

# INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ is open to women of all levels working in infrastructure and has been established to grow the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector. Every month we will be profiling a different woman working in a different part of the sector. If you would like to be involved, please answer the questions and send your picture through to [Natasha](#).

**We'd like to introduce Margaret as our next Woman of Focus. Alongside her career as a company director, Margaret is Chair of the WIN Advisory Board.**



**MARGARET DEVLIN**

**INDEPENDENT UTILITIES  
PROFESSIONAL AND  
PROFESSIONAL DIRECTOR**

## **1. What company or organisation do you work for and what is your role there?**

I am currently in what I refer to as the third stage of my career as a company director. I work with a number of companies across New Zealand, primarily in the infrastructure and service space, so from water and airports to being a member of tertiary education councils. My governance roles include being either Chairman or director. In addition, I usually participate as a member of either the Audit and Risk Committee or Remuneration/People Committee. So I can say that no two days are the same! I can also assure you that governance is a full-time role hence my reference to being in the third stage of my career. A governor's role is to drive the strategic direction of the business and add sustainable value to the shareholders (however the shareholder may be defined). In tandem, a board must ensure that the company is fully compliant with all relevant legislation without of course becoming involved in the day to day running of the business.

## **2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?**

From a very early age I wanted to be a Managing Director by the age of 40. If truth be known I was probably not very sure what being a Managing Director was or did but I was sure that I wanted to be one. Post university I started my career working in retailing and then moved into the infrastructure sector at the time of water privatisation in the UK in 1990. I joined the water company to take up a newly created role of Customer Services Manager. It was a very interesting time for the sector as it moved into a regulated environment covering economic, water quality and the environment. It was also a challenging transition for a monopoly business to understand their relationship with their customers. I was very lucky to contribute to the very significant culture change programme in the business and indeed in the wider UK water sector.

Fast forward to 1999 and I was appointed Managing Director, 3 years ahead of my target. After the sense of elation I do recall then questioning what was the next goal as clearly I did not want to spend the next 20 years in the same business doing the same job however there were sufficient challenges in the business before having to make any decisions about the next stage. During my time as Managing Director, the business moved from being one of the worst performers in the sector to upper quartile and perhaps, more importantly, having credibility with a wide range of stakeholders including customers, shareholders and regulators. A few curve balls during this time were the sale of the business during the 5-year price negotiation and managing a drought. Yes, there are droughts in the UK!

I started to build my governance portfolio whilst a full-time executive and was appointed as an Independent director to the Valuation Office (a subsidiary of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs). In addition I also chaired the industry body, Water UK, being the first woman to do so. It was somewhat ironic that at that time the industry which was fairly traditional in its make up, i.e. mostly male, that the industry was represented by a female Chair and CEO.

When we moved to New Zealand, I had decided to focus on a governance career and move out of full-time executive work.

A very potted history of my career to date.

### **3. Tell us about a project are you currently working on and why it interests you?**

From a governance perspective my focus is very much on improving standards of governance within boardrooms and improving diversity in the boardroom. There is a lot of evidence supporting the benefits of diversity across all parts of the business. Being in a position to actually see diversity in action such as the Futures Directors/Emerging Directors programmes is a privilege and in my role as a governor, it is imperative that these roles are fully supported and encouraged to add value to the business.

The impact, challenges and opportunities of the digital revolution is something which all businesses need to be discussing and addressing to ensure that a business remains relevant and fit for the future.

### **4. What's the hardest job you've ever done and why?**

My view is that if you do not have a moment of taking a deep breathe as you progress through your career then the job is not challenging enough. The challenge is not the job but in having the belief and confidence to take the next step and ensure that you have the support system around you to assist in dealing with the challenge. That support system can come in many forms but having a mentor is certainly a mechanism that I have used and continue to use.

### **5. Can you think of one example where your "diversity" has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?**

In my career to date I have seen a lot of changes in the corporate world as it grapples with issues such as a more informed and demanding customer, the technology revolution and diversity to name but a few. My contribution to this has been to challenge the status quo and sometimes having to accept that the journey may be longer than I might want simply because as a very wise person once told me: "sometimes it is easier to go around the wall than through it". The challenge, of course, is knowing when to knock the wall down and when to simply help strengthen it.

To see some of the companies Margaret is involved with you can view her [LinkedIn here](#).

