



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

**EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FORUM  
AAMI PARK**

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

**Mr Patrick Kidd OBE OAM**, Chair, Emergency Services Foundation, and **Board Members**

**Ms Siusan MacKenzie**, CEO, Emergency Services Foundation and **Staff**

**Mr Andrew Crisp APM**, Emergency Management Commissioner

**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 afternoon.

I am so pleased to join you today.

First, because as the proud Patron of the Emergency Services Foundation, I admire and enthusiastically support your mission to provide relief and assistance to Victorian emergency service workers and their families, and your commitment to improving mental health and wellbeing across the sector.

Of course, I particularly appreciate the gender lens you bring to your work today, focusing on the impact of service on women.

What a pleasure it is to join you on International Women's Day.

It is a day to pause and reflect. To reflect on all the achievements, but also the progress that is still needed to ensure that women here and around the world live free from violence, enjoy full pay parity and have equal opportunity in every aspect of community life and leadership.

You, the women in this room, work at the sharp end of all sorts of difficult situations, whether on the frontline or in essential support roles that the frontliners simply cannot work without.

You are strong women. Competent women.

But I would be astonished if many of you in the room had not encountered at least some bias – whether conscious or unconscious – such that your demanding work has at times been made even more demanding and stressful.

If not, you are very lucky. In any event, you are well equipped to consider these issues, and they might be part of your reflections today.

For my part, I welcome this opportunity to honour and celebrate women from VicPol, the CFA, MFB, DELWP Forest Fire Management, the SES, Ambulance Victoria, ESTA, Life Saving Victoria, St John's Ambulance, Red Cross, Emergency Management Victoria, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, the Office of the Inspector General of Emergency Management and the VCC Emergencies Ministry.

We have met and been impressed by so many of you, whether we have met across my time in this role, during the recent bushfires, or early last year when, as the Patron of the Ten Year Commemoration of the 2009 bushfires, I had the privilege to spend some weeks in the affected areas.

I must say that time and time again, impressed by how much was contributed by so many, we have been struck by the number of women involved in every aspect of fire-fighting and emergency services and in the recovery phase.

Across these last weeks, we have again met and listened to many fantastic women from every possible service in or from East Gippsland.

Just last week, we were in that region again. I listened to a CFA volunteer, who was cradling a restless youngster while she quietly described how the catastrophic fires approached, and destroyed so many houses that she and the other fire-fighters had been fighting to save. We know that no one gender has an exclusive hold on heroics.

Each year, I try to host one IWD event of my choosing at Government House. This year I was keen to gather some of the women who have contributed and are continuing to contribute to their communities during such a difficult time. They joined me for a round-table chat on Friday just gone.

I met the nurse who kept a bush hospital running in a community cut off for 12 days, the CFA captain – a single mother – who had to fight to save her own farm as well as helping others, and the incident controllers who were responsible for moving the trucks and the planes with so many competing demands. And so on and so forth.

That brings me to you and what is at the heart of this event.

I so admire the Emergency Services Foundation for this gathering today.

Obviously, we all respond differently to our jobs and the stressors of work – and for that matter, life. And not all women respond in the same way, any more than do all men. But there are gender differences and different life experiences – and even different expectations of responsibilities – upon us.

It is those differences that make it so important to have women involved in every aspect of community life. In fact, to have men, women, youth, seniors, different ethnic backgrounds and disciplines. I am utterly convinced that a wide range of perspectives leads to better decisions and outcomes.

But it is realistic too to consider the particular effects of your work upon you: a group of women.

I hope that you are able to enjoy conversations today pitched specifically for you and your well-being. They are important conversations.

I do want to add one thing.

I know that many of you, in light of your roles, will continue to do the hard yards, whether because of more fires this season, or now with the overlay of coronavirus, or just because of the day to day work that you do all year around. Please know that we, the community of Victoria, do appreciate what you do. You can feel proud. You make a very special contribution. We thank you.

And after your deliberations today, what a joy it will be to watch brilliant, strong, accomplished female athletes performing at 'the G', in the ICC T20 Women's Final – anticipated as the biggest women's sporting event in Australia's history.

Aren't we lucky to live in one of the world's great sports and events cities!

As the world watches on, what better way is there to show that, despite the awful challenges of this fire season, we are not only 'open for business' in Victoria and Australia, but that we also have the skills and resources to keep things going at the same time as having so many hands – so many generous and brave hands – on deck, to meet ongoing fire recovery and other emergency challenges.

Thank you so much for all that you do.