Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the Centenary of Women in Policing in Tasmania.

I begin by paying my respects to the Mouheneener people, the traditional and original owners of this land – those who have passed before us; and in acknowledgement of today’s Tasmanian Aboriginal community, being the custodians of this land.

May I acknowledge among you:

➢ Darren Hine, Commissioner of Police;
➢ Scott Tilyard, Deputy Commissioner;
➢ Donna Adams, DPFEM Deputy Secretary;
➢ Richard Cowling, Assistant Commissioner; and
➢ Sergeant Brenda Orr, Chair of the 100 Years of Women in Policing Committee.

I have read with great interest 100 Years of Women in Policing, published to celebrate this centenary. It was one hundred years ago that the first woman police officer in Tasmania, Kate Campbell, was sworn in to office. WWI had changed the role of women in the Australian work force and women such as Emily Dobson had been campaigning for the introduction of women police officers.
The motives behind allowing women to be police officers I found interesting. It was not primarily because denying women access to this form of employment was seen as discrimination or that women should be allowed equal access to a policing career but rather, it seems, women were considered necessary to deal with policing issues in relation to women and children.

In 1917 Tasmania’s Attorney-General William Propsting supported the appointment of women police officers because he had learnt that women police in other States had been of great assistance in dealing with offences and complaints relating to women. ‘A number of girls lacking or defying parental control had been induced to return home ... through the influence of these women,’ he said.

So was this change more about improving control over and moral guidance for wayward girls than gender empowerment?

Kate Campbell’s career with Tasmania police was short, she left within three months but shortly after two more women were employed, one in Hobart and one in Launceston. Their work included meeting the arrival of long distance trains and steamers to direct the arriving women and children to accommodation; they patrolled public parks; visited factories that employed women; dealt with fortune telling; patrolled poorer areas of the city to see that children were properly attended to and assisted with the issue of truancy.

Until the 1960s female applicants had to be single, divorced or widowed. They were separated from male police officers and worked from the Police Women’s Office in Launceston, Burnie or Hobart and their work was for the most part confined to the welfare of women and children, as I have described, and administrative duties.

Vera Webberley, who was in charge of the Police Women’s Section in Hobart, became the first female Sergeant in 1960. In 1960 there were only 10 female police officers based around the State.

From the 1960s women became involved in mainstream policing and by the late 1970s pay parity was achieved. In 1970 Caroline Grimsey became the first female police officer to remain a police officer after marrying. In 1973 the first three policewomen were transferred to the CIB. And in 1978, Beth Ashlin became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of Inspector.
Heather Innes was another trailblazer for women and her career spanned the 60s, 70s and 80s. She was the first Australian woman to head a drug bureau, the second woman to be appointed to the rank of Inspector, and was the State’s only police pilot. Born in Smithton, not surprisingly she is member of the Circular Head Hall of Fame along with Commissioner Darren Hine, something that came to my attention last week during our Circular Head Municipal Visit.

Another pioneer was Lyn Jones, whose career spanned from 1979 to 2008. Lyn was promoted to Inspector in 1997. With my interests in child protection and sexual assault, I well remember her work in this area. There are so many women I could mention who have been pioneers and so many current and inspiring stars who are included in the history. I can’t not mention Donna Adams, appointed as the first Female Commander in 2008 and the first female Assistant Commissioner in 2011.

The changes in the 100 years have been dramatic and many of the restrictions on women are startling today. An example is the requirement into the 90s for women to wear high-heeled court shoes, even on night shift foot patrol! Long-serving Sergeant Sally Cottrell, explains, ‘As a female we wore skirts and high heeled shoes... [and] The skirts and pantyhose where impractical and often a hindrance especially when trying to climb a fence or attending a disturbance.’

And Heather Innes commented, ‘Imagine what that was like trying to run after crooks in high heels!’ High heels went at some time in the 1980s along with the issued black handbag containing a baton, notebook and sometimes a pistol.

Today, women comprise 32% of sworn police officers in Tasmania Police, and there are 366 female Constables, 35 female Sergeants and seven Commissioned Officers. Research commissioned by the British Association of Women Police has suggested that a minimum of 35% of female officers is needed for adequate cultural integration.1 So we are not quite there in Tasmania, and it seems to be quite a challenge to move from around 30% to 35% and for women to have proportionate representation at the Commissioned Officer level. Of course, I don’t need, with this audience, to talk about the economic and social benefits of workplace gender equality.

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What is key to preventing women from resigning when children are born and to preventing family responsibilities from impeding promotion opportunities for women is to normalise flexible work place arrangements. In 1994 Tasmania Police introduced the possibility of police officers working reduced hours. As Andrea Heath described, this was ‘transformational’. Normalising flexible working hours and fractional appointments for men and women is key to achieving gender equality and to stopping the evaporation of women from the work force.

So I was pleased to see that profiles of Kellie Bridges, Kristin Males and Holly Bond, three women police officers all working part-time, are included in the History, illustrating Tasmania Police’s commitment to normalising flexible hours and rostering.

Please now enjoy the reception celebrating this significant milestone.

Thank you.