HEPBURN SHIRE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

WOMEN’S HONOUR ROLL EVENT

Thursday 9TH March 2017

Cr Sebastian Klein, Mayor of Hepburn Shire

Councillors, of Hepburn Shire

Ms Mary – Anne Thomas MP, State Member for Macedon

Ms Pam Hicks, representing Ms Catherine King, Shadow Minister for Health and Medicare, Federal Member for Ballarat

Past inductees of the Honour Roll,

Past Councillors of Hepburn Shire,

Members of the International Women’s Day Organisation Advisory Committee,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and to any elders who are with us here this evening.

I am grateful to the Hepburn Shire International Women’s Day Committee for inviting me here to speak this evening. And I am delighted to be apart of this Honour Roll Presentation.
Let me share with you though that, in all honesty, I approach the task with mixed feelings. Part of me wants to celebrate that we are all gathered together sharing the message of International Women’s Day.

But another part of me wants to sigh: not a good, satisfied sort of sigh, as you might give after a job well done. More a ‘Here we go again’ type of sigh, a ‘How many times do we need to say this?’ type of sigh.

You see, International Women’s Day, on the 8th of March each year, has been consistently celebrated in the developed world for about as long as I have led my professional life. And that means that, like all the women who have been visible in their chosen careers - simply because there have not been many women - I have been privileged to speak at and certainly attend many IWD events across the years.

I mentioned the ‘message’ of IWD. Can I share with you that it can be a little difficult to work out precisely the theme in any given year. Although the United Nation’s Women’s Committee (which I think of as authoritative) has the theme this year of ‘Planet 50:50 by 2030’, the International Women’s Day group has as its theme, ‘Be Bold for Change’.

I pondered that for a while and thought it really doesn’t matter. They are completely compatible topics. They tell us that there is an awfully long way to go before we see genuine 50:50 gender equality, and women must be bold in the meantime – bold to achieve the change that is required.

You know I spoke before about sighing. Sighing at the slow rate of change. Sighing that there is still a need to argue for it, that its achievement is so hard, and sighing that it is all so obvious that the world would be a better place with the full participation of all its people, instead of just half!

It’s not as though this is only a recent issue.
Last year, I spoke at the 125th anniversary of the Victorian Parliament’s Women’s Suffrage Petition. That was a petition in 1891 that contained the signatures of 30,000 women (at a time when Victoria’s population was only 490,000) seeking equal voting rights.

In that speech, I spoke about the waves of feminism: the wave of the late 19th century with all those brave suffragists. The wave of the late 1960’s with Germaine Greer and burning bras. And what many refer to as a third wave in the 1990’s.

So many waves. Some success. But still so much further to go.

When it comes to the role of women, there have been many firsts and some progress. We have had one female Prime Minister and one Governor-General, one Victorian Premier, one Victorian Chief Justice, and one Victorian Governor.

Currently, we have two Victorian Departments headed by women. Women comprise only one quarter of the Victorian judiciary, around 20% of Board positions in ASX200 companies and 5% of Chair or CEO roles. (It was recently observed that whilst only 11 ASX companies had a female CEO, 13 of them had a CEO called ‘Peter’. And we combine Peter, with Andrew, John, Michael and David, we see 53 CEO’s!)

The point is that the numbers of women in key positions is still very low. Very low.

It is hard to be optimistic when we know that, amongst other things, women in this country still earn on average more than 16%, (or $261 per week), less than men.

And it is also hard to be optimistic when we see a global drift away from the attainment of parity.
In 2014, The World Economic Forum predicted that it would take until 2095 (that is, 81 years) to achieve global gender parity. Just one year later, in 2015, this prediction was blown out to 2133 (that is, a wait of 117 years). In 2016, the prediction was 2186 or 170 years!

Moreover, in 2014, Australia ranked 24th overall in the world in gender equality; in 2015, 36th; and, last year 46th. Countries such as Rwanda, The Philippines, Namibia and Latvia rank well above us. Last year we were overtaken by Poland, Portugal and Costa Rica. We need to do better.

And it is hard to be optimistic about the progress so far, when we see the awful statistics world-wide, and locally, when it comes to violence against women. We know that more than one woman is killed in an incident of family violence every fortnight in this country, and that many more are injured.

We know that one in four women have experienced at least one incident of violence at the hand of an intimate partner (and we know that in some parts of the world, the figures are even more horrific than that).

We know that all the research, here and abroad, demonstrates the positive correlation between gender equality and GDP per capita. And, that boards, organisations and governments with ‘higher-than-average’ representation of women outperform those with ‘below average’ representation.

Now why am I giving you such a miserable speech on this lovely evening? I didn’t intend to.

Of course, as I said, there is much progress for women.
Family violence and violence towards women generally is firmly on the agenda as one of our most pressing social issues to solve, and hearts, minds and resources are being directed to do just that. It will take time but the planets are aligned for some great steps forward in better, more seamless services, and attitudinal change.

And there is no question that in more and more walks of life, not only are women excelling, but there is a growing appreciation of how and why it matters to garner the strength of diversity.

I think the days are mostly gone when women were advanced just to tick the box to say it was done.

So what now is needed?

1. **We need to speed up the process.** We need to speed up the process in order to capitalise on all of our talent in times that are hard, rapidly changing, disrupted and challenging and unsettled on a global scale.

2. **As women, we need to be bold.** But we must be smart, not just bold. We must be well educated. We must work in every domain without boundaries. We must work hard and well, and sometimes just show, rather than tell, how good we are at our work. We must show how we contribute.

3. **We need to continue the public discussions around quotas.** Some would argue that they are not needed and market forces will do the trick. Others would look to countries like Norway that introduced quotas, and quite quickly found that organisations were thriving and exceeding their quotas of women.

4. **We must enlist men as our champions.** There are so many up for the task. Young men who have grown up with their clever mums and girl friends, and never contemplated a world that’s not equal. Other decent men, who just know what
they want for their daughters or grand-daughters, or who simply have the vision to appreciate that this is the only way that the world can become a better place.

5. **And we must help each other.** There are now amongst us so many women who have fared well in our private and working but our efforts will come to nothing if we come and we go without the legacy of real changes around us.

An event such as this contributes so positively to those changes. By gathering together to acknowledge and honour the efforts of women who have made a valuable contribution, to your community, you support their particular efforts, showcase their talents and inspire others to follow suit.

Past inductees to the Honour Roll that we celebrate this evening, demonstrate the wide variety and contribution of women in the Hepburn Shire, whether in the education and support services for younger people, the CFA or local sporting clubs.

And we have certainly seen in our visit today what dynamic and talented women there are in Hepburn Shire.

So let’s use International Women’s Day to congratulate ourselves on the genuine progress that has been made and challenge ourselves to keep working on it together. Men and women: committed to the same cause.