

**RECEPTION TO MARK THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF
WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 28 APRIL 2026**

Good evening. I warmly welcome you here to mark the 30th anniversary of Women's Legal Service Tasmania.

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky and waters.

Women's Legal Service Tasmania (WLST) provides an important and much-needed service. Women who would not otherwise have access to the justice system, in particular women who experience violence or disadvantage, are supported by the Service.

This anniversary enables us to reflect on the fact that WLST started 30 years ago, incorporated in April 1996. It was officially launched by the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Sue Walpole, in June of the same year. It came about after the Australian Law Reform Commission, in response to the Equality Before the Law reference, recommended that the Commonwealth Government fund a legal service in each state and territory.

The WLST started in a small office with two part-time solicitors to answer telephone inquiries, a community worker and a communications, resource and support worker. The service grew from predominantly telephone advice to representation and the employment of more lawyers to handle casework and court appearances.

Currently, the Service has 37 staff members and offices in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. It has grown into a service that can address a range of issues and meet women's needs. Programs now offered include Allied Services,

Working Women's Centre, Temporary Visa Program, Just Healthy Families, Prevention Programs and Community Legal Education.

I quote CEO Yvette Cehtel, "the power of WLST is that it has been built on the contributions of women over the last 30 years...it's not dependent on any one person...the need for this organisation is still as real today as it was 30 years ago, and that was to combat gendered violence... and to open the legal system so that women could access it."

As we all know, the statistics for women suffering violence are shocking,¹ and sadly demonstrate and confirm the need for the critically important services that the WLST provides to women in Tasmania.

Not only are we here today to support WLST, but also to celebrate the determination of women who contribute to the goal of gender equality. This is vital due to the link between gender inequality and family violence.

I am delighted to be hosting this 30th anniversary and to support this vital service. I also hosted the inaugural International Women's Day fundraising lunch for WLST in 2024. Nearly \$10,000 was raised, which enabled the Women's Legal Service's North-East Outreach Program solicitor to significantly increase her face-to-face time with clients, and to help more women access justice in the north-east of Tasmania.

Congratulations on your 30th anniversary. May I acknowledge the leadership of your dedicated chairs and committees, past and present and your employees and volunteers.

Please enjoy your reception.

¹ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quickfacts>, accessed 27/02/26 citing Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). [Personal Safety](#), Australia: 2021-22. ABS Some examples are that:- one in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15; one in five women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15; and one in four women has experienced violence, emotional abuse or economic abuse by a cohabiting partner since the age of 15.