

**THE HON JULIA GILLARD MP**

**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

Minister for Education

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

Minister for Social Inclusion

**SPEAKING NOTES**

**Serious Women's Business Conference 2009**

9 November 2009

Melbourne

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects, particularly, to the women elders of the Wurundjeri people, both past and present.

Let me also acknowledge other speakers and attendees at this conference including:

- Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination;
- Sarah Hanson-Young, Australian Greens senator, South Australia;
- Helen Silver, Secretary, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet;
- Jillian Segal, Director of National Australia Bank, the Australian Securities Exchange Limited and The Garvan Institute of Medical Research;
- Megan Dalla-Camina, Chairperson, Serious Women's Business Conference 2009;
- Anne Summers, Conference facilitator, Serious Women's Business Conference 2009

Events like *Serious Women's Business* are an opportunity for us to come together to recognise Australian women who are leaders in their fields – to hear their stories and experiences.

This is a forum where women can pool their ideas, talents, and strategies for personal and professional achievement. Opportunities like this help to strengthen the foundations on which all women in Australia can strive and thrive.

The theme of this year's conference is '*The art of focus*'.

This theme speaks to us about personal focus, about being clear about your goals and dedicated in the pursuit of those goals.

It speaks to us about work methods, knowing that in our complex world it is not easy for the urgent to swamp the important. Thankfully, women know a thing or two about multi-skilling.

But in this gathering, I know the theme of '*The art of focus*' is also speaking to us about our need to focus on and support each other, to share and act as a team, to work together to achieve common goals for women. It is about this art of focus that I will speak today.

## ***Women in today's world***

I am an enormous optimist about women's roles and women's rights in today's Australia.

And I am so optimistic because I have lived in an age of such tremendous change for women.

When I was born in 1961, overwhelmingly fathers would have looked in to the eyes of their new born daughters and imagined for them a future of marriage and having children.

Today, new fathers may also have that dream for their daughters' futures, but a father looking in to the eyes of his new born daughter in today's Australia is also likely to dream of his daughter becoming a success in business, a Nobel winning scientist, a sporting legend, may be even a future Prime Minister. His conception of his daughter's future will be that she will learn, she will work, she may travel, she may volunteer her time to good causes, she may look for love and personal fulfilment, she may become a mother. She will be defined by the sum of these choices not any single one of them.

So given this degree of change for Australia's women and girls there is cause for optimism.

But more change is required.

More change is required to ensure women every door is as far open as it should be for women.

More change is required at the senior levels of corporate Australia given women hold only two per cent of chief executive positions in Australia, and only 8.3 per cent of board positions. Half of Australia's companies have no women on their boards at all and only six per cent of senior management is made up of women. Worryingly, this is down on 2006 figures.

While our government has already lifted the number of female chief executive offices in the Australian public sector, with five female APS departmental secretaries, there is more to do.

Even in higher education, Professor Sharon Bell reports in *Women in Science in Australia* that women continue to be "seriously under-represented in some specific disciplines of science, engineering and technology", according to Professor Bell, 'and (are) not well-represented at the most senior levels in all disciplines' at Australia's universities.

More change is required to get women in to all industries. If we look at traditional male enclaves like mining and construction, we find that even during the height of the boom when these key sectors of the Australian economy were facing constraints to growth because of skill shortages, women were not being hired.

At a time when the total employment in construction jumped two thirds, the overall share of female employment in the industry actually fell.

And more change is required for women to be fairly represented in our nation's decision making at national, state and local levels. While there has been a great deal of focus on women in our nation's parliaments, less has been said about our local council chambers.

As a government we are focussed on local government and trying to make a difference level with \$490,000 for a range of projects to help improve the participation of women in local councils and shires. This effort is needed because less than 30 per cent of councillors and only 7 per cent of council chief executive officers are women.

And there is more to do to deal with the gender pay gap that continues to widen. Based on data from the latest ABS Average Weekly Earnings publication, the average hourly gender pay gap was 13.1 per cent in May 2009.

The gender gap is even wider in some sectors: surprisingly, women in the finance and insurance sectors earn 24.7 per cent less than men. For women outside of white collar work, the story is just as bad. Across the board female technicians and tradeswomen earn 20.2 per cent less than men.

Time and again, we see the link between male domination in the well-paid sectors of the workforce and low pay rates in female dominated sectors.

### ***True Equal Pay***

But I share these statistics, not with a sense of doom and gloom but enthused about the possibilities for change.

For example, as a reforming Labor government, we are determined to see some real change made in closing the gender pay gap and our Fair Work Act has a significant role to play in addressing the serious undervaluation of women's work.

Equal remuneration provisions were first introduced into federal workplace relations legislation in 1994, giving effect to various international conventions.

But the track record of the effectiveness of these provisions is an uninspiring. To date, 16 applications have been made in the federal system. But none have succeeded.

Under Work Choices, the Australian Fair Pay Commission was given responsibility for applying the principle of equal remuneration for work of *equal value* in making wage setting decisions. The AIRC also had power to make orders to ensure equal work for equal value between men and women.

A report into equal pay commissioned by the Queensland Government in 2007 observed that the Commonwealth legislation did not provide any real opportunity to correct the undervaluing of feminised work or skills as it was limited to a very narrow test, being work of *equal value*.

The Fair Work Act 2009 has addressed this problem by widening the test used in the equal remuneration provisions to include the right to equal pay for work of *comparable* value, as well as equal value, reflecting the approach already taken in many states and territories. This will allow applications to be brought and argued on a more reasonable and logical basis.

I was delighted to announce last week that the Government will be an active participant in an important pay equity test case for workers in the social and community services sector. The Australian Services Union's application will seek significant increases for workers in social work, recreation work, welfare work, youth work and community development work. This sector employs more than 200,000 people - 87 per cent of whom are women - doing incredibly important work with the most in need in our community.

This will be the first case to be considered under the new, enhanced provisions of the Fair Work Act. This case will make history.

Our education revolution reforms are about improving life chances and life possibilities for every Australia child, boys and girls. As we strive to help young people garner the skills for life and for work, it is important we encourage both boys and girls to consider every job and career choice. We need to encourage girls to move into non-traditional industries and areas, and break down gender labour market stereotypes. Improving women's earning capacity and extending their choice of jobs will not

only aid women's own economic security and increase well-being and personal satisfaction but will lift our country's productivity.

Financially and socially, we can be better off with more women in the workforce, especially in under-represented occupations.

Amongst other important reforms for women, the Rudd Government takes huge pride in delivering on Paid Parental Leave in this year's Budget. Australia had waited too long for this reform which will be available to parents for births and adoptions that occur on or after 1 January 2011. Parents will be able to lodge Paid Parental Leave claims from 1 October 2010.

The scheme will benefit working families, employers and the broader community. It will support stronger families, increase workforce participation and promote early childhood development. Importantly, it will work with our new national employment standards that give new rights to request extended unpaid parental leave and part time and flexible working arrangements to enable the better balancing of work and family life.

### ***Beyond Government***

Building a stronger and fairer nation that offers equality for Australian men and women requires government action. This goal is our focus, the focus of the Rudd Government.

But achieving that stronger and fairer nation requires more than government action.

I believe that Australia's women leaders can help the Government achieve a stronger and fairer Australia.

We can do that by celebrating success and sharing our stories.

I ask you to celebrate with me the success of two Indigenous women, Terri Janke and Kathleen Bateman.

Terri, a council member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, launched her legal consultancy business while still looking after her two babies. It was a time when she had very little money.

Terri now runs a successful consultancy providing cultural and intellectual property advice to Indigenous artists.

Kathleen has been successful in a heavily male dominated field. She is the only female accredited wool classer trainer in Australia with the Australian Wool Exchange. Her company shears over one million sheep in Australia each year and provides traineeships to Indigenous young people.

Kathleen started out cooking meals for shearers. She showed extraordinary resilience in a male-dominated industry to take over management of the business, and develop accredited training programs for young shearers.

Both Terri and Kathleen should inspire us.

And women can create a stronger and fairer country, can help the next generation of Terris and Kathleenes, by working together for change.

Australia's women leaders have always supported non-profit organisations that empower women and girls. At an individual level, women support the non-profit sector as volunteers or philanthropists, through our work in a private capacity. Women also set up our own non-profit organisations.

Jill Lester will speak to you about the incredible work of her organisation, the Hunger Project, helping women to find ways out of poverty.

Australian businesses have the capacity to offer valuable in-kind support to non-profit organisations, and can introduce things like planned payroll giving schemes to promote philanthropy among their employees. We saw this happening after the tragic Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria.

Companies in Australia have a commitment to corporate social responsibility and women leaders in business can direct this commitment toward non-profit organisations like the Hunger Project that unapologetically make women and girls a priority.

And women leaders can direct their energies to mentoring younger women.

### ***Concluding remarks***

As leaders in your fields, you are uniquely placed to inspire other women to focus their energies on achievement and fulfilment.

In a conference entitled on the theme of '*The art of focus*' I am sure your focus will be on our collective role in making change, change for the future, change for Australian women, change for the women and girls who need our help the most.

I congratulate you all on the work you are already undertaking and commend your participation today in this Forum.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the day.