing on in-depth, face-to-face interviews with women residents of the Shire of Ravensthorpe, the social dimension of community and regional economic change, through the experience of women, is presented.

There are numerous reasons why it is useful to view community change through women’s experiences. Seminal work undertaken by the Minerals Council of Australia (2007) showed that women’s participation in the minerals industry is limited by a number of key structural issues including low levels of part-time work, the industry’s culture of long hours and overwork.

It is not surprising then, that women are less likely to participate in the industry but rather observe and experience the industry and its impact on the community from outside the industry. As Liepins (2000a) explained, there are multiple expressions and meanings of ‘community’ depending upon social collectives which are influenced by length of residency, economic activity, interests, ethnicity and lifestyle. Each have different experiences of the ‘community’ and awareness of social power relations and influence in the area. She found that “the greatest division between groups revolved around socio-economic position and material quality of life” (Liepins 2000a, p. 332).

The Minerals Council of Australia (2007) work found that there was relatively low material quality of life for many women involved in and around mining which is exacerbated by the often temporary nature of many people’s attachment to mining towns (Haslam McKenzie et al. 2008).

### 6.3 The Shire of Ravensthorpe

The Shire of Ravensthorpe, 550 km south-east of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia, covers 13 000 square kilometres of which two thirds has been set aside for National Parks and Nature Reserves (Shire of Ravensthorpe 2005).

The Fitzgerald Coast covers the area from Munglinup to Bremer Bay, (see Figure 6.3.1) on the south coast of Western Australia. It includes the towns of Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun, the beautiful Fitzgerald River National Park and Biosphere, the Ravensthorpe Range and inland bush and farm lands.

Early white settlers came to the area in the late 1860s and established isolated farms and later, there were mining discoveries, including gold and copper, none of which came to much after the initial discoveries, although mines were re-opened from time to time depending on world commodity prices.

Esperance, 160 kilometres east of Ravensthorpe was, and continues to be, the principal port and commercial centre servicing the south eastern region of Western Australia. The town of Ravensthorpe was established in the early 1900s and is 50 kilometres inland from the small coastal settlement of Hopetoun, a favoured holiday destination for many Southern Wheatbelt families.
Agriculture has been the enduring industry and during the boom years of the 1960s and later in the 1970s, there were several major land releases (Shire of Ravensthorpe 2006). For a century, the area was relatively marginal with small, incremental increases in the local population.

Figure 6.3.1 Ravensthorpe Hopetoun District

All of this changed in March 2004 when BHP Billiton approved commencement of the Ravensthorpe Nickel Operation (RNO). Consisting of an open-cut mine and hydrometallurgical process plant the venture has an expected ore-reserve lifespan of twenty-five years (RNO 2008).

Unlike the earlier mining ventures (Shire of Ravensthorpe 2006), this project is the first (and so far only) modern, large-scale mine in the area. Described as Australia’s largest nickel laterite mine and processing plant (Clark 2007), RNO requires an operational workforce of 650 staff (RNO 2008).

BHP Billiton has opted for a residential workforce thus increasing local employment opportunities not only during the construction phase but also throughout the mine’s operational life. Officially opened in May 2008, RNO had at that point undergone plant commissioning processes and begun to ‘ramp up’ nickel production (BHP Billiton 2008). At that time approximately three hundred employees and their families were residing in the Shire of Ravensthorpe and adjoining Shire of Esperance (RNO 2008).

The establishment of this large scale mining investment has meant that the local economy has changed significantly from the established industries of agriculture and fisheries into an area dominated by mining income and the multiplier impact of a mining labour force. Unlike other mining developments however, BHP Billiton intended to rely on local workers for their staff, a move away from the usual fly-in fly-out (FIFO) scenario.

Until the mine’s establishment there was relatively little change in the total labour force but between 2004 and 2006 the local workforce increased by 16 per cent. Interestingly, the unemployment statistic...
remained fairly constant. The mining sector is now the major employer in the Shire (Goldfields-Esperance Economic Perspective DLGRD 2006).

Not surprisingly, in line with general mining workforce trends, the median individual, household and family incomes have increased in Ravensthorpe since the mine was established as shown in Figure 6.3.2 and has surpassed that of Esperance which has always been a more affluent community. As already noted, the company committed to the government of Western Australia that the mine would commit to a residential workforce and real estate values in Ravensthorpe and the picturesque hamlet of Hopetoun quickly escalated as shown in Figure 6.3.3.

Despite the increased demand for housing, the average household size did not change and the average number of people occupying a house in fact declined, indicating that there were more singles and couples coming to the Shire with the mine than families.

**Figure 6.3.2 Median individual, family and household incomes in Shire of Ravensthorpe**

![Median Incomes (weekly)](image)


Demand for housing from mine workers and the Company outstripped supply in Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun causing a real estate bubble and considerable disquiet. The number of people living in caravans and other improvised accommodation trebled in the decade 1996 to 2006.

**Figure 6.3.3 Median rent and housing repayment in the Shire of Ravensthorpe, 1996-2001**

![Housing costs](image)

Landcorp, the trading enterprise established by an Act of Parliament which rezones and develops land on behalf of the State government was called upon to develop large tracts of government land adjacent to the town of Hopetoun. The process of rezoning the land was time consuming and onerous, requiring the involvement and co-ordination of multiple government departments including Native Title, Environment and Conservation, Planning and Infrastructure, Planning Commission, Landgate, Heritage, Water Corporation and the local government authority; none of which were able to co-ordinate their decision-making processes. Delays were exacerbated by skilled labour shortages in all areas.

Census information shows that the demographic descriptors of the Shire changed after construction of the mine began. There were considerably more (37 per cent) men than women in the Shire on Census night and considerably more people reported being born outside Australia than was the case in 2001. It is difficult to assess whether this is due to a high proportion of construction workforce or whether this is indicative of ongoing workforce trends in the Shire of Ravensthorpe.

6.4 Methodology

This case study draws on 19 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with women residents of the Shire of Ravensthorpe undertaken during May 2008. The women interviewed, ranging in age from early-twenties to mid-sixties, represent a diversity of experiences and contributions in relation to the local agricultural and mining industries. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Names and other identifying markers have been withheld to protect the privacy of interviewees.

The interviews were semi-structured around perceptions of roles and opportunities in both the farming and mining industries prominent in the area, focusing on:

- advantages facilitating participation in either or both industries
- constraints on participation
- leadership roles and opportunities.

Of the 19 interviewees, nine are farming women living and working on farms in the area prior to the arrival of RNO. The other ten interviewees are newly-arrived in the Shire directly as a result of connections to the mining industry. These interviewees were residing in the small coastal community of Hopetoun, where the majority of residential mine staff and their families in the Shire live.

The term “farming women” is used here to describe women living on farms, while the term “mining women” is also used comprehensively to include women employed in the mining industry along with those whose partners or other close family members work in the mining industry while they themselves do not. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the women interviewed do not necessarily identify with these categories.

Without intending to homogenise or essentialise these groupings, this case study is thus organised around farming and mining women as separate cohorts in recognition of the ways in which the differing circumstances and contexts of “mining” and “farming” inform the experiences of these women.

It is important to note that four of these women fall into both the farming and mining categories. That is, at the time of interview four of the farming women had been, or were currently, in paid work in the mining industry. Five of the mining women were in paid work directly in the mining industry. Those working in the mining industry were working at the RNO site at Bandalup Hill in Jerdacuttup, 50 km from Hopetoun. The remaining five mining women were not involved in the mining industry. Four were not involved in paid work at all, and one woman had paid work outside both the agricultural and mining industries. Seven of the farming women and six of the mining women had (young) dependent children.
6.4 1 Women’s roles

Domestic roles

The farming women interviewed here are all responsible for the bulk of the housework: shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing, and organising of children.

Of the ten mining women interviewed, eight, whether in paid work or not, also undertake the bulk of the domestic work—again, cleaning, cooking, shopping, washing, organising of children. A further two of the mining interviewees employed a cleaner, but were still responsible for cooking, shopping, washing and organising of children.

Industry roles

The farming women interviewed undertake farm work of the same nature and scope as other farming women documented elsewhere in this report. Farm-related as performed by the women interviewed here encompasses acting as “gofers” (Ghorayshi 1989), feeding animals, doing tractor work, and attending to much of the bookwork including GST requirements. This work is unpaid.

Those farming women in this cohort who also have in the past worked or are currently working in the Ravensthorpe-based mining industry are engaged in a limited range of roles, namely administration, catering and cleaning. In one farming interviewee’s estimate 90 per cent of the farming women who took up mining employment during the construction phase worked for catering and cleaning companies.

Anecdotal evidence regarding the activities of other local agricultural women who also have work in the mining sector, suggests that these roles are representative of farming women’s employment in the local mining industry. This is consistent with recent findings that women in the Australian minerals industry are mainly employed in administrative and clerical positions and remain under-represented in managerial and supervisory areas (CSRM 2006). As one farming woman pointed out, the mine presents farming women with a “whole new range of employment opportunities other than the more traditional nursing and teaching” roles.

The roles of the five mining women in paid work in the mining industry span health and safety, security, administration, and ore control with anecdotal evidence of another woman employed as a process engineer. One interviewee commented that there are “definitely more men than women” in the pit area and a few young women in the plant and crushing areas. In her experience at RNO, women were mostly employed in administration. This suggests, firstly, that mining women occupy a broader range of roles than do the local farming women and, secondly, that they too are under-represented in senior roles.

6.4.2 Advantages facilitating participation in mining industry

Women in both the farming and mining groups perceive being local, both in terms of living in the area and of having access to local networks of friends, as an advantage in gaining employment with RNO.

One farming interviewee expressed surprise that her job application for an administration position was successful given that non-local peers (specifically, friends living in Perth) had been consistently unsuccessful. She explicitly attributed her success to being a local resident. Other pre-mine women have described cases where local women have been employed more-or-less on the spot, as it were, as a direct result of being in the right (local) place at the right time. Yet others have found that employed friends or partners are able to provide insider-knowledge about upcoming jobs along with advice concerning the best way to get one’s resume noticed.

One mining interviewee, who gained employment with RNO after moving to Hopetoun as a result of her partner’s employment in the industry, noted that her job was classified “local employment only” which narrowed the field of applicants. There is also a perception among both mining and farming
women that mining women with partners in “powerful” positions in the industry have an advantage not only in knowing what jobs are coming up but also in the receipt of preferential treatment.

6.4.3 Constraints on participation

Interviewees in both the farming and mining groups identified a range of shared and also cohort-specific constraints. Constraints experienced by both mining and farming women include lack of access to formal childcare and inflexible working hours.

Constraints specific to farming women encompass role clashes and a lack of interest in, or ethical rejection of employment with RNO. In each group the identified constraints tend to operate as interlinked barriers rather than as separate issues.

Though farming interviewees in the overall cohort did not explicitly refer to the limited number of positions taken up by pre-mine residents and the difficulties of getting noticed in a global online recruitment system, this is a widely discussed source of tension in the broader community (Mayes 2008). The relatively small number of pre-mine locals employed by BHP Billiton on the RNO site, 70 in a workforce of 650, is explained as a local absence of appropriate skill sets (BHP Billiton 2008).

The level of expected formal qualifications held by mining industry professionals is increasing (CBSR 2005) and this project is no exception in its requirement for highly-trained staff. For farming women without mining backgrounds, the lack of relevant education and industry experience constitutes a restriction in terms of the areas of participation, (these women are likely to be confined to non-professional, non-career positions), compounded by lack of access to and time for training in this area. This would also be true, at least in part, for many women accompanying mining partners.

6.4.4 Constraints for farming women

Childcare

For the farming women, in particular those with small children, lack of access to formal childcare facilities presents a significant ongoing barrier to taking up paid work either directly or indirectly available as a result of the mine’s arrival and subsequent population growth. The majority of the farming women when asked about the opportunities arising from having RNO in the area, were quick to point out this lack.

Paid childcare, as many of the women also emphasised, is not only scarce but what is available is too far away from them to be of use. The day care centre operating from early 2008 from a temporary site in Hopetoun and soon to be relocated to a building alongside the Hopetoun Primary School is the first of its kind in the Shire.

Though family day care and babysitting services are available locally they cater for a very limited number of children and are located in townships 50 km and further from many farms. Many of the interviewees noted that the Hopetoun-based centre was for BHP Billiton employees and that women whose partners were also employed at the mine would be given first priority.

Again, even once the centre is fully operational and able to accommodate larger numbers of children including those from the broader community, distance will remain a problem. While the mine is close to many farms, this day care arrangement could involve a round-trip for farming women with children seeking employment on the mine site in the vicinity of 200 km per day.

Even if these women were to take their children to Hopetoun and then take the RNO bus to and from the mine site, this travel would still amount to 100 km per day, just as it would make the already long working day—day shifts for residential staff at May 2008 had just been reduced from 10 to 9 hours, with other arrangements calling for 10- and 12-hour shifts – even longer.
Lack of flexible work hours

Closely related to the difficulties in arranging childcare is the absence of “child-friendly” work hours. In the construction stage many local farming women—in some interviewees’ estimations up to 20 per cent of their peers—worked in the associated catering industry. As ‘K’ explained it, this was possible because the women:

‘… were able to play around with the [work] roster a bit.’

This flexibility allowed women to work around children’s school hours, for example, thus reducing the need for formal childcare.

However, as the mine moved into the operational stage, the nature of employment also changed.

‘These flexible rosters just aren’t there. If they were I might think about going and trying to get an administration job or something during school hours.’ (K)

As another farming woman, ‘G,’ noted:

‘There are no split shifts. The ladies I know who are working at the mine are doing long hours.’

These long hours make it difficult to arrange sharing of the childcare with other local women, just as these conditions create often insurmountable role clashes with women’s farm duties. Some flexibility of working hours may be possible once employed—there is anecdotal evidence that this has occurred to very limited extent and at the discretion of individual bosses.

Inflexible working hours remains an exclusionary barrier to gaining employment in the first instance. This too is a broader phenomenon: lack of flexible work arrangements and the difficulties of maintaining family life are widely reported negative aspects of the industry particularly for women with children (CBSR 2005; CSRM 2006).

Role clashes

Fitting in additional work to their already busy farm schedules is difficult, if not impossible to sustain, for the majority of the farm women interviewed here many of whom are expected to, and of necessity must, continue in their usual on-farm roles. As ‘D’ expresses this:

‘If you go off to work then you’ve still got to do everything when you get back home and that can create a huge stress.’

For many of those interviewed this is a limiting initial barrier. ‘F’ says she was very tempted to seek employment at the mine but in reality had to realise that:

‘I’ve got enough to do here so I’d better stay here.’

This situation is exacerbated by the ongoing skill shortage and the additional drain on the local labour force brought about by the arrival of lucrative and long-term mining opportunities in the area. Competition with the mine for labour has meant ongoing difficulties attracting farm labour and the unfilled gaps inevitably fall to farming women and children in the area to fill (Mayes 2007).

Attempting to do both jobs, paid employment in the mining industry and, usually unpaid, farm work, creates significant stresses so that some who have attempted this have since given up off-farm/mine work. As ‘K’ bluntly put it:

‘I couldn’t work on the mine and do everything else that I had to do here as well. It was too much.’
Interviewees also referred to many friends who had tried to do both jobs and found themselves worn out and made unhappy by it.

As was reported ten years prior (Elix & Lambert 1998; Haslam McKenzie 1998) it is possible for men to work off farm precisely because women take over additional tasks in the day to day running of the farm. Male farmers appear to be seeking, and have available to them, shift work rather than day work positions. For example some shift workers at the time of field work were on a 12-hour day, 14 days on and 7 days off roster.

Farming men on this roster are able to undertake many of their traditional farming tasks between shifts. It does not appear that men are taking on women’s tasks in order to facilitate women’s employment in the local mining industry. This may be due to imbalances in earning power.

During interviews it became clear that many of the farming men saw the women’s off-farm work as providing “pin money” rather than as a substantial contribution. On the other hand men’s off farm work was seen as of significant benefit to the long-term sustainability of the farm.

Mine jobs unattractive and/or ethically problematical

A further barrier articulated by farming women centres around the lifestyle associated with mining. As many women pointed out, and as is well-supported in the literature (Alston 1995; Elix & Lambert 1998; Gray & Lawrence 2001; Haslam McKenzie & Lord 2001) farming is seen as more than a job, as a specific highly valued lifestyle. As ‘J,’ explaining why she wasn’t interested in working at the mine, made it clear:

‘I just don’t think I’d like the lifestyle and I would hate it if my partner worked on the mine.’

Closely related to this is a sense of opposition in terms of local politics and also broader ideological perspectives:

‘I don’t agree with what they do.’ (G)

According to ‘K’, few local farming people work at the mine because:

“It’s basically the community against the mine. And you can’t be against the mine and go there and get a job can you?”

There is also evidence of social pressure – both ‘C’ and ‘K’ referred to community resistance to farming women working on the mine as encoded in local conversations around negative perceptions of complicity with the mine (as unwelcome intruder in the farming community).

In a similar vein, two interviewees suggested there was a sense in the farming community at large, particularly in male circles, that the mine was a threat to current domestic relationships.

6.4.5 Constraints for mining women

Childcare

Access to childcare services is certainly a serious concern for mining women with children. Those offered employment with BHP Billiton now have access to a child care service close by in Hopetoun where the majority of BHP Billiton staff and families reside. Those mining women interviewed here who are in paid work and with children requiring care make use of this service.

Even so, lack of childcare remains an issue for many mining women who would seek non-mining-industry work. Anecdotal evidence from several interviewees suggests that in a small number of cases ‘stay-at-home’ husbands undertake childcare responsibilities enabling women to take up mine work.
Lack of flexible work hours

The long hours and lack of part-time work make mining industry employment less attractive for women who don’t want to be away from family for extended periods, and for women who find it stressful placing their children in long day care. The following comments from ‘B’ and ‘S’ typify these positions:

‘I don’t want to leave my children in care. It’s the emotional thing as well. You’re leaving your baby with somebody else. Somebody else is going to feed them the food that makes them go.’ (B)

‘I’d like to work if something comes up but I don’t want to be working from 7.00am to 5.00pm. But if I can work you know a day or a half day.’ (S)

This is particularly important for women who have accompanied spouses to Hopetoun in order to minimise family separation. After all, as ‘S’ pointed out:

‘We wanted to be residential. We didn’t want to do the fly in fly out with little kids.’

While mining women do not emphasise a role clash in terms of juggling two jobs (off-farm mining work and ongoing farm commitments), those with children in particular note that it is difficult combining long hours and domestic work.

‘Basically on your day off, it sounds terrible, you clean house and catch up with housework. On a Sunday afternoon you cook your meals and freeze a whole lot of them in case you come home and don’t feel like starting a meal from scratch. With kids obviously you can’t eat at 8pm.’ (N)

Assumptions made about women which may shut them out of participation

Taken collectively, these discussions with local women suggest that there may well be an industry assumption that high pay rates alone are sufficient incentive for both farming and mining women to find a way around the barriers discussed above.

There may exist a corollary assumption that relatively high salaries for male positions make it unnecessary for mining women to take on paid work, just as there is evidence of ongoing dependence on women’s unpaid labour to enable partners to meet the long hours required by the industry as documented by Rhodes (2005).

A further likely implicit assumption is that the opportunities and barriers are the same for all women whether from mining or farming backgrounds. On the other hand, children are broadly recognised as a differentiating factor.

6.4.6 Impact on community roles

Farming women

Community work and attendant strong sense of community are recognised as crucial aspects of rural living (Haslam McKenzie 1999). Farming women interviewees perceive a decline in community work and participation, particularly in sporting clubs, as a result of pressures from increasing farm commitments, in part due to local labour shortages, and of mine employment.

The women currently employed in the mining industry, and those with partners working on the mine, reported a reduction in their participation in voluntary community work. This decline is tempered by an acknowledgement that as children grow older, the level and type of community involvement changes.
This change may well play a part in the reductions noted. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that in smaller communities the loss of a small number of active community members can make a significant difference.

‘… those working on the mine are no longer available to do community work, to come to Busy Bees.’ (D)

‘I did notice that because women had work there [in the mining industry], that possibly the community sorts of things aren’t as strong as they were a couple of years ago.’ (F)

**Mining Women**

Mining women also report a decline in their own community roles as a direct result of long hours of employment and also shift work cycles. At the same time, anecdotal evidence was offered regarding a number of other women who had moved away from previous community commitments upon taking up employment in the mining and related industries.

‘I was involved with [X] last year. I’ve given up now because I’m working.’ (N)

‘I’d love to do community work but I don’t. I could do something on my week off but community groups need someone who can be there every day of the week.’ (B)

**Young women**

Young women are here defined as between 18 years (the minimum age for working in the mining industry) and mid-twenties. This section summarises the experiences and perceptions of the two interviewees, one with mining industry experience and one without, who fall into this category, showing both divergences and similarities to other interviewees.

While two interviewees is not representative, their experiences nonetheless provide insight to the tensions of two large industry sectors in a small community.

For the young woman with mining industry experience, the arrival of the mine had provided her with an opportunity to return to the area and to make (relatively) good money. Importantly though;

‘I actually didn’t want to come back but I had no money.’ (M)

The other interviewee expressed a lack of interest in working in the mining industry and felt that other young women in the area were similarly disinterested in a mining industry lifestyle.

Neither interviewees see or desire long-term employment in the industry. Anecdotal evidence indicates that other young women in the area have also worked in the industry for a period in order to make some money before moving on to other places and enterprises.

The value of this opportunity as enabling other achievements, however, should not be underestimated just as the pragmatics of ‘getting ahead’ is well noted in the literature as an important motivation for many workers in the mining industry.

In addition, some interviewees from the farming cohort saw the mining industry as a means for daughters (and sons) to return to the region for a while, just as others related stories of young women who had returned or were able to stay in the region (though not indefinitely). As ‘F’, a farming woman, explained:

‘Older children are eyeing that mine off and thinking, “Oh great. There might be a job there for us”’. 
6.4.7 Opportunities for leadership in agriculture

Though women are taking on more of the farming work there is no evidence in this cohort of parallel opportunities for taking up leadership roles. The well-documented (Shortall 1992; Alston 1997; Alston 1998; Elix & Lambert 1998; Liepins 2000; Pini 2005) masculine traits of the agricultural industry appear to still prevail.

For many of the women interviewed here who found themselves undertaking more farm duties this did not include a greater role in decision making or a higher profile in traditionally male areas of farming practice; these women did not perceive any change in their status. Those who had taken on these traditionally masculine tasks, however, also did not report increased opportunities for leadership. Even though she was doing most of the farming tasks, ‘K’ felt that:

‘The men definitely think that I’m just playing. I’m not playing. Oh my God I’m not playing and every time I get a chance I tell them I’m not playing.’

Another interviewee was very explicit about the lack of opportunities for leadership in agriculture. When asked to think generally about whether women are taking on more leadership roles, ‘E’ responded:

‘I don’t think you can really say that …’

Further, as ‘D’ argues, many farming men are not interested in mining work thus reducing the potential for women to step into their roles.

‘I don’t see my husband working up at the mine. He’s too busy being a farmer and doing what he’s best at.’

6.4.8 Opportunities for leadership in mining

The responses from the ‘mining’ women regarding leadership opportunities are somewhat ambiguous. Many felt that this was not relevant for them as they were not interested in developing a career or even remaining in the industry in the long-term. The following responses encapsulate this position:

‘I’m only in it for the money. I’m not in it for career.’ (B)

‘I’m not interested in taking a leadership role.’ (P)

On the other hand, several interviews felt there was potential though were somewhat reserved in their judgement. For example, ‘A’ felt there was potential but was struggling with how to reconcile the industry and children, just as she expressed concerns about whose career—hers or her partner’s—would then take precedence. Though she is very interested in pursuing a career in the industry, ‘A’ is aware of a need to:

‘… make a decision whether I want to have a family or stay in this industry.’

6.4.9 Women’s observations

A substantial number of farming women (seven out of the nine interviewed) and a smaller group within the mining cohort (three out of the ten interviewed) saw the local mining industry as significantly broadening the range of options for local women. The farming women talked of this in relation to gaining employment skills and experience, in particular outside the more traditional roles of teacher and nurse; improving self-confidence; and achieving greater personal independence.

For ‘M’ it was a chance to get her foot in the door:
‘And once you’ve got your foot in the door in that sort of industry [mining] you’re never really going to find it hard to get a good job.’

‘F’ was tempted to seek work on the mine as a way to:

‘… do something different. Get some other skills’

‘C’ noted a profound change in her personal position:

‘My outlook on life changed once I started earning my own money and had a bit of independence.’

Other farming women talked specifically about the pleasures of having a challenge, and of exposure to new viewpoints.

The mining women also spoke of opportunities for independence. For ‘N’ not having employment contributed to a sense of being “trapped” and feeling “down.” Having a job made a big difference:

‘It’s incredible how your self confidence improves. I’m so much more positive about everything just by going to work.’

As ‘N’s’ comment suggests, lack of access to paid employment is debilitating. This was borne out by comments from other mining women who also felt a loss of self-confidence and status when they were unable to gain suitable employment in the area.

6.5 Conclusion

Roles, Opportunities and Constraints

The women interviewed here, whether in the farming or mining group, and including those in full-time paid employment, take responsibility for and perform the large majority of domestic tasks. Mining roles encompass service industry positions in catering and cleaning (for the majority of farming women in this cohort), and administration (for some of the farming women and also the mining women), and less senior positions in health and safety, security, and ore control (for the mining women alone).

Interviewees noted being local, as in living in the area and having networks of friends, is their prime advantage in gaining work. It would seem that mining women have a greater advantage in terms of information and access to support through influential partners with mine employment. Some RNO positions are advertised as restricted to local residents.

Mining women may also have an advantage in terms of privileged access to limited formal childcare places. Living in Hopetoun, as opposed to outlying farms, is also a relative advantage in that a formal childcare service and RNO work-bus route are close by.

Opportunities for women to find paid work in the farming industry appear to be non-existent.

Opportunities for gaining work in the mining industry appear to be curtailed by traditional barriers experienced by women in general; and in particular by those in the mining industry at large (see Minerals Council of Australia 2008).

Though lack of childcare services and flexible working hours appears as a constraining factor for both groups these issues operate in different ways and to varying extents for each group. The barriers identified here are cumulative in that more than one barrier is experienced by a given individual. For example, for many farming women the key, interlinked, issues are lack of access to formal childcare services (a situation unlikely to change given their geographical isolation), exacerbated by the lack of
flexible and part-time working arrangements in the local mining industry, which in turn makes it very
difficult if not impossible to meet not only existing domestic but also farm work commitments.

For mining women in Hopetoun, though access to formal childcare is available, the inflexible and long
working hours make employment in the mining industry unattractive, especially when partners are also
working in the industry, because of the length of the time children need to be in care and the pressures
of meeting domestic commitments. In addition, the farming women note a level of community
disapproval of the mine (see Mayes 2008 for further details) and an associated moral dilemma in
seeking work there.

Barring this last constraint, these barriers are well noted in the literature, just as ABS (2008) statistics
show that male, full-time positions constitute the majority of jobs emerging from the mining boom.

Farming and mining women noted a reduction in community and volunteer work as a direct result of
taking up employment in the mining industry, due to both the long hours required and also the shift
work cycles.

The non-representative sample of two young women suggests that this group may have an ambivalent
perception of the industry: for one interviewee it presents an opportunity to make some money while
the other interviewee described her complete lack of interest in the mining industry particularly as a
lifestyle. Both these perspectives are supported by anecdotal evidence of the experiences of other
young women in the area.

Opportunities for leadership, as a result of the recent arrival of large-scale mining in the region, in
either the agricultural or mining industry are not reported by the sample of mining and farming women
interviewed here. At the same time, a desire for greater leadership is evident in the farming cohort.
These women however are largely uninterested in a mining career.

Serious involvement in both farming and mining is not seen as sustainable, just as mining industry
work is subordinate to farm interests. Of the mining women, the majority were not pursuing a career
nor were they interested in seeking leadership opportunities. Those few who were career-oriented and
looking to attain a leadership role, expressed concern that this ambition was not compatible with
raising a family, and would then involve a choice between family and career.

Though leadership goals and opportunities in the mining industry were not the focal point for the
majority of women interviewed, the farming group in particular perceived highly-valued opportunities
in the mining industry for developing a broader range of work skills, for raising self-confidence, and
for increasing personal independence.
Bibliography for case study


BHP Billiton (2008). Personal Communication to Robyn Mayes


Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

In the chapters so far, we have employed a variety of views – micro, macro, wide, deep and long – to address the project aims.

Focusing on the **micro** perspective, we reviewed the literature around women’s experiences in rural and regional leadership positions, and interviewed a sample of women who were well placed in rural and regional leadership positions, and those who were just starting to put their ‘toes in’.

From a **macro** perspective, the WiSER modeling has shed light on women’s contributions, both paid and unpaid, to the agricultural sector and our tracking of women’s employment by remoteness category has highlighted the many occupational and industry roles women play in rural and regional communities across Australia.

Taking a **wide** view, we have placed these perspectives in the context of what we know more broadly about the gendering of management and leadership as it relates to the Australian context.

The **deep** view has come through our case study of a community which has undergone significant change in its economic profile, with agriculture representing a lower share of the value of production as mining developed in the region. Through this case study we have sought to uncover some of the deeper issues facing women in their communities and how land use changes impact on their employment opportunities.

And finally, throughout the research process we have reflected on the trends we have seen in women’s representation in leadership in rural and regional leadership, as well as in the management more generally, as we have sought to add a **long** view.

In this, our final chapter, we aim to make sense of these different views in a creative way, providing direction for how to open our thinking to better valuing women’s contributions, avoiding the trap of accepting the current hierarchies as the only way of constituting organisations. We acknowledge the appropriateness of the recommendations from *Missed Opportunities*, but we also recognise they have not been enacted. While they made sense in the late 1990s, they lost their potency in a neo-liberal political climate and the past decade has seen a richer understanding of the gendered nature of the management and leadership roles evolve.

In this context, it has been acknowledged in recent times that men need to be involved in gender-equity reform (Connell and Wood 2005). Men and boys are significant gatekeepers for gender equality because they control most of the resources required to address gender inequality. Although Connell and Wood (2005) point to a considerable history of support for gender equality among men, they also point to significant evidence of men’s and boys’ resistance to change in gender relations. They maintain that there are now many documented examples of the diversity of masculinities and of men’s and boys’ capacity for equality and support for gender reform.

This diversity and support needs to extend to the agriculture sector and communities in regional and remote Australia and the challenge of how this is to come about lies ahead.
7.2 Limitations

As with any study there are limitations associated with the methods employed to explore the research questions. While we have drawn on a range of sources to address the questions framed within the research, these sources are not exhaustive. We are particularly conscious of the absence of issues relating to Indigenous women and leadership.

As well, we recognise we may be criticised for some theoretical ‘slippage’ as we engage with both liberal and radical feminist positions in our recommendations.

7.2.1 Our white subject position

Moreton-Robinson (2000) points to the unspoken normative subject of feminism as white middle class women. In hindsight, we see that throughout this project, we have been complicit in this. While engaging with the literature around women and leadership in regional Australia, we did not interrogate the absence of Indigenous women’s experiences until late in the project. It was not explicit in our terms of reference to do so, and we had failed to notice this. We were not conscious of our racialised subjective position. As a result, we now recognise that our report is limited; it reflects our partial knowledge.

This is an area we believe must be addressed more directly. Moreton-Robinson’s discussion of the importance of the Indigenous woman’s standpoint – ‘informed with meaning grounded in knowledges of different realities from those of white women’ (Moreton-Robinson 2000; p. xvi) – is something we cannot claim to be able to represent. Nor should we.

We respect Huggins (2003, p. 60) declaration that ‘there are no books written by non-Aboriginals that can tell me what it is to Black as it is a fiction and an ethnocentric presumption to do so’. The reflections of Huggins herself (Huggins 2004) about her leadership experiences and the description by Griffin and Houston (2004) of the leadership program for Indigenous women provide some insights which should shape further work in this area.

Clearly there needs to be resources directed to better understanding the experiences of Indigenous women leaders and nascent Indigenous women leaders, to make visible the racist assumptions underpinning notions of leadership within regional and remote Australia.

7.2.2 Tensions between valuing women’s work while recommending how they can navigate the labyrinth

We are also conscious that there is a fundamental tension between valuing what women already do, through quantifying the activities that are currently overlooked in the national accounts (as detailed in the WiSER modeling) while simultaneously arguing for women’s greater representation in formal leadership positions.

Implicit in the call for more women in formal leadership positions is the reality that they wouldn’t then have the time to provide the social glue which is so important for the communities in which they live and work. Much of their unpaid work may be sacrificed if they take up more of the formal leadership roles. That women in regional and remote Australia are grappling with this tension is evident in Harris’s account of the women’s responses to the recommendation that women should fill in the skilled labour shortages evident in regional Australia:

‘[t]he real concern these women have is if they are all ‘trained’ to be farmers or farmers helpers, who will do the charity work, who will run the local show, the local race day? Who will co-ordinate Meals on Wheels, or keep the local CWA Branch alive?’ (Harris, 2008, p. 3).

Our terms of reference for the project were of the liberal feminist ilk. Based on the assumption that women should be given the same opportunities as men to participate in leadership opportunities, we
set out to identify what would need to happen to enable this. In making our recommendations we have straddled both liberal (equality through political and legal reform) and radical (challenging the gendered structures) feminisms, which some may argue is logically inconsistent.

This tension is not unique to our work, but is familiar in much of the policy debate throughout the 1980s with the activities of the femocrats in the Australian public sector, both within the women’s units, but also more widely spread throughout the public sector hierarchy (Maddison and Partridge 2007). The demise of the women’s units has resulted in a silencing of these debates, which we believe has been to the detriment of our social institutions.

Rather than weakening our recommendations, we believe the mixing of the liberal and radical approaches reflects a pragmatic response to the complexity of the issues surrounding women’s representation in leadership.

7.3 Critical and generative recommendations

Recognising the complex spaces of organisations requires more creative thinking about the framing of women’s relative absence from the most senior positions. Following Meyerson and Kolb (2000), the approach we have taken in this report is one that is both critical and generative; critical in that we have, using a gender lens, sought to question the underlying assumptions, values and practices within the context of regional and remote leadership and generative in that this analysis is aimed at revealing possibilities for real transformation.

After a decade of relative neglect of the issue of women’s access to leadership positions from a policy perspective, it is time for it to be placed firmly back on the agenda, with clear accountabilities for change.

While the Missed Opportunities recommendations made sense from a theoretical perspective, their failure to be enacted within the key organisations suggests there was not an ‘absorptive capacity’ within the firms to apply the recommendations. Drawing from the innovation literature, it is clear that for firms to be able to do new things – for instance, to redress their gendered practices and become more inclusive – they need to be able to recognise the value of external information, assimilate it, transform it to be meaningful in their own context and apply it (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Bessant and Tidd 2007).

The constraints women experience accessing formal leadership positions within agricultural organisations are now well established. Drawing attention to this may require more commitment from government to ensure this information is available to the relevant organisations, where greater efforts to assimilate it will need to be evident than was generally the case following the 1998 Missed Opportunities report. With the demise of women’s units within relevant government departments (Sawer 2008), the sites for the active championing of increasing women’s participation in leadership roles disappeared too. Consequently we have seen little attention paid to the various reports that have pointed to this (DoTARS, 2005a; 2005b), and a decline in the commitment to gender equality (Maddison and Partridge 2007). Echoing Leonie Still’s argument (Still 2006 , p. 189) that it was efforts on the part of government, both federal and state, that were largely responsible for the major change programs in the 1980s and early 1990s, we too think it is time for government ‘to become involved again, to lead a ‘new wave’.

One of the few agricultural organisations to appear to take on the findings of Missed Opportunities, and seek to assimilate them in the late 1990s, was the Victorian Farmers Federation. The case study reported in Missed Opportunities Stage 2, suggests there was concerted effort to apply the knowledge generated from the first report to their own organisation, for the purposes of transforming practice. There did appear to be some improvement in the representation of women as a result of this. While the rate of change did not continue at the initial pace, the VFF continues to report some of the higher rates of representation of women in formal leadership positions.
There were few other agricultural organisations that were prepared to attend to the external information so directly, commit to its application and seek transformation. It seems, however, that the VFF have found it difficult to sustain their commitment. Without the ongoing support and attention (both internally and externally), there has been no incentive for the initial successes to continue. We recommend that part of the performance assessment of the leaders of the regional bodies of influence described in Chapter 2, should include commitment to creating more inclusive workplaces.

In drawing together our recommendations we have grouped them into two categories: those which can be influenced through public policy and/or regulations; and those which relate to enhancing the absorptive capacity of the relevant organisations.

7.4 Public policy

7.4.1 Re-establishment of women’s units

As we have seen throughout the earlier chapters, the gender mainstreaming approach adopted by policy makers from the mid-1990s, has not delivered the promised outcomes. It is time to re-establish women’s units within state and federal departments to directly address issues relating to women’s substantive representation (Childs and Krook 2006).

These units will be the vehicles by which accountability about women’s representation in formal leadership positions can be monitored across the states and will be important resources to support the development of the ‘absorptive capacity’ of organisations – they can be the bridge between the external information and its implementation.

Pini, Brown and Ryan (2004), in their review of women-only networks in local government, argue these can be a powerful tool for transformative change. While by themselves women-only networks are not a panacea for change, through providing a supportive space where the individual experiences of discrimination and sexism can be shared, these networks help members to recognise the systemic nature of the gendering within organisations and provide an ongoing reminder of the need for continued resistance to the dominant gendered practices.

While women-only activities may have lost some of their sheen in recent years, justified by the now common refrain that women have ‘made’ it, so they don’t need specific programs or activities, it is time to revive their acceptability, recognising the importance of this as a strategy within a suite of strategies. The statistics provided earlier in this report are not consistent with women having ‘made it’ in regional and remote leadership positions, nor in the corporate sector more widely in Australia. Progress has stalled and it is time for more action to be taken.

Pini et al (2004, p. 291) argue that ‘to achieve the long-term goal of transformation, women’s networks cannot operate in isolation. In the first instance, they should attempt to engage with male dominated networks, and particularly sympathetic leadership within these networks. This is a critical factor if gender issues are not to be sidelined into women’s only spaces’. A critical point to this argument is the recognition of the importance of ‘sympathetic leadership’. Clearly increasing the number of those sympathetic leaders will be vital for change to happen.

A further plank to Pini et al’s (2004) argument is that ‘women’s networks should seek to build alliances with their women’s groups in what Berkelaar (1991, p. 26) labels a ‘network of networks’. This is, of course, difficult given that women are not a homogenous group. There is a need, therefore, for any grouping of women’s networks to give particular attention to questions of difference and diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability’ (Travers et al, 1997).
7.4.2 Routine data collection

The process of updating the Missed Opportunities report was a substantial component of this project. This should not have been the case. In this era of evidence-based policy making, there should be ready access to the information relating to women’s participation in the agricultural industries and other regional roles more broadly.

There needs to be a commitment to the structured collection of data about women in regional and remote locations which has the flexibility to allow women to report their participation in several industry sectors. The current forms of data collection which require the nomination of a single occupation in a single industry, reflect the historical patterns of men’s labour force participation. This is another example of the norms being set by men’s experiences. Women’s patterns of multiple roles in different industries are not able to be captured adequately in the current forms of data collection.

The ABS data collections should be revised in this context, to regularly document public and non-government organisations (NGO) leadership positions with the capacity to record multiple roles. The difference we are suggesting here is recognising that NGO roles are important sites for community leadership, which have often been overlooked in the past, largely because they span the private and the public – the ‘betweenness’. We favour the ABS as the collecting body as it has national coverage and conforms to data standards across the states. If we left it to states to do so, there could be the risk of non-comparable data. It may be that in practice, states can collect it, on the proviso that it be done within ABS definitions and standards.

The importance of the ABS being responsive to the different data requests cannot be underestimated. The impact of mining on regional communities, population distribution and infrastructure and resource consumption has been a neglected area, and the recent requests from WA for this vital information to be collected seem to have been ignored because of budgetary constraints.

As a result, public policy and state and federal resource allocation are poorly informed. This same argument holds for women’s representation and is why we believe it is crucial that routine data collection mapping the sites of their occupational and industry participation be a priority.

7.4.3 Conducting gender analyses

A useful aid for enhancing the absorptive capacity of organisations for change is the very concrete step of conducting gender analyses of these key organisations. The costs to rural women in Australia of the policy shift from focusing on women’s disadvantage to gender mainstreaming has been well documented (Alston 2006). Alston’s analysis highlighted the poor levels of understanding as to what gender mainstreaming actually is and the active resistance to such actions within departments.

Eveline and Bacchi (2005) provide a review of the different approaches taken to gender mainstreaming in Canada and the Netherlands, with an emphasis on understanding gender as a verb. Their analysis leads them to conclude that rather than gender mainstreaming, the focus should be on gender-awareness mainstreaming, with due regard to the context.

In their review of the regional governance structures, Pini et al. (forthcoming) propose a framework which can be employed to make explicit the gendering of governance structures. This framework, reproduced in Figure 7.4.1, could be applied more broadly to rural and regional organisations, if we are to better understand how gender plays out in organisations for the purposes of then countering it.

If there really is the political will to better understand how leadership opportunities are shaped, then such analyses need to be resourced. Alston (2006, p. 144) argues that ‘it is clear that internationally sanctioned accountability measures are needed to hold national governments to their gender-equality commitments’.
We agree in principle, but are also conscious that such internationally promoted solutions are not obvious on the horizon. If there are to be real changes to women’s representation, we believe the impetus should come from our own political context.

The importance of uniformity across the national scene leads to our recommendation that the Federal Office for Women should be appropriately resourced and charged with the responsibility of ensuring such analyses are conducted. Through responding to the questions contained in Table 7.4.1, full documentation of the agricultural and regional organisations will be possible.

Through this process, we will make visible the gendered structures, and provide the necessary evidence for the need for change. As Eveline and Bacchi (2009) demonstrate, it is only through doing such gender analyses that policy actors see the need for them – the doing leads to the learning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of governance</th>
<th>Interrogating questions</th>
</tr>
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| Context and place        | In what physical location(s) is/are the governance structure(s) located?  
What are some of the key economic and social indicators of the location, for example, welfare, occupational segregation, unemployment rates? What economic and social trends are emerging? What are the gendered aspects of these indicators and trends?  
What is the political, economic and social context in which this governance structure has been established? What is the relationship between the governance structure and the formal political institution? What formal political institutions exist in this/these locations? What is the representation of men/women on these political institutions? What are the dominant political ideologies being espoused in these political institutions? What implications does this ideology have in terms of gender relations and inequalities between and within groups of men and women and how labour is divided between the private and public spheres? What other responsibilities do members have outside of the governance body? Are these responsibilities gendered? Do these impede the capacity of the member to participate in rural governance? |
| Membership               | Is there gender equity in the group’s membership?  
What agencies are represented/not represented in this group? What is the constituency of these groups? Could these organisations be seen to represent gendered interests?  
What alliances/relationships exist between representative groups/individuals? In what ways were these relevant to selection of members? To what extent are these gendered?  
How are members (s)elected and in what ways are the (s)election processes gendered?  
What skills/knowledge are members seen to have and are these embedded in constructs of gender?  
How do aspiring leaders and the broader community know that opportunities exist for group membership? Are the information channels utilised gendered?  
What is the term of membership of the group? On what grounds are member terms renewed or expired? Do these differ for men and women members?  
What is the nature of membership succession planning? Are there gendered elements to this? |
| Equity policies          | Are there equity policies in place? How do they influence membership?  
Are strategies implemented to facilitate greater inclusion?  
How do equity policies of regional organisations construct women and men? What discourses of equity/inclusion are utilised and how effective are these in promoting greater involvement by women in regional organisations? |
| Management               | Do particular gendered management techniques, styles and discourses dominate amongst members while others are marginalised? How are these manifest in within group interactions and in external interactions?  
What is the organisational structure of the governance entity? Are there gendered patterns to this?  
What are the communication patterns and dynamics of group interaction? Are these gendered?  
Are there gendered patterns to the cultural processes of signification?  
Is there a committee structure or working party configuration within the entity and is it gendered in terms of its membership, organisation and roles? |
| Operations               | What are the goals of the group? To what extent are the goals symbolically or materially associated with particular definitions and understandings of gender? Are there topics on which men and women members are more likely to be heard? Are these topics gendered?  
What activities does the group undertake? Do these activities differentially position
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of governance</th>
<th>Interrogating questions</th>
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<td>To what extent is the allocation of resources (as evidenced in the budget) gendered?</td>
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<td>When was it established? Why was the structure established? Were men and women equally involved in its establishment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who do members view as the stakeholders of the group? To whom do members feel accountable? Is variation in this notable based on gender?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To what extent are women and other marginalised groups perceived to be important stakeholders? Are particular groups excluded in member definitions of stakeholders?</td>
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<td>What other organisations have influence over the group? Is there support for this group? Has there been resistance to the establishment of the group? Is there a gendered pattern to this resistance?</td>
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Source: (Pini, Sheridan et al. 2009)

7.4.4 Ongoing support for the Regional Women’s Advisory Committee (RWAC)

Since the change of federal government in 2007, there has not been a formal meeting of RWAC. It seems this important mechanism for communication to senior members of the government has been overlooked. The role of this committee should be reinvigorated to ensure a direct means of communication to the relevant minister is guaranteed (as it was in its original charter), and the committee be supported to ensure the substantive representation (Childs and Krook 2006) of women in regional Australia occurs.

Recruitment and selection processes for this committee should be transparent.

7.4.5 Mentoring young women

As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, there is now strong evidence that mentoring relationships can be important facilitators for women’s access to leadership positions. This can be particularly valuable for women in their idealistic achievement phase of their careers (O’Neil and Bilimoria 2005). Drawing on the success of the NSW Government’s Lucy program in enabling young women to be matched with senior managers within the public and private sectors in NSW, we recommend that a similar program be adequately resourced and implemented across the rural science and agribusiness-based university programs across Australia.

The program would formalise a relationship between women in their final year of studies with a senior manager in one of the entities identified in At the Table. These include agricultural commodity councils, research and development corporations, rural representative bodies, agricultural companies, regional development boards, area consultative committees and catchment management authorities. The benefit of such programs would be the exposure of these young women to the possible paths and formal leadership roles that can be pursued and the removal of the mystique from these roles.
Through the process of working with a mentor, the Lucy program has demonstrated that young women’s understanding of what roles entail is enhanced and they are able to see how their own skills can be developed to enable them to progress into such positions. These development programs should be the responsibility of the state departments of agriculture, much as the NSW Office for Women facilitated the introduction of the Lucy program into a number of NSW based universities (http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/Working/Working_YoungW_Lucy.htm).

The value of such programs for the mentors can be seen in the satisfaction they experience through the interaction as well as the knowledge they are better preparing their industries for succession. The mentoring ensures they are developing the capacity of those emerging leaders.

Members of government appointed boards should take on mentoring roles and this should be part of their ongoing assessment in their roles

7.4.6 Targeting older women

Given the overwhelming evidence about the difficulties younger women face in accessing leadership positions – as they struggle with the unequal division of household labour, the jobs structured to accommodate the life cycles of men with wives providing full-time support, the tensions the women feel in being away from their families – should we, instead, decide to focus on promoting the benefits of older women assuming leadership roles?

Recognising the work of O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) in identifying the ‘reinventive contribution’ phase of women’s careers and following Fels (2004, p. 60), why not heed the point made by many women writers that ‘in later life, after their children have been raised, women develop a new resilience and energy.’ Her argument is that ‘the new found strength of these women reflects the fact that their sexual identity is no longer assailable. “Been there, done that”, they can say to anyone who questions their capacity for relationships. The classic reproach (always aimed at women and never at men) – that they are promoting themselves at the expense of others who need their care – no longer applies’.

Recognising this as a reality, however unpalatable this reality is to those of us who want to challenge the structures that sustain the unwelcome cultures, then why not work with it? Why not have as one of the strategies for change, concerted effort on the part of government departments/policy makers, to implement affirmative action directed at older women, and in this way harness the energy of those women ready to move from the endurance phase of their careers to reinventing themselves?

Their skills/roles should be more visible through the more extensive data collection processes followed as per Section 7.4.2. As we have demonstrated in this report, it’s not that these women are not trained; they are trained, able and experienced, but currently they are not recognised. One example of an effective program for older women was developed in the Progress WA Program (Haslam McKenzie 2001a) which aimed to give older women confidence through self-discovery, self-improvement and self-motivation. Participation in such programs can help the transition between the endurance phase and the reinventive contribution phase of women’s careers in regional Australia.

7.4.7 Making visible the ‘space of betweenness’

As women’s roles often span the private and the public, and so do not conform to what is normatively prescribed as the experience necessary for leadership roles, there continue to be structural barriers to their recognition. It is time for this to be redressed. How absurd it is to think experience with a tractor prepares men for the various leadership roles in their associations (Pini 2008) while women’s work, which equates to 49 per cent of the total value of the output that might be attributed to farming communities, are discounted?

As detailed in Chapter 4, the site of regional women’s business activity, often focused in the services and retail sectors, has been overlooked by policymakers. Financial support for business development
provided by governments is often predicated on the requirement that the business be an ‘exporter’. This must change and the endogenous development opportunities from women’s activities must be recognised through changes to policy making.

A further dimension to this is the need for women’s representation in formal appointments to government boards to be appropriately compensated. While direct travel costs may currently be recognised, there is a failure to recognise that time away from their business needs to be compensated too.

### 7.4.8 Ensuring transparent appointment processes for public boards

The appointment processes for many government boards, as well as private sector boards remain opaque. The issue of the transparency of appointment processes has been well canvassed by Edwards (2006) and we reiterate her call for appointment processes for boards to ‘encourage transparent, timely and cost effective processes, and ensure greater attention is paid to relevant skills and experience and the need for diversity’. Rather than reiterate her findings we point to the report, Edwards (2006), in which she canvasses three general approaches that could be taken to achieve this which we recommend should be considered for public sector boards.

### 7.5 Enhancing the absorptive capacity of organisations

While the ongoing recording of women’s participation in agricultural and regional bodies of influence will be important, the information generated must be heeded and acted on within the relevant organisations. We believe this is where the greatest challenges lie – in enhancing the absorptive capacity of these organisations for change. The processes we recommend for enabling greater absorptive capacity include revising the existing leadership programs to enable more mindful leadership, in particular greater reflexivity on the part of existing leaders and setting targets for increasing women’s representation.

#### 7.5.1 Refining leadership programs

As detailed by Eady (2008) in her recent review of leadership programs and how they relate to women’s access to leadership positions in rural industries, considerable resources have already been directed to developing the leadership skills of women in rural industries, yet we have not seen a significant increase in the number of women in leadership positions within organisations.

Rather than take as given the women as deficit model, it is time to directly address the (limited) leadership skills of those already in formal leadership positions within the agricultural and regional organisations identified in *Missed Opportunities* and *At the Table*. Given the lack of progress over the past decade, it is time to address the absorptive capacity of these organisations. For change to happen there must be openness to this from those within the organisation.

As we noted from the innovation literature, key players need the ability to recognise the value of external information, assimilate it, transform it to be meaningful in their own context and apply it. An important dimension to this will be an openness to change, which we believe will come through a greater capacity for self-reflection.

An example of a leadership development program which aims to raise people’s awareness of the hierarchies embedded in much of our traditional thinking about leadership in a western context, can be seen in the unit *Leadership in a Dynamic Global Environment*, offered by the Curtin Graduate School of Business in its Master of Leadership and Management program. In this unit, those who have uncritically accepted their positions of privilege have the opportunity to engage with this through activities designed to give them experiences of being the ‘other’.
Such experiential learning enables a deeper understanding of the social structures that reinforce the current hegemony. More of this needs to be embedded in leadership programs if we are to see greater self-reflection occurring by those in positions of privilege.

Amanda Sinclair’s work is also relevant here. Her critique of many existing leadership training programs directs us to how it should be done better to create ‘mindful’ leaders. Recognising the social construction of leadership and its place in a globalised business model, Sinclair (2005) argues for the need to question the values and assumptions underpinning such representations and the rituals associated with it. For example, the capacity to work long hours, willingness to travel at short notice, client rituals such as golf (all of which are highly gendered).

Most importantly she challenges us to think differently about it; to reject the hollowed out notion of leadership that is peddled by many. In her scathing critique of the leadership canon, she notes that leadership scholars ‘too often collude in rewarding narcissism with sycophancy’ (Sinclair 2005, p. ix). What she takes most offence to is the incredible growth in the rhetoric around leadership which reproduces the myth of the heroic CEO – or as she calls it, the ‘track down the truth about leadership, trap it and train it’ approach that has dominated the discourse around leadership for the past two decades (because there’s a lot of money to be made from such a recipe).

Sinclair acknowledges the seductive nature of the heroic leader image. The notion that there is someone there who can solve all the problems is seductive because it ‘releases individuals from the work of leading themselves, from taking responsibility for thinking through difficult problems and for critical decision-making’ (Sinclair 2007, p. 9).

It is important to look critically at the structures in place within organisations and reflect on how these may reinforce this dependency. Leadership is, as Sinclair (2005) argues, the most important part of the work we all do and the influence we have in our lives. There is leadership – potentially – in most actions and sometimes it is the most common of actions in which we can exercise extraordinary leadership.

‘For men and women in organisations, being different as leaders means asking what their leadership work is for, and whose agenda or interests are advanced by it. It involves standing up for work that is valuable and important, and insisting on doing it in a reflective and compassionate way, not simply capitulating to imperatives generated by an overpowering boss, truculent client or an invented sense of urgency. Leadership of this kind risks being singled out as ‘not a team player’ or not ‘on board’ with the interests of the organisation. Yet, in a wider sense, taking such a position is exactly what leadership is often about.

Doing leadership differently also means bringing the whole self to the job, not living in camouflage. This can include many things: asserting values that are important but have been crushed under the weight of other priorities’ (Sinclair 2005, p. x).

In her most recent work, Sinclair (2007, p. xxii) takes this even further and emphasises the importance of unlocking how we have traditionally conceived of leadership or our implicit leadership theories. This requires being reflective, working experientially and thinking critically. It is these sorts of skills we need to see embedded in the leadership programs supported by the policy makers and agricultural and regional organisations.

Only those leadership programs which enhance the individual’s skills of reflection and critical engagement with the doing of gender should be subscribed to by those organisations identified as regional bodies of influence (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005a).
7.5.2 Demonstrated reflexivity by leaders

‘Individual agency is required for collective entities to be constituted, no matter how big the collectivities are’ (Martin 2006).

As noted above, those in leadership positions need to be actively engaged with being reflexive about how they routinely practice gender and race. This should be a requirement for ongoing participation in public boards; that they engage with an organised program of renewal (Haslam McKenzie 2001a) which is evaluated by measures more than a token attendance at a program.

There needs to be demonstrated outcomes of their professional development and these board members must be held accountable for enhanced equity.

While there are still examples of people who practice gender intentionally, artfully exemplified in Pini’s work with Canegrowers (Pini 2002), in most cases, people are practicing gender unintentionally or with only liminal awareness. Through seeking greater reflexivity about our day to day interactions, we have, as Martin (2006) notes, a greater chance of naming, challenging and eliminating the unintentional gender practices.

Ely et al. (2006, 80) argue for the need for ‘constructive engagement of differences’ in order to develop more meaningful relationships in workplaces with diverse profiles, where relationships often have to cross “boundaries” such as race, gender, religion. Specifically they detail five principles – pause; connect with others; question yourself; get genuine support; and a being open to a shifting mind-set – as steps to create more inclusive workspaces. What they label as the principle of ‘questioning yourself’ can be seen as another term for self-reflection, a fundamental tenet of many strands of feminism (Jackson and Jones 1998). Yet it is one that is often difficult for individuals to engage in, especially those from positions of privilege.

That sharing ‘personally meaningful insights’ does not come easily to many men, is recognised by a leading scholar’s admission of his ‘masculine reluctance to open up my own subjectivity to scrutiny for fear of exposing the weaknesses that inevitably lurk within’ (Knights 2006, 700). As Knights (2006, p. 715) observes, if even he who has spent his professional career seeking to challenge ‘the dominance of mainstream and maelstrom approaches in organisation studies’ finds it uncomfortable to engage in self-reflection, how much more difficult is it for those ‘less inclined to break with tradition?’.

In their review of the barriers to learning from experience, Boud and Walker (1993) elaborate on the difficulties that some learners, and they admit themselves included, have in working with experience. Specifically they note that ‘not being in touch with one’s own assumptions and what one is able to do’, ‘threats to oneself, one’s world view or to ways of behaving’, and ‘lack of self-awareness of one’s place in the world’ (Boud and Walker 1993,p. 79) can all contribute to blocking the sort of self-reflection required for learning to occur.

Such barriers are almost impermeable when issues relating to gender are raised in workplaces and as seen in Pini’s work with the Farmers Union (Pini 2008), particularly in the agricultural context. For many men in positions of privilege, they are unable to see their privilege, and not having been in positions of the ‘other’, lack a fundamental ‘self-awareness of one’s place in the world’ (Boud and Walker 1993,p. 79).

While Ely et al. (2006) make the claim that workplaces will be more inclusive if the leaders are able to model the five principles – with a particular emphasis on the leader questioning him/herself – at the same time they acknowledge that such questioning is the most difficult principle, especially given the commonly understood image of the ‘confident, decisive leader’ (Ely, Meyerson et al. 2006,p. 87), which of course is highly correlated to masculinity (Sinclair 2005) and closely aligned with the prevailing image of the agri-political leader (Liepins 2000; Pini 2008).
We should not underestimate the social dynamics involved in being open to learning and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity currently underpinning the most commonly held notions of leadership in agricultural organisations. Much more attention needs to be paid to understanding the barriers to self-reflection, before they can be surmounted.

An alternative approach to generating change can be taken from Boud and Walker’s (1993, p.85) argument that learning from experience may ‘be prompted by systemic reflection, but it can also be powerfully prompted by discrepancies or dilemmas which we are “forced” to confront’. They maintain that others’ stories may be the means by which individuals learn from experience, through the ‘naming’ of a process that may be otherwise ‘invisible’ to the person.

In this regard, Dorothy Smith’s work in promoting the ‘standpoint of women’ is relevant (Smith, 1987). Any process to change gendered organisational structures requires mapping women’s experiences to make them visible. The day to day experiences of exclusion need to be made visible more often, if there is to be any challenge to the current norms. We see this as particularly important for exploring the double whammy of race and gender that Indigenous women face in accessing leadership positions.

Women’s stories need to be heard for there to be any prospect of the gendered structures to be challenged. Pini’s recounting and analysis of women’s stories (Pini 2008) provides a fine example of the sort of work we need to be developing further.

It is within women’s networks that these stories have most likelihood of being heard now, but we need to draw them out to a wider audience. The process can be facilitated through the gender analyses recommended above and also through active efforts to create a safe space, ‘an agora’ (Rindfleish, Sheridan et al. forthcoming) – for these stories to be heard.

The importance of the need for those in privileged positions to be reflexive builds one the arguments by Childs and Krook (2006) that we cannot assume that numerically higher representation of women will actually change the existing structures. Unless there is a deep understanding of the gendered nature of the structures by those who are wielding power, then little can be achieved by simply increasing women’s representation.

Sinclair’s work on mindful leadership helps point the way for those in formal leadership positions to better practice their leadership (Sinclair 2007).

7.5.3 Targets for women’s representation

As per the recent recommendations in the Female FTSE Report 2008, we are recommending that the companies identified in At the Table be responsible for setting targets for women’s representation. While such targets have been resisted historically, we believe it is timely to reconsider the introduction of targets in recognition that the progress of women’s substantive representation has been too slow.

Waiting for the ‘pipeline’ to deliver is no longer credible. While we have noted earlier that numerical targets are not sufficient to enact change, if our previous recommendations are followed, then realising targets may enable the structural changes required for the substantive representation of women.
7.6 Individual agency

And let’s not forget that pragmatic piece of advice from an RWAC member, ‘you have to be noticed by someone. That’s the main thing.’ While structural changes are necessary, we cannot overlook the agency individuals can exercise in accessing formal leadership roles. As we noted, there are women who have navigated the labyrinth and been appointed to boards (albeit small numbers). A key theme they reinforce is the importance of being visible.

As has been identified so far, the potential for being able to exercise this agency is compromised by the limited visibility surrounding much of what women do. Obfuscated by their ‘space of betweenness’, agency becomes more difficult. Unless there is sustained commitment to ensuring women’s contributions are valued and recognised, individual efforts will be hampered.

7.7 Conclusion

The pursuit of social change at the three levels of institutional, cultural and sex category (West and Zimmerman 2002) in relation to women in leadership roles in regional organisations, including those related to agriculture, presents a complex scenario requiring change on numerous fronts.

A person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others. As such, the pursuit of social change also needs to occur at the level of everyday life and personal conduct.

This has implications for women and men. If this interchange is to open doors to gender equity, it can be argued that the values and attitudes underpinning those interactions must change.

If we are to ‘collectively, intelligently facilitate the changes that will be required’ (Sealy, Vinnicombe et al. 2008; p. 45), we believe there needs to be a multi-pronged approach to enabling women’s leadership in regional Australia.

For this to happen, we need strong commitment from the public sector and an openness to change within the private sector. In particular, there needs to a recognition of the gendered practices embedded in these organisations.

This will take significant resources to support the ongoing production of the ‘routine data’ to track women’s representation and to interrogate the doing of gender within regional organisations, as well as a preparedness for organisations to make sense of this, transform it and apply it – they need to increase their absorptive capacity.

Public funding and resources once again need to be directed to enabling this. Just as in the mid-1980s we saw the development of women’s units within both state and federal government departments to address equity issues, there is a need in the late 2000s to direct resources to this end. Such resources can create the vehicles (women’s units) by which the information can be collated, analysed and, most importantly, communicated in accessible ways. With leaders engaged in greater reflexivity and held accountable for creating more inclusive spaces, we may see some redressing of the gendered norms which currently limit women’s participation and in so doing increasing the efficacy of these organisations – surely a necessity in this uncertain economic climate. It is time to realise the opportunities.
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Revisiting Missed Opportunities
— growing women’s contribution to agriculture
by Alison Sheridan and Fiona Haslam McKenzie

Pub. No. 09/083

This RIRDC report reviews the outcomes and deliverables since the publication of the Missed Opportunities report (Elix and Lambert 1998).

It updates the quantification of women’s contributions to the agricultural sector based on 2006 Census data, and explores whether such analyses can be conducted across all industry sectors.

The report identifies where women are located across occupations and industries in the Australian paid workforce and examines the reasons for women’s low representation in formal leadership positions in agricultural and regional organisations. The conclusion recommends improvements in the proportion of women in formal leadership roles and enhancing women’s leadership experiences.

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