Mapping a new course to spatial leadership
June 2020

In its nearly 35-year history, the [Australia and New Zealand Land Information Council (ANZLIC)](#) has never had a female sit in one of its two top seats. But all that changed in 2019, when ANZLIC appointed Melissa Harris from the Victorian Government's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) as Deputy Chair. ANZLIC is the peak intergovernmental organisation providing leadership on all aspects of spatial information across Australia and New Zealand. Melissa says she feels honoured to be the first woman to hold a chair position in ANZLIC's history. "ANZLIC has a long and esteemed history with incredible depth of expertise and experience among its membership, but we recognise how important it is to navigate this new landscape and support a thriving national industry with a skilled, future ready

workforce that attracts a broad cross section of the community," she says, "having diversity among the membership of ANZLIC will undoubtedly help us provide effective leadership over the coming years."

ANZLIC Chair Bruce Thompson agrees that it's important for leadership groups like ANZLIC to strive for greater diversity in their membership. "There is now a strong body of research showing diversity improves decision-making, problem solving, innovation and overall performance," says Bruce. "It's also the right thing to do ethically and morally."

As part of its commitment to driving diversity and inclusion, ANZLIC formally endorsed the spatial sector's *[Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#)* and included this as a

strategic priority in the new *ANZLIC Strategic Plan*. ANZLIC is also on-track to achieving gender parity around the board table with Melissa, along with spatial industry leader Jan Pierce from Land Information New Zealand and Kayelle Drinkwater from the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, who oversights the ANZLIC secretariat function, welcoming into their ranks two new talented women, including Alison Rose from Geoscience Australia and Sandy Carruthers from the South Australian Department for Environment and Water.

ANZLIC leadership (pictured left to right: Bruce Thompson, Melissa Harris and Steve Jacoby)

The increased diversity of the ANZLIC membership is significant. "As the peak public sector spatial body for New Zealand and Australia, we need to stand with our industry, academic and professional counterparts to drive diversity," says Bruce, "the public sector overall is reasonably well advanced in framing and developing diversity, so the initiatives and programs being driven at whole-of-Governments level give us a solid foundation to work from" he says.

Going forward, ANZLIC aims to collaborate with others to collect and share information on diversity and inclusion initiatives across industry, research and government spatial spheres, recognising that 'if it isn't checked, it isn't done'. "Measurement in this space isn't easy," says Bruce "but it's essential to ensuring we realistically assess and understand our progress. Measurement tells us how well (or not!) we're doing and allows us to refine or recast our efforts and

actions" he explains.

> "Measurement in this space isn't easy, but it's essential to ensuring we realistically assess and understand our progress."
>
> - Bruce Thompson

The trend towards greater diversity in government spatial spheres has seen the appointment of many talented women into leadership positions in the region in recent years, including two of the nation's seven surveyor generals. Narelle Underwood was appointed the first female Surveyor General of New South Wales in September 2016, followed by Dione Bilick, appointed Surveyor General of Western Australia in July 2017, the first woman to hold the position since it was established in 1829.

In November 2019, Dr Kat Salm was appointed as the President of Survey and Spatial New Zealand. "This is an exciting opportunity to lead Survey and Spatial NZ into the next chapter - connecting with members, stakeholders and the wider community to ensure we provide a recognised and valued home for all of our diverse community," says Dr. Salm.

In 2019, the Board of the Public Sector Mapping Agency (PSMA) reached gender parity for the first time, led by female Chair, Lynne Robinson.

> "Attracting women to our industry is important but retaining and supporting them when they arrive is possibly even more so"
>
> - Melissa Harris

Melissa Harris agrees we need more female role models in the geospatial and surveying industry. "Women are underrepresented in STEM industries, and ours is no different. Attracting women to our industry is important but retaining and supporting

them when they arrive is possibly even more so" she says, "as part of that, having female role models that other women can relate to and seek advice and mentorship from is very important so they can thrive in their day to day roles and achieve long term success."

> "Like any significant transformation, we look forward to diversity as business as usual."
>
> - Bruce Thompson

In reflecting on what the future holds, ANZLIC Chair Bruce Thompson is looking forward to diversity being the norm rather than the exception. "Ultimately, I think we all look forward to diversity being a genuine and fundamental part of our community and our workplaces. Like any significant transformation, we look forward to diversity as business as usual. And I'd like ANZLIC to be able to say it contributed to that outcome," he says. ∎

In February 2020 the Co-Convenors of the Spatial and Surveying Diversity Leadership Network issued a call to the spatial sector to showcase leaders in our sector who are investing in opening doors, challenging bias, and creating workplace cultures that foster a sense of belonging and inclusion. This case study is a direct outcome of that call. For more on Diversity & Inclusion in the Spatial sector visit the [2026 Agenda – Diversity & Inclusion webpage](#) or connect at diversity@2026agenda.com