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# International Women's Day Event

*Responsible Officer: Helen McNeil*

*Report Author: Casie Hughes, Customer and Communications Manager.*

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## Recommendation

That Council receive and note the report.

## Background

On 12 March 2024 Rous County Council hosted an event at Invercauld House for International Women's Day. The aim of the event was to both recognise the important contribution of women but also to highlight the on-going issues impacting on women. At Rous, females make up less than half of the workforce and the majority hold traditional female roles. This was the first time that Rous had hosted an event of this type.

The keynote speaker for the event was Rabia Siddique, a retired British army officer and human rights lawyer. Rabia was joined by a panel of Rous staff members, including Helen McNeil (Group Manager People and Performance), Tania Burls (Future Water Program Manager), Chrisy Clay (Flood Mitigation Manager), and Laurie Lefcourt (Chair, Rous Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee). Councillor Sarah Ndiaye, Deputy Mayor of Byron Shire Council and Rous Councillor was the MC for the event.

Following a Welcome to Country conducted by local Bundjalung woman, Maryanne Roberts, Rabia delivered a powerful, challenging and thought-provoking presentation that went for approximately one hour. She used storytelling to recount and share her lived experience with sexual abuse, mental health and war crimes. Systemic sexism and discrimination were a key theme of her presentation, especially in reference to her time in the British military which exemplified her resilience and ability to overcome adversity.

The panel session was an opportunity to highlight some Rous female employees that have worked or currently work in male dominated areas and allowed them to share some of their experiences.

The event has generated many discussions between staff about the challenges for women in the workplace, and Rous hopes to capitalise on this with future initiatives. Rous is dedicated to promoting workplace diversity as outlined in its Workforce Management Strategy objective 7 - Continued effort in building and attracting a diverse workforce. Additionally, Rous is committed to allocating resources for a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion event in the long-term financial plan, scheduled once every term of council (i.e., every 4 years).

74 people that included a mix of both men and women attended the event. Constituent Councils staff were invited with no charge applied. This included three attendees from Ballina Shire Council, six attendees from Byron Shire Council, two attendees from Lismore City Council, six attendees from Richmond Valley Council.

## Finance

In total, the event expenses, including the keynote speaker, amounted to approximately \$10,740, excluding staff costs.

## Legal

Not applicable.

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## **Consultation**

A post event survey has been distributed to all participants to assist us with improvements for future events.

## **Conclusion**

The International Women's Day event, served as an important occasion to discuss the ongoing challenges confronting women in the workplace. Through engaging presentations and panel discussions, featuring keynote speaker Rabia Siddique, the event stimulated valuable conversations, laying the groundwork for future initiatives aimed at fostering diversity and inclusivity within Rous.

Attachment:

1. Rabia Siddique website: <https://www.rabiasiddique.com/>