

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF WLN**

It is open to women who are leaders in their field, whether from business, academia or the public sector, many of whom are willing to use their position to influence policies that will help benefit women throughout the APEC region.

Andrina Lever from Canada, the co-founder of WLN in 1996, stated that WLN is unique in that it is the only multi-sectorial, voluntary network of women leaders anywhere in the world that has access to government leaders and ministers in a multi-lateral trading arrangement. In 1997, Canada started the tradition of WLN presenting its Statement directly to the Minister Responsible for SMEs.

Throughout its history, WLN has also been invited to make presentations to the Ministers responsible for Trade. Every APEC host economy since 1996 has recognized the value of the WLN by agreeing to host a WLN meeting prior to the APEC Ministerial meetings. Whilst it is a non-government driven network that exists at the invitation of the host APEC economy, most WLN meetings have received financial support from the government of the host economy. Also, the APEC Secretariat has provided assistance to WLN on an ad hoc basis since 1996 to help ensure that its agenda is consistent with APEC themes, priorities and protocol.

The key areas of concern include trade, human resources development, industrial technologies and SMEs.

Integral to the success and performance of WLN is the focus on developing the program and drafting the Statement. WLN Statements reflect inputs from invited speakers and discussion from plenaries and break-out sessions. These Statements /recommendations are then presented to APEC ministers and leaders on how the APEC agenda can better address the needs of women. So, WLN is not just a conference but very much a working forum that must produce results.

WLN is only as strong as its participants, their commitment to the network and the continuity that they can bring. It is important that those who participate in WLN meetings take the message back to their own economies and other international arenas, raise the awareness of the issues identified and promote the recommendations made at the meetings.

In recent years the WLN has specifically focused on influencing the SME Working Group. Last year the APEC Leaders resolved to ensure that future economic growth be more inclusive, to broaden access to opportunities created by growth and to spread the benefits of growth more widely and included specific emphasis on:

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1. supporting and developing SMEs which account for more than 90 percent of all businesses in the APEC region and employ between 50 and 80 percent of the workforce.
2. assisting SMEs to gain better access to global markets, technology and finance as well as to improve their crisis management capabilities.
3. enhancing women's access to education, training, financing, technology, and infrastructure, to maximise their economic opportunities.
4. welcoming continued outreach to women entrepreneurs to grow the positive multiplier effect that women's economic engagement can have on productivity and sustained growth.

The WLN meeting in Tokyo presents some historic opportunities:

1. 2010 is the first target of the Bogor Goals of creating free and open trade among the developed APEC economies. The Bogor Goals for developed economies are due for review in 2010 and WLN needs to be part of the discussion about what should replace those goals.
2. Japan, the host economy has elected a new government with a mandate for change.
3. This year the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's has undertaken its 15 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action for Women
4. 2010 is a key milestone for the Millennium Development Goals target of 2015

All of these provide an important opportunity for the WLN to speak on the effects of the expansion of the G8 to the G20, the impact of the global financial crisis and the position of women in APEC economies.

Japan's proposed SME theme is "Strategy for reinvigorating economic growth with dual engines: SME and Asia-Pacific Economy".

The proposed sub-themes are:

1. improving business environment of SMEs
2. enhancing business support programs for SMEs, and

3. facilitating SME innovation and access to global markets.

These themes are of great interest to women in SMEs and it will be important for the WLN to develop outcomes that the SME Working Group is able to incorporate in its future work.

WLN's informality and lack of structure have probably prevented it from being as successful as it could be and many long time participants believe this is a good time for WLN to reconsider its own future direction. Otherwise it could risk becoming just another annual women's conference.

***This is your opportunity to help make a difference.***

### **WHY GO TO WLN IN TOKYO?**

I will focus on three main points. They are the opportunity to:

1. Learn from speakers from other APEC countries
2. Meet inspiring women leaders from other APEC countries
3. Make a difference to the future of women, particularly from the less affluent APEC countries

### **HOW TO MAXIMISE THESE OPPORTUNITIES?**

1. **Learn from speakers from other APEC countries:**
  - a. There is the opportunity for you to gain an understanding as to how APEC women have successfully operated businesses and the issues they have faced.
  - b. You may learn something new that could assist you in the future.
2. **Meet inspiring women from other APEC countries. *This is even more valuable than listening to the presentations***
  - a. There is the opportunity to get to know women you can work with in the future.

Just as an example:

In my case it is about meeting landscape architects, developers, contractors and people who can produce plants competitively for our landscape projects in South East Asia. It is impossible to be competitive and export everything that is required from Australia. This gives companies in countries that have a low cost labour force the opportunity for business – win win for all concerned. We also provide business opportunities to allied industries, such as suppliers of horticultural lighting, fertilizers and growing mediums.

If your business is selling taps or tiles, linking with others who supply to building projects could be beneficial in terms of referrals or recommendations to projects.

- b. I found that the only time available for networking at the conferences was during breaks – morning/afternoon teas, lunches, dinners and functions but that is usually fairly random in terms of meeting women who may have synergies with your business or areas of interest. This meant focusing more on talking than eating.
- c. I note in the preliminary Programme for WLN Tokyo, that there are two concurrent workshop sessions but the chances of meeting women who may have similar business interests in this type of workshop is not high.

***So what is the best way to make beneficial contacts?***

- d. It is important to be well organized prior to the conference and endeavour to make contact with delegates who you think may offer business or other opportunities and allow time after the conference for further meetings. This has not been easy in the past as there was no listing of delegates prior to the conferences, let alone identifying their areas of expertise. However, the good news is that this is about the change with a new website [www.apecwomen.com](http://www.apecwomen.com).

Grace Chu Te, who currently manages the official [apecwln.org](http://apecwln.org) site, mentioned that this site has limitations because WLN is not a legal entity. She said that it became obvious to her when attending the Digital Economy Forum for Women at an APEC WLN meeting that there was no natural momentum to strengthen connections established at WLN meetings and thought that the best way to assist in this situation would be to develop online tools to enable WLN participants to engage with each other before, during and after these meetings.

The new [www.apecwomen.com](http://www.apecwomen.com) site will soft launch this month and will be able to be accessed through the official [www.apecwln.org](http://www.apecwln.org) site and will provide the opportunity for women to connect and interact with each other.

- e. Use Austrade, particularly if you are new to the Japanese market, to undertake targeted market research and set up appointments either before or after the Conference.
- f. If there are any post conference tours, this is a good opportunity to get to know delegates better and also have a great time exploring beautiful Japan.

**3. Help make a difference to the future of women, particularly from the less affluent APEC countries**

- a. Many women don't have the same opportunities as in Australia, and need assistance and encouragement to break through the barriers in their countries.

It could be there are opportunities for purchasing from women from countries with a low cost labour force or it could simply be advice and some moral support.

- b. You also have the opportunity to contribute with WLN recommendations to be presented to APEC ministers and leaders on how the APEC agenda can better address the needs of women.

**My Experience at WLN Conferences – this will emphasize my three points**

My first WLN Conference was at Port Douglas in Queensland in 2007 where I was a speaker at the Export Forum.

This was extremely well organized with an interesting and diverse programme and a good mix of speakers from other APEC countries. The delegates came from US, Canada, Asian countries were well represented and Peru, Chile and Argentina. The Latin American delegates were keen to learn from the Australian experience, seeing Peru was to be the host country the following year.

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My second conference was in Arequipa, Peru in 2008 where I was also a speaker on exporting. Their programme was more focused on issues relating to South America. This was to be expected as the majority of delegates came from this region, with a small proportion from the other APEC countries.

It was certainly a matter of going with the flow at this conference and Peruvian time prevailed. The morning starts were scheduled for 9.00am but usually didn't get underway until ten. Then often the afternoon sessions would finish at 6-6.30.

Many of the presentations were in Spanish with simultaneous translation. Though often the headsets did not work and after trying, sometimes two or three different headset with no success, decided it was best to just make the most of the presentations in English and focus on networking during the breaks.

The hospitality was amazing with wonderful morning and afternoon teas (certainly not the usual biscuits, tea and coffee), lunches with entertainment – dancing (including dancing horses) and singing which lasted around 2 hours plus evening tours and entertainment.

As I mentioned in my point no. 2, having the opportunity to meet inspiring women was more important to me than the conference presentations. And there was plenty of time for that in the extended breaks. Even though the South American women gave their presentations in Spanish, they could also speak English quite well. So communication was not an issue.

When I mention inspiring women, I don't mention that lightly and would just like to tell you a heartwarming story about Patricia Foley Hinnen from the US who founded Capital Sisters International, a non-profit organization that invests in microfinance institutions in developing countries. Prior to the conference in Peru she set up micro-finance for women in Puno (a remote area on the border of Peru and Bolivia). The official opening was to take place straight after the conference and seven delegates including myself had planned to be there for this very special event. Unfortunately, there were violent demonstrations and we were advised by our various embassies not to go. However, this did not deter Patricia who went with her husband and son, and had to navigate roads strewn with glass to get there. We were all worried for their safety. However, a few days later, we met in Cuzco. Apparently the opening was a great success and the women who received their loans came in their best clothes for the occasion – some in their wedding dresses. The loans were a tiny US\$50 (with no collateral) and with this amount they could start a small business (often in the

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area of handicrafts or clothing). The women receiving the loans would work together and give each other moral support. This financing gives them the opportunity to have some independence from their husbands and help educate their children - a flow-on benefit for the next generation.

At the Conference, there was a presentation by the Bank of Peru on micro finance offerings but would only lent amounts above \$100. It was very humbling to learn that even \$50 could make such a difference.

WLN, over the years, has helped establish village banks during the host economy's year. Microfinancing is of major importance to women in developing countries and I note was also a recommendation from the Singapore conference last year.

After the conference I travelled to Cusco and Machu Picchu with six women, one from the US, two from Canada, one from Vietnam and one from New Zealand. Two of them were indigenous leaders from their countries and all women were involved in either aid programmes or assisting those less fortunate than themselves. I had been to these areas in Peru before, but decided to take this trip just to get to know these inspirational women better.

During one lunch break at the Arequipa conference, two other speakers and I were asked if we would speak to the women exhibiting at the conference. We thought it was only going to be for about 1 hr!!! Started by giving a short talk and was then asked if I could provide some advice to individual exhibitors. They sat me down at a table and before I could blink a queue snaking back through the doorway appeared with people clutching their produce ranging from herbal remedies through to potatoes – all looking for export opportunities. I ended up talking to exhibitors who were hungry for information from 1- 6.30 pm.

Go to Japan. Don't miss the opportunity to make a difference, whether it be to further your business opportunities or to help others. I have been to Japan many times over the last 15 years and would think that the Conference will be very well organized. Japan is a fascinating country and I am sure you will have a great time.

**About Barbara McGeogh**

Barbara has had over 20 years experience in exporting, particularly in Asia.

Emaho Trees, mentioned in the programme for today is the domestic Australian business. However, Birkdale International, which services large upmarket landscape projects, is the company which is active in the international market with companies in HK, China (including a large production nursery), Macau and Abu Dhabi.

Major projects have been Disney HK and City of Dreams Casino Resort in Macau. Birkdale also has suppliers from Australia and other APEC countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and Indonesia. For Disney HK over 800 x 40 foot sea containers of trees were supplied from these countries.

She was the guest speaker at both the Port Douglas and Arequipa (Peru) APEC WLN conference Export Forums.

Barbara is a director of the Australian Institute of Export and was a Westpac/ Australian Institute Export Hero in 1999.