



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

VICTORIA POLICE SUPERINTENDENTS DINNER

Wednesday 8 August 2018

Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton AM APM

Commander Glen Weir

Members of the Victoria Police

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 in the room.

This evening, I am going to talk about several things, including parity for women. However, I hope that I have enough insight to appreciate that everyone in this room is already alive to the issues that underpin the statistics. And that, in any event, dinner and statistics generally don't go all that well together, particularly when the figures can be a little depressing.

But more particularly, I suspect that everyone in this group has heard those statistics before, and many not only know them, but have lived them.

That said, let me still start with this topic. What some refer to as 'women's issues': what I prefer to reframe as 'people's issues'. In fact, 'the community's issues' and the issues that, if not addressed, will affect the future prosperity of our State, holding us back from reaching our full social and economic potential.

Somehow, when we speak of 'women's issues', it is like some sort of 'unmentionable' disease not normally discussed in polite company. Or it sounds like a problem that belongs to the hapless group that can't help but be....well....women.

That is: the 'other' sex.

And so, tonight you will be spared all but the briefest reference to the figures.

We all know that, although things are changing, we must still count many successes for women in tiny little numbers.

In fact, often in 'ones'. Some of you may have heard me say this before. If so, I apologise for the repetition, but it can't be helped.

Australia has had just one female Governor-General. One female Prime Minister. Victoria has had one female Governor, one female Premier and one female Chief Commissioner of Police.

We know that in the top ASX 200 companies, there is something like just 10 women Chairs and only nine women CEOs.

And we know that the World Economic Forum rates our 'lucky country', Australia, as 35th in the world for women's equality gender parity. We rank behind a number of European, African and South American nations.

And we know – in fact you know better than anyone – more than one woman is killed in an incident of family violence every two weeks in Australia. Sadly, many more are injured. And one in four women have experienced at least one incident of violence at the hands of a partner.

I said things are changing - and they are.

In Victoria we have seen a Royal Commission into Family Violence, that was fundamental to addressing the safety of women.

In 2015, before there were any targets for women on paid Victorian Government boards, only 36% of seats were held by women. Targets were set that same year. Now, 53% of those board seats are held by women.

And I am proud to say that in Victoria, pay parity is a little better than the Australian average. Victorian women are paid an average of 12.2% less than men, rather than 15.3% or around \$250 per week, which is the national pay gap.

I apologise. Having said that I would not do 'the usual', of walking you through the figures, I seem to have done exactly the opposite. In my defence, it does set a context. But let me stop myself there, and change tack.

I thought I might just use this opportunity to chat about a few loosely related topics.

The first is that this dinner really gives me heart. Let me explain why.

Tony and I – with our more than 80 years combined experience as lawyers and judges – have overlapped a great deal with police. He even more than me, having always practised criminal law and been a criminal law judge. And at the Bar, he was very often briefed to represent members.

I did practise some criminal law and, with him, I prosecuted criminal trials in Hong Kong for nearly three years, before spending close to 10 years in the Children's, Coroner's and Magistrates' Courts. But then the last 18 years of my legal career was spent as a judge of the Family Court of Australia.

That experience gives us some insight into the police force. Of course, it can't help but be an outsider's insight.

That small insight, however, combined with my knowledge of the AFL – having previously been a Commissioner for seven or so years – leads me to see parallels between a disciplined force such as the police, and a sporting club or organisation such as the AFL or a footy club.

I see the huge advantages when people can join together to become part of a group. I envy the easy sense of belonging and connection that a tightly knit group or team can build.

But I know too that the same tightness, the ethos, and what become the cultural norms, can become so deeply entrenched in such groups that, depending where you fall within that culture, it can be hard to trade places or to improve your position.

And so, as I said, I take heart from this dinner.

I know the work that Victoria Police has done on parity. And a dinner like this is a good example of action: of 'putting your money where your mouths are'.

The initiative of gathering senior police such as Superintendents together is indisputably good. You are at a stage in your careers when you should be stretched. When it is good to be exposed to external and fresh ideas. When your leadership skills can thus be enhanced.

But the truth is that, amongst a group of Superintendents, there will still be many more men than women. And so, there is likely to be a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of those men continuing to enhance their careers as a result of this exposure.

May I say that it is generous – and so very smart – that you have initiated this concept, whereby you each bring a woman into the fold.

This is an example of leadership at its best. You recognise gaps. You realise that something needs to be done. You take the initiative to do it. And, whether male or female, you do not shut the door of opportunity behind yourselves.

I really admire you.

And so, while I have the opportunity, may I say something further to you about diversity.

I really do believe in it!

Not because it is politically correct (an expression I don't warm to, by the way: it is so often used to shut down the sorts of important discussions you are supporting this evening.....but perhaps that is a diversion into a whole different speech!)

Anyway, I don't believe in diversity just because it is politically correct, nor just because the basic human right to equality demands it.

I genuinely believe that diversity creates the strongest possible pathway to success.

And I believe in diversity, in the most diverse possible way!

It's not just about gender. Although it is. Or ethnicity. Although it is. Or age. Or sexuality. Or field of expertise. Although of course those elements are crucial too.

I firmly believe in sharing a workplace, or a board table, with people who think differently from me, and differently from each other. With creative as well as concrete thinkers. Risk-takers alongside conservatives. With the slightly off-beat and those who are more direct and to the point.

I believe it because it strengthens – it enhances – any discussion and decision.

I mentioned the AFL before. In my years on the AFL Commission, I shared the table with some terrific minds.

Although each Commissioner brought to the table a multifaceted set of skills, there were certain hallmarks that ensured a great ferment amongst the group.

One was a Rhodes Scholar. An engineer by training. A concrete thinker. A highly successful man in business. Someone who knew the game as a former and highly decorated player.

His concrete thinking was well matched by a bright philosopher, a man of and for the people, a strategic genius. Always analysing an issue from a slightly, (sometimes markedly), different perspective to anyone else at the table.

There were the deal makers: those with the capacity for the creative thinking that could help carve a successful path through a complex deal.

And then the counter-balance to that. The conservative, risk-averse lawyer. Useful at times. Stultifying if left only to our own type!

And then there were those who were close to the community. Who could feel the temperature. Who were proficient when it came to understanding the workforce and the likely impact of our decisions on these participants and stake-holders.

Now, although I knew how good those differences were – how much they enriched, and sometimes even safeguarded our processes and our decisions, they weren't always easy to navigate or accommodate.

For ease, we might all choose to be amongst our own. To be with those with whom we have the most in common, with whom the conversation will flow so easily. So seamlessly. With whom decisions will be quickly achieved without much discussion, and certainly without conjecture.

And there are times when swift and seamless decisions are absolutely what the situation requires. I am just saying that, mostly, even with the discomfort – or frustration – that may be thrown up by difference, decisions are usually better if a variety of perspectives have been considered.

Actually, in this regard, I think those of us blooded in the adversarial setting of a courtroom are lucky. We are used to robust discussion. We are used to two or more sides being strongly advocated. Polite disagreement is somewhat normalised. We are used to finding a solution, and used to abiding the umpire's decision.

I still have a few moments left and so I thought I might just talk a little about my role and what I am seeing in the community.

This role gives us a wonderful perspective of what our State looks like.

I wanted to mention it to you because, we know from experience, that when you are immersed in a job – particularly one that demands that you frequently see the worst of human behaviour – sometimes your world view can become distorted. Or at least narrowed.

So, just by way of orientation, let me explain that there are four main parts to the Governor's role.

There are the constitutional duties: an oversight of the State's constitution. Signing bills into law, or ensuring a seamless transition between governments after elections, are examples.

The Governor leads the community on ceremonial occasions, such as ANZAC Day, or in commemorative services. And it is the Governor who has the very positive task of investing the Australian honours awarded to Victorians.

Increasingly, across the years, international engagement has become an important part of the role, with the Governor working to ensure that Victoria's cultural, social and economic interests are promoted overseas.

And finally, the part of the role that takes up most of our time is working with the community right across Victoria, with people from all walks of life and with organisations that traverse business, education, sports and arts, and every possible discipline or community group.

I have the opportunity to congratulate, encourage and thank them. And to bring people together, emphasising community harmony and cohesion.

And so. My overview of Victoria? Well, I think we live in a very fortunate setting.

A State with a long and stable democracy, 25 year on year growth, and the recognition this week of leading Australia on most of the important economic measures.

We have a rapidly growing population that will most likely see Melbourne surpass Sydney in population within the next 10 years or so.

We have the benefits of a diverse community. We can be proud that Victorians come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages and dialects, and follow more than 130 religious faiths.

We live in not only a physically beautiful State, but one that is also particularly productive. Victoria comprises only 3% of the nation's landmass, but we produce around 25% of the nation's food and fibre exports.

Melbourne excels in the biosciences. It is one of only three world cities to have two universities in the global top 30 biomedical rankings. We are also ranked in the top three global cities for students.

Victoria is leading the way here in advanced manufacturing and aerospace technology, cyber security, defence and mining technology and gaming.

We live in a city voted for seven consecutive years as the world's most liveable.

Our major sports events agenda would be the envy of most other places, and yet we have a rich offering in the arts as well. Many people don't realise that our NGV is in the top 20 most visited galleries anywhere in the world.

And we are, without doubt, a community filled with kindness. With altruistic people. With generous people. With good people.

We see it everywhere. People visiting the sick and the elderly who are without family support, rescuing food to feed those on hard times, packing hampers of necessities for those experiencing homelessness, or helping a young person with their studies to ensure that he or she doesn't drop out of school. And so on and so on.

And so, what has this unique vantage-point proven to me?

That we do live in a positive and advantaged setting. And that we need to appreciate that.

But our vision mustn't be clouded by complacency or hubris.

We need to be vigilant in ensuring equal opportunity, respecting diversity and striving for social harmony. We need to ensure that the prosperity and the successes within our community are equally open to all.

And that brings me to you.

As members of the police force, you are on the frontline of our community. The frontline of tragedies, of crime and of violence. It comes with great risks, and the stakes are high.

We commend and applaud the bravery and resilience of the members of Victoria Police.

But your position on the frontline also means that you are able to do so much good. To quote your recruitment material: you are a *'force for good'*.

And that gives me great optimism.

Optimism that your work not only keeps us safer, but that, by your leadership, you can contribute so directly to the cohesion within our community that helps to ensure that every Victorian can experience the 'peace and prosperity' that are the precious words of our State motto.

We thank you for that, and for inviting us to join you for this special dinner.