



Asia-Pacific  
Economic Cooperation



## Australian Delegates to the 12<sup>th</sup> APEC Women Leaders' Network

Dear WLN Delegate

It is now four months since the 12<sup>th</sup> APEC Women Leaders' Network meeting ended. I thought it timely to write to inform you about areas of progress in implementing the agenda for women in the APEC region that we developed in Port Douglas.

As foreshadowed at the meeting, WLN was invited to report to the Meeting of the Ministers Responsible for Trade who met in Cairns on 6 July 2007. Alison Terry, on behalf of the WLN Reference Group, presented and spoke to the recommendations. Alison's presentation was very positively received by the Trade Ministers.

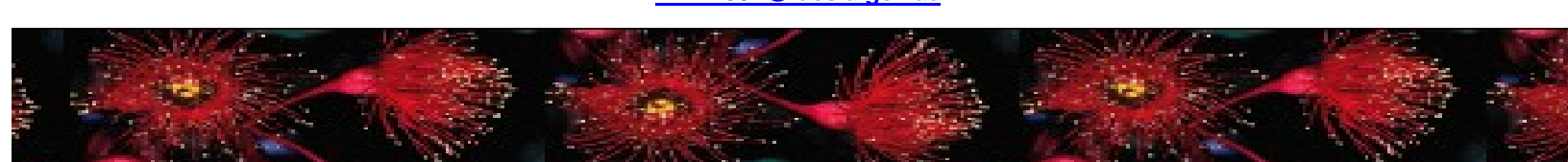
Many of you would have attended the luncheon dialogue at this year's WLN meeting at which Geoff Brennan, Executive Director of the Australian APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) Secretariat, spoke about the potential for links between WLN and ABAC. In September I presented the WLN recommendations to the ABAC meeting. Again, the presentation was well received and I hope a report from the hosting WLN economy will become a regular event at future ABAC meetings.

In September I also wrote about the work of WLN in Australia's principal business journal, *The Australian Financial Review*. In that article I explained the depth of our expertise and thinking on key economic issues facing our region, such as climate change, sustainable trade and business practices. A copy of the article is attached for your information.

You will recall that a key recommendation from the 2007 WLN meeting concerned the trade liberalisation agenda. Peru has indicated that this issue will be a key focus of WLN in 2008 and that their program will include a workshop on the impact of free trade agreements on women in micro, small and medium enterprises.

The 2007 WLN meeting proposed research on the nature and extent of any differential impacts on women of regional trade liberalisation and Free Trade Agreements within the APEC region. The Australian Government Office for Women, in consultation with the Australian WLN Reference Group, is presently undertaking work to map the scope of this research with the aim of securing funding to progress the research and present the findings at WLN 2008.

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To assist Peru in their preparations to host the 2008 APEC WLN meeting, the WLN Secretariat in the Australian Government Office for Women provided an information package on a range of matters including organisational processes and timelines, stakeholder information and lessons learnt. The Office also prepared a presentation for a conference held at the end of October attended by Peruvian Ministers, senior women business leaders and entrepreneurs on the WLN and the importance of their support to the success of the meeting in 2008.

In its role as 2007 Chair of the Gender Focal Point Network, the Australian Government Office for Women is liaising with the APEC Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Working Group on its work to develop a four-year strategic plan that will include support for women, youth and minorities as a strategic priority. At the most recent SME Working Group meeting, held in Bali in late August, members agreed to work with Peru (2008 SME Working Group Chair) and an independent consultant to develop the strategic plan. A workshop will be held in the margins of the next SME Working Group meeting, scheduled for late March/early April 2008 in Chinese Taipei, to undertake much of this work

A key agenda item at the Bali SME Working Group meeting related to the informal sector and ways for improving compliance in the cash economy. As part of this agenda item, Indonesia delivered a presentation on micro-financing and work that is being undertaken to assist micro-enterprises, including those run by women, to access finance. Micro-enterprise issues are a major focus of the SME Working Group and, as you know, women make up the substantial component of this sector.

The 2007 WLN meeting program included some very insightful presentations which stimulated our thinking and understanding of the issues affecting the women and the economies of our region. The Australian Government Office for Women website is being updated progressively to include many of the WLN presentations, speeches, media releases and publications. These transcripts will sit with the full set of WLN recommendations which are currently posted on the Australian Government Office for Women website at:

[http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/apec\\_wln/index.htm](http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/apec_wln/index.htm)

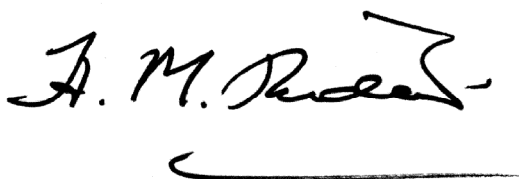
It is essential that women have a voice at the centre of the debate, not just in the margins. Currently only five of the 63 members of the APEC Business Advisory Council are women. In this respect I again strongly encourage you to raise the issue of greater gender balance on the APEC Business Advisory Council with your respective governments. The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Host of the 12<sup>th</sup> APEC WLN meeting, Minister for Education, Science and Training and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Women's Issues, has made strong recommendations to the Australian Prime Minister, as have I about the need to increase the representation of women on ABAC. I am optimistic the next vacancy for Australia will be filled by an appropriate business woman.

It is important that we continue to work in practical ways to maintain the momentum of change so that women's fresh thinking and range of views are brought to bear on the economic challenges of our time, many of which impact especially on women.

I will post regular updates on progress against the 2007 WLN agenda on the website above and I have invited the other WLN Heads of Delegation and Focal Points to provide me with feedback on developments in their own economy to give effect to the aims of the 2007 WLN recommendations. This information will also be included in the progress updates posted on the website.

I would like to express my appreciation for your continued support and dedication to achieving our shared goals for the women and communities of the APEC region.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. M. Ridout", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Heather Ridout  
Chair  
2007 APEC Women Leaders' Network

14 November 2007

# Time to use our combined brain power

**Heather Ridout**

**I**n the words of *The Economist*: "Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women." This is a message that will resonate at this week's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation group meeting.

In many countries of the developed and developing world, women are increasingly well educated and moving into paid employment at a steadily increasing rate. Countries that make best use of their workforce and support the contribution of highly educated women will be the ones to reap the benefits of increased productivity.

In short, making better use of women's skills, knowledge and experience has become an economic imperative.

In late June, I chaired a meeting of 400 Asia-Pacific leaders from business, government, academia and civil society, who met to consider issues critical to building a sustainable future. We looked at new ideas on ways to approach the key economic issues of globalisation, climate change, sustainable trade, technology and

business practices. What was distinctive about this group was that we were all women — we met under the umbrella of the APEC Women Leaders Network — and I presented the report of the meeting to the APEC Business Advisory Council in Sydney this week.

The group understood workforce issues and had ideas on enabling labour mobility. They are engaged in the world of business and see opportunities for ensuring that all countries and communities in APEC benefit from trade liberalisation, and from women's skills and education being used more effectively in the private sector.

The 2007 APEC WLN is made up of women experienced in the challenges that face small to medium enterprise entrepreneurs. They have clear ideas about the importance of removing regulatory impediments to women establishing new businesses and the value of setting in place business targets on skills development, diversity in decision making and carbon neutrality.

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They understand that micro-enterprise is the lifeline out of poverty for many women in the APEC region.

Climate change is one issue that links the wellbeing of our region to the wellbeing of the world. It is a problem that requires fresh thinking that reflects a range of views. The 2007 APEC WLN demonstrated its ability to be a powerful force in contributing to solving the challenges of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These are some of the issues addressed by the 2007 APEC WLN meeting, which set a new benchmark for engaging women's collective thinking on these problems.

If we do not draw on the insights and experiences of more than half our population, we are ignoring the knowledge of half our collective brain.

By anyone's thinking, that is not smart economics.

■ *Heather Ridout is chief executive of the Australian Industry Group.*

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