



WMS CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IN ENGINEERING DAY

We have recently welcomed Catherine Walker to our team as the NSW Regional Manager. Catherine reflects on her experience of being a woman in engineering and shares her plans for our new Sydney office.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHAT YOU DID BEFORE YOU JOINED WMS.

I'm a civil engineer with a background in floodplain risk management. Before joining Water Modelling Solutions I was a senior water engineer with Cardno (1 year) and WMAwater (~5 years). Prior to joining the floodplain management industry, I worked in regional NSW designing farm irrigation infrastructure.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO WMS AND MADE YOU WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?

WMS has given me the opportunity to take ownership of setting up a new team and office, whilst having the backing of an established engineering consultancy. Blake and Monika's passion for what they do is contagious, and I wanted to be part of (and contribute to) the supportive and fun culture they have created at WMS.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE NEW SYDNEY OFFICE?

We will be based in Sydney's Inner West and focused on providing high-quality services to clients in regional NSW.

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO BECOME AN ENGINEER?

I always wanted to use science and maths to solve problems and help people, and engineering offers that in spades.

WHAT ARE YOUR SPECIALIST AREAS/ AREAS OF INTEREST?

I particularly love working on projects that involve translating technical information (e.g. flood model results) to non-technical audiences (e.g. community members), or taking outputs from a study and turning them into something a Council can readily use to make their lives easier or their community safer.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES YOU HAVE FACED AS A WOMAN IN THE INDUSTRY AND HOW HAVE YOU OVERCOME THEM?

I've been fortunate to work at companies that have not tolerated sexism or discrimination, so haven't been subject to much overt sexism aside from the occasional remark here and there. However, in talking to my female friends in engineering (and outside the industry) I've realised there are some subtle issues we can improve on, and as a manager I will be particularly mindful of. For example, at some stage we have all covered for a male colleague

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who was not doing their job, or stayed late to “help out” when it’s not our job to (or we aren’t being paid to), and were not given credit. We tend to take on the projects or clients that our male counterparts don’t want, rather than seeming difficult to work with, or take on those extra tasks such as organising the birthday card or a team bonding activity – tasks that take time and energy, but aren’t valued in the same way when it comes to promotions. Learning to push back on these types of things is an ongoing effort, and having a supportive circle of friends where we can call out things we shouldn’t be putting up with is incredibly important.

WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN ENGINEERING?

As stated by UNESCO in 2017: Ensuring girls and women have equal access to STEM education and ultimately STEM careers is an imperative from the human rights, scientific, and development perspectives. The Robogals website also states: Decreasing the gender disparity in STEM fields provides more opportunity for women to generate fair incomes, as well as encourages professional environments that are safer and more productive for women. As well as being good for women, improving gender equality (and all types of diversity) in engineering benefits the industry itself. A workforce made up of varying genders and minorities creates a team dynamic more conducive to problem solving and innovation, and better reflects the communities for which we are solving problems (i.e. our customers) – all of this leads to improved business performance.

WERE YOU INSPIRED BY ANY OTHER WOMEN ALONG YOUR JOURNEY TO BECOME AN ENGINEER?

So many! Particularly my mum, who is an electrical engineer, and could always think of a creative way to solve any problem I brought to her. My high school maths and physics teachers were amazing, they really encouraged me to hold my own with the boys (I was one of the only girls doing physics). While at uni I did an internship with Jillian Kilby, who at that point had just started her own consultancy and showed me how versatile and varied a career in engineering can be.

WHAT DOES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IN ENGINEERING DAY MEAN TO YOU?

Day to day, it’s easy to get wrapped up in our own work, projects, deadlines and challenges, and forget we’re part of a huge network of amazing and intelligent women. International Women in Engineering Day is a reminder to touch base with my colleagues, mentors and mentees to reconnect and be reinvigorated.


WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER YOUNG WOMEN WANTING TO BECOME ENGINEERS THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IN ENGINEERING DAY?

Chase variety and diversity in your opportunities and experiences – head out to regional areas and work for a small business, try out a major consultancy, sit in a Council office – keep adding to your toolbox so that when you work out what you want to do, you’ve got the tools, confidence and contacts to go for it! And never pass up an opportunity to practise presenting or giving a speech, so that when you have to speak in public it’s that little bit easier.

CONTACT

CONTACT CATHERINE WALKER ABOUT YOUR NSW PROJECTS

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