



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

WOMEN IN TRADES RECEPTION

Tuesday 10th December 2019

Ms Sonja Terpstra MP, Member for Eastern Metropolitan, representing the Honourable Gayle Tierney MP, Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education

All our guests

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 evening.

I would like to welcome you here to Government House. I wonder if, when you received the invitation to attend, you might have wondered why you were being invited. And, in particular, if you wondered how this event was linked to making decorations for, and then the unveiling of a Christmas Tree!

When I say it like that, I can readily see how it sounds a bit puzzling. But rest assured that the thinking behind this event is quite clear, and it supports issues that are particularly dear to us.

First, we know that for Victoria's future prosperity, we need to overcome a skills shortage in trades and technical roles. In fact, these skills are sorely needed around Australia, and overseas as well.

The figures show us that. As do our conversations with employers, here and elsewhere.

Secondly, we know that women are under-represented in trades, and yet have so much to offer.

Nationally, for example, women make up just 3% of those employed in the electrotechnology and telecommunications trades, and only 1% of those working in construction, engineering and automotive trades.

Sadly, the number of women in the manual trades in Australia has barely budged in the last 20 years.

Similarly, in Victoria, women make up only 2% of Australia's construction workforce, despite something like 1 in 10 jobs in Victoria last year being in the building industry.

We need more women in trades! We need the broadest available talent pool.

And we need the complementary skills that women often bring to the workplace: their communications skills, and capacity for team work and problem-solving.

We also need increased productivity.

Goldman Sachs calculated that the rise in female labour force participation between 1974 and 2009 improved Australia's economy by 22%, and that closing the gap between male and female labour force participation rates could boost the Australian GDP by 11%.

As well, I know from first-hand experience, how we must celebrate the women who are the trailblazers and in the minority in male-dominated arenas.

It can be difficult being a part of a visible minority. Feeling different, whether or not you are overtly treated as different. It can be hard carrying the expectations on behalf of a group. It can be difficult knowing that others look to you as a role-model, even when that is not a responsibility that you have specifically sought for yourself.

So, to the Christmas Tree.

Decorated Christmas Trees have long been a part of the history of Government House. In fact, it is believed that the introduction of the fir-tree as a symbol of the Christmas season was introduced in Victoria (then known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales), by Sophie La Trobe, the wife of the first Superintendent, Charles La Trobe.

Sophie La Trobe was from Switzerland, and decorated fir-trees were a part of the Christmases of her childhood.

In any event, when we came into this role, nearly 5 years ago now, the tradition of a beautiful Christmas Tree was one of the traditions that we inherited.

Respectful of tradition, we wanted to continue the practice of having a Christmas Tree at Government House every year. But, knowing that so many people do not celebrate Christmas, and wanting to ensure that this House is contemporary in catering to all Victorians, we have tried to ensure that each year, the decorations embrace different important sectors of the community.

We have had a Tree decorated by each Shire throughout the State, and one decorated by the many organisations of which we are the Patrons, for example.

This year, we are so proud that we can showcase our skilful Women in Trades. And we are impressed by the clever decorations that we have received. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

We hope that you enjoy your time here at Government House this evening.