

**ROADS AUSTRALIA**  
**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY INDUSTRY LUNCHEON**  
**SPEECH BY**  
**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC**  
**GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**  
**MÖVENPICK HOTEL, HOBART, FRIDAY 10 MARCH 2023**

It is a great pleasure to be here today on the kind invitation of Roads Australia (RA). I warmly thank you for asking me to speak.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters.

The campaign theme for this year's International Women's Day, (IWD) is "#Embrace Equity.

On this theme I should like to firstly discuss the meaning of gender equity, secondly discuss some of the barriers to leadership for women, thirdly discuss why should there be equity in the workplace, fourthly how we are progressing in Australia on this equity journey and finally to suggest some specific goals to champion gender equity.

**What do we mean by equity?**

Equity in the workplace is about everyone having equal treatment, but is also about fairness and just opportunities, based on individual needs, and aims to give a larger pool of employees the equitable opportunity to aspire to leadership positions.<sup>1</sup>

I note that commendably, Roads Australia recognises, I quote, "the need to champion a diverse, inclusive and sustainable values-led organisation and industry." Importantly, RA also recognises the need for gender equity across your industry.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://recruitee.com/articles/equity-in-workplace>, accessed 7/02/2023.

I turn to my second topic of:

## 2. Barriers to Leadership for Women in the Workplace

There are many reasons why women are unrepresented in leadership positions across all sectors, including:

- structural barriers, such as lack of flexibility;
- subtle barriers, such as gender bias and stereotyping; and
- barriers from not being part of key decision-making processes.

A *Transport Women Australia Limited 2011* survey, still cited in 2022 research,<sup>2</sup> identified a number of challenges around workplace attitudes and practices, including sexual harassment, not being listened to or taken seriously, questions about their strength and capability, bullying and lack of respect.<sup>3</sup>

In a 2020 study, women spoke about the need to educate men in the industry about the benefit of having women in operational roles and at the decision-making table. These were essential if there was to be any change in workplace culture.<sup>4</sup> Over half the women interviewed commented on the importance of self-confidence when working in a male dominated industry. For the women in this study strength of character, confidence, resilience, tenacity and a sense of humour were ‘must have’ success factors and at levels greater than expected with their male peers.

Lack of confidence is a barrier for many girls and women. Research demonstrates that we are generally less confident than boys and men.

On confidence building, in a go to book of mine, *The Authority Gap*,<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Sieghart interviewed Janet Yellen, the 78th US Treasury Secretary, the 15<sup>th</sup> Chair of the US Federal Reserve and the first woman to hold both roles. She admitted, “...I do a lot of preparation. I don’t wing it...I don’t feel super-confident, no matter what position I’ve been in...”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.womenintransport.gov.au/resources/barriers-women-entering-and-progressing-transport-roles> page 27 accessed 21 February 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid page 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid page 28.

<sup>5</sup> *The Authority Gap* Mary Ann Sieghart Penguin Random House 2021

<sup>6</sup> Ibid page 101

Christine Lagarde, French lawyer, politician and President of the European Central Bank told Mary Ann, “Of course, it is part of the confidence issue to be overly prepared and to be rehearsed, and to make sure that you are going to get it all and not make a mistake.”<sup>7</sup>

Both these immensely capable and brilliant women put in hours of preparation for meetings or speeches to be absolutely sure of their ground.

I find it helpful to read these quotes at times when I am feeling uncertain, so they may help you too.

As another barrier, may I raise the issue of conscious and unconscious bias. Bias limits the influence of women and limits diversity and equity in leadership. It can affect earnings and impact career advancement. A perception survey of women professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in Australia found that 70% agreed that unconscious bias had negatively impacted their career advancement, and 60% agreed that it had impacted their earnings.<sup>8</sup>

A lot of behaviour which undermines women is unconscious. I can give a personal example of unconscious gender bias which occurred earlier in my career. The male partners of my law firm assumed that I did not have partnership ambitions for two reasons: because of my gender and because I had children! There had never been a female partner in the 100-year-old law firm. They were only used to men and made the incorrect assumption based on their norms and experience. After I made it known that I wanted to be a partner and became a partner, soon after two more females came into the partnership.

So, when we make it more normal for women to be in positions of authority and leadership, it becomes easier for those following.<sup>9</sup> Women in leadership positions are examples for other women to aspire to.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid page103

<sup>8</sup> Ibid page 5 citing Professionals Australia: Unconscious gender bias in the STEM professions (Melbourne, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> The Authority Gap

### 3. Turning to my third point, why there should be equity for women in the workplace?

We should be promoting gender equity as a matter of fairness. Importantly, there is also a commercial imperative for gender equity.<sup>10</sup> There is evidence that companies which have more women in decision-making are more productive and profitable.<sup>11</sup>

At the OECD International Transport Forum 2019, Susan Kurland, U.S.A. Assistant Secretary of Aviation, and International Affairs said: *“women bring a unique perspective to the issues facing a modernising global transportation system. When women are given an equal opportunity to succeed in transportation careers, they unlock new pathways for growth and profitability.”*<sup>12</sup>

Simply, there is an obvious economic and social benefit of having the talents of 50% of our population recognised.

In a 2022 report about your transport industry, it is noted that in a male dominated industry, with workforce shortages and shifting business models, it is imperative to remove obstacles to attracting, recruiting, and retaining women to the sector.<sup>13</sup>

Gender equity is also important for success in both recruiting and retaining talented people. The culture of a workplace is becoming a more important issue for our younger workers and millennials, particularly women. They are increasingly checking on diversity, equity, and inclusion in an organisation before taking up employment. They want a well-paid job, and also a work environment which accords with their values.<sup>14</sup> Quite simply, workplaces need to be attractive to and supportive of all genders if they want to attract and retain the best talent.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equity-insights-series> accessed 30/9/2021.

<sup>11</sup> [www.wgea.gov.au](http://www.wgea.gov.au) Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard, December 2022, accessed January 2023.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.womenintransport.gov.au/resources/barriers-women-entering-and-progressing-transport-roles>, page 20, accessed 21 February 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid at page 20.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.womenintransport.gov.au/resources/barriers-women-entering-and-progressing-transport-roles>, page 20, accessed 21 February 2023.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com.business> accessed 18/02/22/millennial-genz-workplace-diversity-equity

<sup>15</sup> Ibid page 2.

#### 4. May I turn to my fourth point, **How are we going on the road to gender equity in Australia?**

Simply, we are not doing very well.

The data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2021-2022 Census<sup>16</sup> indicated a consistent trend of men holding the larger share of managerial roles. Only 22.3 percent of CEO's were women.

In respect of the wider transport industry, women currently make up 27.4% of employees and under 5% of leadership roles, compared to 20% across all sectors.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the gender pay gap remains at 22.8 percent. On average, women are paid \$26,600 less than men a year.<sup>18</sup>

This is so even though leading employers recognise that pay equity is essential to superior performance.<sup>19</sup>

We still have a long way to go.

#### **Now to my 5<sup>th</sup> point of how do we promote equity for women in the workplace?**

First, research indicates that workplaces should ensure effective policies and practices related to recruitment, retention and promotion are in place to promote gender equality opportunities. Inclusion, flexibility, work life balance, workplace safety and company values are part of the solution. We need to highlight to men that equal working opportunities and equal sharing in family responsibilities benefits everyone. The more equal a society is, the safer and more prosperous it is for all.

We also need to raise awareness of the impact of bias in the workforce and need to call out and challenge bias and inappropriate behaviour.

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<sup>16</sup> covered around 10,000 employers and around 4.5 million Australian employees.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.womenintransport.gov.au/resources/barriers-women-entering-and-progressing-transport-roles>, accessed 21 February 2023.

<sup>18</sup> The WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2022 <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality>, accessed 9/2/23.

May I acknowledge the policy of our host, Roads Australia, which has a commitment to engage and retain women, and has a diversity and inclusion strategy, which references “equity”. RA aims to increase female representation across its activity, raise awareness and improve the attractiveness of the industry.

RA also aims to improve procurement and tendering processes to enhance female participation. One modest, but worthwhile example of RA’s equity actions, to encourage those on leave to stay connected to peers, is to offer up to five complimentary parental leave seats per major industry event. This recognises research which indicates that a large percentage of women who leave engineering and construction for children struggle to return to work because of the connection lost during their leave.<sup>9</sup>

Second, setting measurable targets has been shown to increase equity and the numbers of women in leadership positions in the public sectors, such as both our Australian Public Service (APS)<sup>20</sup> and Tasmania State Service.<sup>21</sup> In respect of the corporate sector, research shows that targets specifically in executive teams and line management roles are an effective mechanism to drive changes to increase the representation of women in leadership teams.<sup>22</sup>

Third, gender auditing, with transparent reporting and action plans should be used to track and address gender pay or leadership imbalances.<sup>23</sup>

Fourth, leadership in an organization is important. Research has indicated that the most powerful action a CEO can take to create a positive work environment for women is to be a role model for inclusive behaviours, particularly in management meetings and during promotion. By demonstrating that the CEO values diverse ideas and opinions and talks and acts in a way that is inclusive to both men and women, will promote equality.<sup>24</sup> There should be genuine listening in meetings and an acceptance of different leadership styles.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Australian Government (2016): Balancing the Future: The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016-19 cited in Chief Executive Women Senior Executive Census 2021 page 12. Targets set in 2001, and the proportion of senior female executives increased from 26.8% to 50% in 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Tasmanian Women’s Strategy 2018-2021 page 25. Targets were set in 2016. In 2021, 46.39% of senior executives were women.

<sup>22</sup> CEW Senior Executive Census 2021

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/diversity-and-inclusion>, page 2, accessed 28/01/2022.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid Bain and CEW research.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can all strive to achieve equality of gender and of leadership positions in our workplaces. We should target to end gender pay disparity, call out and challenge bias, and to make our workplaces inclusive and diverse.

Thank you and I wish you all every success.