

NSFM NEWS

AUSSIE SCHOLAR RESEARCHES WOMEN & POLITICS

Cape Breton's campaign school for women and First Nations is drawing international attention -- all the way Down Under.

An Australian city councillor flew to Nova Scotia earlier this month to gain insights from the organizers of the innovative program.



Australian Councillor Coral Ross and NSFM President Pam Mood earlier this month

Councillor Coral Ross, the president of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, made the Nova Scotian capital one of only two Canadian stops on her Churchill Fellowship tour.

Her thesis will investigate ways to improve general equality in local government by increasing the number of women elected.

Australia has set an ambitious goal of parity in local politics by 2025. The country has women's caucus conferences at the state and federal level, and state-funded mentoring programs, but Ross wanted to see what worked in other jurisdictions.

"We're at 35% (representation) now, and we have increased things, but we've run out of new ideas," Ross, the former mayor of the city of Boorondara, told NSFM NEWS.

She applied for a Churchill Fellowship, a grant which funds short-term research focused on topics tied to Winston Churchill's example of global leadership.

Her overseas tour includes visits to the US, Canada, UK, Sweden and Germany to investigate different ways to get more women into local politics.

"Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, why not have a look and see what wheels are out there?"

"If there's one that I can pinch or borrow, that would be good. I'm not expecting to find a silver bullet, but I am expecting to find something out there."

She points to "Teach a Girl to Lead," a project of the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, which aims to inspire girls and young women to follow in the footsteps of women leaders.

"This program really gets younger girls interested in running for politics," she says, crediting the presentations done by women politicians at elementary schools.

Seeing and accepting women in political roles at a young age is important, she says.

"While many men make politics a career in their early 20s, many women wait until they're in their 40s," she says.

Ross also points to the work being done by Port Hawkesbury Mayor Brenda Beaton-Chisholm and her Government FOCUS School for Women and First Nations.

News of the school caught her attention when she planned her trip abroad.

They don't do campaign schools in Australia, so she's interested to learn if providing training and education in the run-up to an election helps boost gender parity around council tables.

(Continued on page 2)

Coral Ross, continued

“We’re all doing different things around the world to get more women into public office, and we’re all working in a bit of a vacuum, really.”

While Ross has been welcomed on all the stops along her tour, not everyone back home is open to her research.

Some of her male colleagues are critical that her work seeks to push them out of a job.

Her response? “A council that doesn’t reflect its community, can’t serve its community.”

“We know if you have more women elected, you’ll end up with more women mayors, CEOs, CAOs and more women at the state and federal levels.”

Something must be clicking: Five women councillors have gone on to lead higher levels of government in Australia.

“There is that natural progression, and that’s the idea behind (the research).”

During her NS visit, Ross also met members of HRM council, where a Women’s Advisory Committee was just created.

“It was a unique experience to have her choose Halifax as one of her stops,” Councillor Lorelei Nicoll said this week.

Nicoll is keen to see the results of Ross’s research when she files her findings later this year to the Churchill Fellowship.

“How amazing it would be to have similar initiatives in Canada,” Nicoll said.

Barrington Future-Proofs Boardwalk

A recent boardwalk upgrade in South West Nova Scotia did more than just replace the planks: It factors in climate change and protects fragile coastal communities along the shoreline.

North East Point Beach is a hot spot in Barrington because it’s right beside the Cape Sable Island causeway, the showcase host for the municipality’s annual lobster pot Christmas tree.



“It’s definitely a well-known and popular area for both tourists and locals,” Barrington CAO Chris Frotten said.

“It’s accessible, there’s great parking, a picnic area, and it’s close to the commercial district of Barrington Passage with all our restaurants and stores.”

But the boardwalk was showing its age after two decades of beachgoers.

“It’s obviously something that’s used a lot, so we had to replace it.”

The original plan was a straight-up replacement, but it evolved through the planning process to include more access points and a new location back from the water to adapt for climate change.

“We’ve seen before that the tides and the surge have come up towards it, so we decided we should probably back it up.”

The existing rock retaining wall was also rebuilt and upgraded all along the boardwalk.

Despite the add-ons, the price tag on the project stayed the same.

“It was early enough in the process and we could manage the extras with no additional costs.”

The boardwalk upgrade ties in with the municipality’s three-year beach strategy, which also includes new signage, change rooms and lifeguards.

The municipality targeted the boardwalk, which reaches 825 feet along the beach, as its second major construction project under the Federal Gas Tax Fund.

They’ve also used their share of the fund to pay for an arena roof replacement and to put toward the rural internet project.

“It’s pretty incredible what (the Gas Tax Fund has) meant to municipalities since it started.”

Debbie Nielsen, NSFM’s Infrastructure and Officer, credits Barrington for taking the time to be thoughtful with the boardwalk’s design and construction.

“For a relatively small rural municipality, Barrington has done a really great job in attracting tourists, and this project is an indication of the value that they see in the development of tourism and recreation infrastructure.”