

WOMEN IN RESOURCES NATIONAL AWARDS 2017
SPEECH BY
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GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, LAUNCESTON
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Good evening everyone and welcome to the Women in Resources National Awards for 2017.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land – to pay respect to those who have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

I acknowledge Minister for Resources, the Honourable Guy Barnett MP, Bruce Cox, Managing Director, Pacific Operations (representing Rio Tinto, naming rights sponsor), Ray Mostogl, President Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council and General Manager, Bell Bay Aluminium

Can I warmly welcome our interstate and international guests to Tasmania and to Launceston. I do hope that you will have some time to explore our beautiful island.

Lou Clark has asked to speak about why gender equity is important, and what we can do to accelerate gender parity and inclusiveness – a subject that is close to my heart and which needs no prompting for me to speak about!

It is well known that historically the mining and resources sector has been perceived to be a men's domain, with the representation of women remaining low.

Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency data published in 2016 showed that females comprised 14% of employees in the mining industry,¹ down from 17% in 2013.²

There are good reasons for addressing the under-representation of women in employment and in male dominated industries in particular. First, it is economically sound to expand the labour pool by tapping into under-represented groups such as females and that there is a strong business case to do so. According to the Grattan Institute, there are three big reforms that could have a marked effect on the prosperity of Australia and one of these is increasing female workforce participation.

I was intrigued to read that increasing women's participation in your industry reduces the cost of asset depreciation and financial costs associated with workplace accidents. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy Western Australia has reported:³

... when women are part of the workforce at mine sites, better care is taken of the equipment; there are improved workplace relations through the moderating impact of soft skills such as negotiation and the overall safety record has [improved].

It has also been found that teams with gender diversity improve decision making, innovation and financial results.⁴

As well as a business case for increasing female workforce participation there are equity grounds for doing so.

Mining is the highest paying industry for men and women, but has one of the lowest participation rates for women. The fact that women are over-represented in lower paid occupations is one the reasons for the gender pay gap (currently 16% for average full-time weekly earnings). It helps explain why it is that while more females now graduate from university, the gender

¹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gender composition of the workforce: by industry*, April 2016.

² Minerals Council of Australia, 'It's not just a program', MCA Workforce Gender Diversity Review, White Paper, June 2013, 3. It seems it does tend to rise and fall in line with economic cycles.

³ Quoted in Minerals Council of Australia, n 5, 4.

⁴ Minerals Council of Australia, n 5, 4.

pay gap persists. Clearly, increasing the proportion of women in male dominated, higher paying work is one way of addressing the gender pay gap.

So females comprise just 14% of the workplace in the Mining Industry. The experience of other occupations shows things can change. In 1966 when I started University, there were very few female law students and when I started work in the legal profession as an articled clerk, there were just two women lawyers practising in Tasmania.

Fast forward four decades or so. There are now more female law graduates than males and in the legal profession in Australia. In 2014 there was close to an even gender split with men comprising 51% of those in legal practice and females 49%.⁵

However, the gender pay gap is worse in the legal profession – reported to be almost 30% in 2016.⁶ Why is it that there are so many women law graduates but so few female partners in legal firms, so few silks, so few judges? What happens is that women evaporate from the legal profession post admission or at least pull back from full-time work and their career prospects suffer.

There are lessons here for your industry. It is not enough to increase the participation rate of women in male dominated courses such as geology and engineering, although this is an important first step.

That first step is preceded by addressing the under-representation of girls in STEM subjects at school. There is empirical evidence that girls are discouraged from developing their maths and science skills from a young age, by the stereotype that maths and science are for boys, when research also tells us that boys aren't better at these subjects than girls.⁷

⁵ 2014 Law Society National Profile, 2015, 2.

⁶ WGEA Data Explorer, <http://data.wgea.gov.au/comparison/?id1=115&id2=115>, accessed 12 may 2016.

⁷ Adam Grant, 'Differences between Men and Women are Vastly Exaggerated' 7 August 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/differences-between-men-women-vastly-exaggerated-adam-grant>, accessed 9 August 2017.

The first step – increased enrolments and graduations in non-traditional degrees for women – needs to translate to increased employment of women in the mining industry. Once there, they need to be nurtured, retained and promoted.

The literature in relation to improving gender diversity in the mining industry is impressive. Issues such as the need for mentoring, for female role models in leadership roles;⁸ the need to address women's lack of self-confidence compared to men; and for workplaces to more accommodating to different leadership styles.

Work culture is another issue particularly relevant to mining and resources. Women often don't stay in male dominated industries because the workplace culture is not inclusive; and an inclusive culture is difficult to achieve without a critical mass of females.

From personal experience, I would like to focus on the need for workplace flexibility to support attracting and retaining women. For me this was the key. Working flexibly when I had young children, the ability to pick them up from school, juggle things when they were sick and in school holidays meant that I was able to stay in the workforce, meet the performance expectations of my job as an academic in teaching and research and gain promotion.

For too many women, women's caring responsibilities inhibit career progression. Their careers are derailed because of caring responsibilities and breaking back into work after a gap can be difficult. Juggling care responsibilities can be particularly challenging when working in remote locations, when a lot of travel is required and for FIFO positions. In these situations, even greater support is needed for parents in terms of child care and so on.

It is often said that many women choose to leave the work force; or that they choose to work in less demanding lower paid employment. But their choices are so often constrained choices:

⁸ I understand that according to 2013 data there were only two CEOs among the 89 mining companies reporting to WGEA: Minerals Council of Australia, n 5, 41.

- >constrained by an inability to commit to work in industries that have a culture of over-work and long hours;
- >constrained by gender-role stereotypes which assume the primary care giver must be female.

Workplaces need to mainstream flexible work, for men and for women. Employers should not treat part-time work and parental leave as a problem, and not marginalise employees as a result, or regard such options as a sign of flaky commitment.

Cultural change and gender equality is not just a matter for the mining industry. Societal and cultural norms need to change to break down the stereotype of the male and primary breadwinner and the female as primary carer. One way of doing this is to encourage men into female dominated professions of nursing, child care, primary teaching and social work to help break down the assumption that caring-based work is for women. Gender stereotypes work both ways.

And the criminologist in me has to add that the benefits of breaking down rigid gender role stereotypes has the additional benefit of tackling the underlying causes of gender violence. But that is another story.

To conclude: The Women in Resources National Awards demonstrate a commitment to improving gender equality in the sector. They provide a platform to showcase and encourage female talent in the industry, demonstrating to younger women (and their mothers and fathers) a set of path breakers and role models across occupation categories in mineral and resources and to celebrate the advances that have been made in gender equity in this sector.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak tonight.