

INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ has been established to increase the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector. Every month we profile a different woman working in a different part of the industry.

We'd like to introduce Maire as our next Woman of Focus. In addition to her role at Stantec, Maire is also Chair of the WIN Queenstown Chapter Committee.



MAIRE LENIHAN

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND
PROJECT MANAGER**



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

I work for Stantec New Zealand and I'm based in our Queenstown office. My role is Business Development and Project Manager and I'm also Water Team Leader for our Queenstown and Alexandra offices.

Stantec is a top-tier international design and delivery firm. In New Zealand, our main work is in engineering consultancy for water and transportation and we're a community of designers, engineers, scientists, modellers, planners and project managers. There are 16 offices in New Zealand and over 22,000 staff worldwide.

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

I'm an environmental engineer and spent the first 10 years of my career providing professional engineering services for government water infrastructure projects in Ireland, the UK and the US. I specialised in the design of wastewater treatment plants and this literally meant getting my hands and boots dirty.

When I moved to New Zealand six years ago, I commenced a role in infrastructure delivery with Watercare Services in Auckland. I was involved in some really challenging multi-million-dollar infrastructure projects to provide for Auckland's growth, network resilience, and enhanced environmental outcomes. I loved collaborating with our consultant and contractor suppliers across the region and working with multiple and varied stakeholders to meet combined project objectives. During this time, I also completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration at the University of Auckland.

Then a year ago, I got a fantastic opportunity with Stantec to move to Queenstown and go back to my consultancy 'roots' while applying what I'd learned from the postgraduate diploma and client-side experience to my current business development role.

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

I'm fortunate to be working on some incredibly interesting and multi-disciplinary projects across Otago, one of which is the Clyde Wastewater Project. This project is a first-time wastewater infrastructure project for this historic gold-rush town. Once advanced, this project will reduce the reliance on private wastewater systems and have long-lasting environmental, community and economic benefits.

This project personally interests me because I grew up in a small rural community in Ireland and I appreciate the benefits that quality water infrastructure provides to rural communities that may not have access to municipal water supplies or wastewater infrastructure and are reliant on private supplies. These private supplies have high maintenance requirements and may not be as resilient or meet the same environmental quality standards as municipal supplies.

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

I moved back to my native Ireland after working in the US, just before the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC). I returned to the same office that I had left, however, in the period I was overseas, they had acquired a local company and I returned to a much larger, new team. I had to establish a relationship with my new co-workers who were also undergoing significant corporate change, just as the GFC hit. Government spending was slashed, projects were put on hold and redundancies, demotions and pay-cuts were the norm. It was tough for the entire industry.

The projects that did advance were incredibly competitive as firms focused on ensuring that revenue was coming in to keep their key staff employed. I had to deliver the projects I won to an exceptionally high standard as the competition was so fierce. This involved long nights in the office and at times undertaking the role of two people. I had a joke at the time, that after 5pm I would do the 'night shift'. When my computer-aided designer went home at 5pm, I would take off my designer/project manager hat and sit for hours finishing computer drawings to keep the project budget down. Although it was tough, it was really rewarding when our team received positive client feedback, received more work, and avoided redundancies as a result.

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 the infrastructure industry, we're responsible for the planning, design and construction of urban places, transport systems and underground infrastructure which are used by all members of society. Having a diverse team working on these projects from inception through to delivery, from board level to constructors on the ground, assists in ensuring that the needs of all end users are met.

One specific example is when I was working on the construction stage of a project on the Auckland Waterfront. The construction required a footpath to be closed and the installation of a pedestrian gantry walkway. The location of the gantry meant that streetlights were obstructed. During the day, this wasn't an issue, however, when I visited the area at night, with no streetlights and surrounded by construction works, it felt very unsafe and I knew that this feeling would be sentiment to other members of the public, particularly women.

I called the contractor and explained the situation and they arranged to have lighting installed in the gantry. When I visited the next evening, the difference was significant. There are many ways that we can influence a project and sometimes even the smallest changes, such as adequate lighting, can have a big impact to the infrastructure users.

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