



**International Women's Day event  
Australian Public Service Commission  
Hyatt Hotel, Commonwealth Avenue, Canberra  
Wednesday, 18 March 2009**

(Speech that was to be delivered by Minister Plibersek)

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

- Rayne de Gruchy, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Government Solicitor.

**Introduction**

Thank you Carmel (McGregor, Deputy Public Service Commissioner) for your introduction.

I would also like to thank Lynelle Briggs, Public Service Commissioner, for her kind invitation to speak here today.

The road towards equality between women and men has seen great advances over the last couple of decades.

There has been progress in:

- women's pay;
- women's labour force participation (now 45 per cent of total labour force);
- the availability of flexible and family friendly working conditions;
- access to quality affordable child care;
- legal rights post divorce and separation;
- women's education (women now account for 55 per cent of all higher education students);

- support available to survivors and victims of violence;
- availability of quality health care; and
- human rights.

In politics, women now make up 30 per cent of all of Australian Parliamentarians.

This compares to 30 years ago when there was not one woman parliamentarian in the Federal House of Representatives - it was an all-male house!

We have our first female Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC and two women, Julia Gillard and Julie Bishop, hold the position of Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Leader of the Opposition respectively.

Many women have achieved high office, good pay, significant influence.

We cannot yet say, however, that equality has been won.

Not when, so many women are stretched between paid work and caring obligations, unable to perform any of their many roles as well as they want.

Not when, women earn 83 cents for every dollar men earn.

Not when, the number of female board directors in ASX Top 200 companies actually decreased from 8.7 per cent to 8.3 per cent over the last two years.

Not when the average superannuation payout to a women is projected to be \$150,000, just 50 per cent of the average payout to a man in 2010-11.

Not when the biggest risk factor for becoming a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault is being a woman.

The Government recognises its role in tackling these challenges and is responding.

We have developed a modern and ambitious women's agenda for 2009 and beyond.

I have made:

- improving women’s economic outcomes and financial independence;
- reducing violence; and
- ensuring women's voices are heard at all levels of decision making

my three priorities as Minister for Women.

In addition, I have directed the Office for Women to investigate ways we can build stronger partnerships between men and women to achieve these goals.

### **Working across government to improve outcomes for women**

The Public Service has historically been a leader as an employer on gender equality.

For example, the Federal Public Service was one of the first organisations to grant employees paid maternity leave in 1973.

Women currently make up nearly 58 per cent of the 160,000 employees in the APS<sup>i</sup> and five departments are headed by women.

But seniority in the APS isn’t just a personal victory for the women who achieve it; it is an opportunity to better serve the whole of the Australian community.

As public servants, you have the responsibility for administering Government programs and policies so they deliver for the people we serve.

You also have the ability to shape community debate, social attitudes and behaviours.

I’d like to set you a challenge.

It’s time for the Federal Government to do better on gender – not just in its employment and promotion of women – but in its delivery of programs, policies and services.

To make a real impact on these issues, we can’t rely solely on the Office for Women - no matter how great they are or how hard they work.

There are four practical ways you can assist the Government to progress better outcomes for women.

### **1. Increase the proportion of women on Government boards.**

Women occupy around a third of board membership overall, but hold less than a quarter of the Chair and Deputy Chair positions (22.3 per cent).

The percentage of women on boards actually decreased by 0.9 per cent from 2007-2008.

My colleague Tony Burke, Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry said at last year's National Women's Rural Summit:

*When boards keep appearing before me with about 20 to 25 per cent female representation, I find it really hard to believe that the selection has been done purely on merit.*

*I am not interested in imposing formal quotas on selection committees, but at the same time, I've got to say, it's time that selection on merit simply cannot be occurring when women are so consistently and so blatantly underrepresented on almost every single board that is meant to be advising me. It just can't be right.*

The results speak for themselves.

Female representation in Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry boards has increased from 20 per cent in 2007 to 42 per cent in 2009.

But it is not just equity on boards but equity across the board that this Government is striving for.

Gender equality is best advanced through whole-of-government engagement, otherwise known as gender mainstreaming.

### **2. Support new gender infrastructure: Women's IDC**

The Government has created a Women's Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) to advance our women's work plan.

I met with the IDC for the first time today and I delivered a clear message, calling on them to use their position as APS leaders to influence and shape policies which can bring about improved outcomes for both women and men.

Debbie Budlender and Guy Hewitt, in their book, *Gender Budgets Make More Cents* said:

*Mainstream policies, such as industry policy or industrial relations, have more impact on women's lives than expenditure given to specific women's or children's services.*<sup>ii</sup>

This means that gender issues must be considered in all stages of the policy cycle, in every department.

And no, I don't mean just a generic tick and flick exercise.

How will our industrial relations policies affect women?

What are the differences between women's and men's work and caring patterns that affect our tax policy or retirement incomes?

How will the Global Financial Crisis affect women and men differently?

Gender analysis and engagement across all portfolios should be a standard.

### **3. Consider methodically how your department can improve outcomes for women**

Shortly, my Office for Women will support Jenny Macklin, and her Executive leadership in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs the Department to undertake a gender assessment trial.

The trial will comprise of two main activities.

The first will be an analysis of if and how gender was considered in the development and implementation of selected policies and programs.

The second component will look at FaHCSIA as an employer – gender pay gaps, levels of women in senior positions and the availability of flexible and family friendly conditions.

This gender assessment is just the first step.

I'll be seeking other government agencies to step up and do the same.

Unless we critically review the way we work and the gender implications, the situation in Australia is status quo.

I believe this can be better, and I suspect that you all do too.

#### **4. Use gender evidence to develop and administer policies**

As the Prime Minister said in April last year,

*Evidence-based policy making is at the heart of being a reformist government.*

The Office for Women is working with the relevant data collection agencies to improve the availability and quality of gender disaggregated data.

Up-to-date evidence combined with your excellent policy analysis skills will be vital tools to improve outcomes for women.

Today I am releasing the statistical publication, *Women in Australia 2009*, an important tool in promoting gender equality.

*Women in Australia 2009* highlights areas where we can achieve greater equality between women and men: economically, financially and socially.

I want to documents like this, to be valuable resources that assist you in advancing outcomes for women in your area.

#### **Conclusion**

I look forward to us working together to successfully introduce, shape and deliver effective policy and programs that are gender sensitive and that result in positive outcomes for ALL Australians.

The real challenge of whole of government is in the day to day realities of trying to work across boundaries to make sure the outcomes are achieved.

***ENDS.***

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<sup>i</sup> *State of the Service Report, State of the Service Series 2007-08, Commonwealth of Australia 2008*

<sup>ii</sup> (*Gender Budgets Make More Cents*, Budlender, D., Hewitt, G., Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002)