



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

VESKI INSPIRING WOMEN FELLOWSHIP AWARDS 2017

Wednesday, 21st June 2017

Professor David de Kretser AC, former Governor of Victoria

Dr Amanda Caples, Victorian Lead Scientist

Professor Ian Smith, Chairman, veski

Fellowship recipients, their family, friends and supporters

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this morning.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you all to Government House. It is a particular pleasure, having welcomed you to the Inaugural Fellowship awards in December 2015.

That was just a short time ago in some ways, but it seems like such a long time in terms of what, as Governor, I have had the privilege to see and hear since then.

I recall, in 2015, talking enthusiastically about STEM, its importance to Victoria and the need to encourage women into STEM related careers.

Well, almost 18 months later, my enthusiasm has only been heightened.

I am conscious that, for Victoria to flourish in a disrupted and competitive global economy, it must be ready to feed talent into the STEM occupations. Quite simply, it is forecast that 75% of the fastest growing occupations will require STEM skills.

And to feed that pipeline, we need women as well as men. It is easy to see that we are selling ourselves short when we realise that, currently, only about 25% of those in the STEM workforce are women.

In this room I can be confident that I am preaching to the converted.

You are aware of, or a part of the over 150 biotech firms, and the over 10,000 researchers and clinicians that we have in more than 25 major facilities.

And you know that Victoria is ranked in the top 5 biotech centres in the world.

To maintain, or to improve on that ranking, we need to encourage women into research and, as recognised so well by these awards, to keep them in research.

I have seen the challenges that women can face when the years in which they start a family converge with the years in which their careers are in full flight.

But these last few years, visiting many laboratories, participating in numerous science events and hearing from female researchers, I now have a greater appreciation as to the particularly detrimental effect that convergence can have on research.

Unlike many other disciplines, scientific research can't just await a leader's return in some years' time, and it does not readily lend itself to flexible part-time work.

And that brings me to the innovative thinking that lies behind these fellowships.

Thanks to veski, these fellowships, worth \$150,000 each over a three year period, provide material support for talented women to manage a career break in order to carry out family or carer commitments.

The funds may be used in a variety of ways. They may, for example, help to fund childcare to ensure that a Fellow can continue her ongoing research. Or they may be used to support a research assistant to continue a project until the Fellow is able to return to it.

Congratulations to each of the Fellows about whom we shall hear in a moment.

Before that though, may I offer congratulations to the veski team for its part, not only in this program, but also in successfully establishing here in Victoria, a strong, resilient network of world-class researchers who collaborate to drive innovation.

And thank you to all those who give their time and expertise in the selection process which, given the depth of talent in our State, must be a challenging one.

It now gives me great pleasure to ask Professor Ian Smith, Chairman of veski, to address us.