

WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 3 MAY 2016

Good evening. Dick and I welcome you to Government House for this celebration marking the 20th anniversary of Women's Legal Service Tasmania.

Among the guests I would like to acknowledge are your CEO Susan Fahey, Board Members, Donors, Volunteers and Supporters; including the Honourable Dr Vanessa Goodwin, the Honourable Rob Valentine, Cassy O'Connor, Leader of the Greens, Justice Helen Wood, Judge Barbara Baker, Donna Adams, Tasmania Police Deputy Secretary and Luke Rheinberger, Executive Director of the Law Society of Tasmania.

This is a special occasion, not least because it enables us to reflect on the fact that a mere twenty years ago the Women's Legal Service came into being, in response to what many of us had known for far longer than that: namely, that women experienced significant barriers to accessing justice through the legal system.

In its interim report in 1993 and again its final report in 1994, the Australian Law Reform Commission, in response to the Equality Before the Law reference, recommended that the Commonwealth Government fund a women's legal service in each state and territory.

So it was that two years later, the Women's Legal Service Tasmania (WLST) became an incorporated organisation in April 1996 and was officially launched by the then Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Sue Walpole in June 1996.

WLST originally employed two part-time solicitors to answer legal enquiries from around the state, a part-time community education officer and a part-time administrative officer. Today, it has grown to employ four solicitors, a Principal Solicitor and the CEO in the Southern Office, as well as administrative staff, enabling assistance to over 1000 women every year.

And WLST now also has a presence in the North-West, with the establishment of the Burnie office.

WLST is overseen by a voluntary board of management comprising women from a broad range of professional backgrounds. It also receives voluntary support including support from recent law graduates. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those volunteers and supporters who have assisted in the work of the Women's Legal Service over the years.

The factors identified by the ALRC in 1994 and 1995 for impeding access to justice for women, namely lack of financial resources and a lack of services to deal with particular problems women face such as family violence and discrimination, remain with us two decades later, together with the need for such a service.

As well as service delivery, the Women's Legal Service has a very important role in education, advocacy and policy development. Through my former roles with the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute and the Sentencing Advisory Council, I know how valuable the submissions it makes to law reform inquiries are.

I would like to particularly congratulate the Women's Legal Service on its award winning *Girls Gotta Know* website and app, a national legal information site for young women.¹ And the more recent *Guys Gotta Know* site,² which was launched in February with the AFL and the Clarence Football Club. The information these sites supply is much broader than legal information for it contains important messages about respectful relationships and controlling behaviour.

¹ <http://girlsgottaknow.com.au/>

² <http://guysgottaknow.com.au/>

These messages seek to confront violence supportive attitudes which we know to be an important way of addressing the underlying causes of sexual and family violence.

So congratulations on your work, thank you again for all who have contributed to it, and Happy Birthday!

Thank you.