



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

**CHANGE OUR GAME  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY LUNCH**

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**The Honourable Martin Pakula MP**, Minister Tourism, Sport

**Ms Lizzie Blandthorn MP**, Parliamentary Secretary for Sport

**Mr Simon Phemister**, Secretary Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

**Mr Peter Beston**, Acting Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria

**Dr Bridie O'Donnell**, Director, Office for Women in Sport and Recreation

**Change Our Game Ambassadors**

**Change Our Game Champions**

**All 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.

We are particularly delighted to be here with you, on International Women's Day.

It didn't take much to persuade me to join you at this celebratory event.

First, I am a great lover of sport – amongst other things, for the transformative power it presents.

Secondly, gender parity is a topic close to my heart.

Next, I am proud that Victoria is the first State in Australia to have an Office of Women in Sport and Recreation.

And, finally, I am a great admirer of the 'Change our Game' campaign.

I recall a question from a judicial colleague when I joined the AFL Commission in about 2007. Her question of me was – to use her words – ‘How can someone, a serious judge, bother to put so much time into sport, let alone footy?’

It was a moment when I knew that we shared no common ground whatsoever. Inside my head, (where it politely remained), was the answer:

“ How can you even ask such a question?”

In fact, I did try to patiently explain that sport matters in so many ways.

First, elite sport matters because it is just such a joy to watch. Like great art. Or writing. Or performance of any kind. How uplifting it is to watch people performing at the top of their game.

How inspiring as well. To see the triumphs. The disappointments. The come-backs. The teamwork. How many lessons we learn.

And then there is grass-roots participation. Kids being busy. Running around. Learning the lessons of winning and losing, and playing together, all learned from their own first-hand experience.

Of course, sport is fundamental to both physical and mental health. How many times, as a Family Court judge, I heard expert evidence about how to instil resilience in young people. How important it was to be part of a group. To have a sense of belonging.

And I knew of course that it is not only young people who prosper from sport and recreational exercise. I know how I feel if I walk with friends. The exercise feels great: the company and the chatter even better.

When it came to AFL, I was particularly impressed that, although it did not necessarily have to, and although it would never get everything right, it was a code that at least was trying to tackle the big social issues: drugs, respect for women, depression and diversity.

What was missing in footy – and in most sports though then, more than a decade ago – was enough opportunities for girls and women in participation.

They had been embraced as supporters. Certainly, my early foray into the game was in starting the Essendon Women's Network, and helping other Clubs to do the same.

But it was years later that the discussion properly widened to how we could do better for women and girls in this great sporting nation, and in this State where we have such sporting success.

Thank goodness for the Inquiry chaired by Peggy O'Neal in 2015, from which the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation was started, and in turn, from which this Change Our Game initiative sprang.

Since then, we have seen AFLW grow. Women's Netball continues to flourish. As does cricket and soccer and so many other sports that young girls have no shortage of role models to follow.

And VicHealth has done a great job with campaigns like 'This Girl Can', encouraging girls and women, at any level of ability, and wearing any gear that they choose, (not feeling it must be the most fashion forward version of lycra), to get out and exercise.

All these initiatives are helping to promote and 'normalise' the idea that girls and women can be as athletically skilled as boys and men, or as physically active.

Congratulations to all those involved. What you are achieving has a ripple effect that can increase not only the health and well-being of women and girls, but their confidence too. And it can educate men on the capacity and equality of their partners, their sisters, their daughters and colleagues.

All that said, we know that there is still more room for growth to support women and girls in sport.

There are yet more opportunities to seize.

And indeed, more work to be done to equalise the playing field. Both at an elite level, as well as at grassroots sporting clubs and in sport for kids.

That simply reflects that there is still so very much that we still need to pursue, when it comes to gender parity.

When I say 'we', I do mean 'we'. That is, it is the collective responsibility that we share. Men and women alike. We are not talking about 'women's issues'. We are talking about the deficiency in our community if we have half our population left behind, or if we are unable to draw on our whole talent pool.

Although a year around effort is what is required, International Women's Day gives us the chance to re-appraise and re-commit to the areas that need our urgent attention.

And urgent attention is STILL required. STILL. After so many rounds of activism across so many decades.

STILL, in December last year, the World Economic Forum ranked Australia 39 out of 144 countries on its Global Gender Gap Index.

According to projections from the World Economic Forum, women STILL will have to wait another 108 years for gender equality.

I'd like to applaud everyone in this room for their role – whether in their professional lives or personal lives – in working towards gender equality.

The UN theme for 2019 International Women's Day is: 'Think equal, build smart, innovate for change.'

These concepts are imbedded within the DNA of the Change our Game initiative. Striving for *equality*, with a *smart*, strategic and *innovative* approach.

Thank you for the work you do championing women and sport. Thank you to the Change Our Game Ambassadors, who are a crucial voice for breaking down barriers to gender equality.

And I would like to acknowledge the important work of the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, and Dr Bridie O'Donnell, who is working so hard to ensure that the opportunities for women in sport and recreation are maximised and entrenched.

Happy 2019 International Women's Day.