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| Change Our Game IWD Lunch – The Hon. Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria  |
| Video transcript  |

**[Change Our Game Logo]**

**The Hon. Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria**

Could I also though, start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we're gathering by paying my respects to elders past and present and to any elders who are with us as well. I can say very honestly I'm absolutely delighted to be with you here on International Women's Day. It didn't take much to persuade me to join you at this celebratory event. First of all, I am a great lover of sport amongst other reasons being that it has the most amazing transformative powers. Secondly you won't be shocked to hear that gender parity is a topic very close to my heart. Thirdly, I am proud that Victoria is the first state in Australia to have an Office for Women in Sport and Recreation. Finally, I am a great admirer of the Change Our Game Campaign.

I recall a question that was put to me by judicial colleague when I was joining the AFL commission in 2007. She said to me using her words, how can someone a serious judge bother to put so much time into sport, let alone footy? Well it was a moment when I knew we should know 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. Elite sport matters because it's just such a joy to watch. Like great art or great writing or performance of any kind. How uplifting is it for those of us who don't have the capacity that many in the room do have? How uplifting is it to watch people performing at the top of their game, whatever game it is? How inspiring as well to see the triumphs, the disappointments, the comebacks, the teamwork, and how many lessons we learned from watching?

Then there's the grass roots participation. Kids being busy running around, learning the lessons of winning and losing, playing together, learning everything from first-hand experience. Of course, sport is fundamental to both physical and mental health too. How many times has a family court judge I heard expert evidence to the effect that to instil resilience in young people, they needed a sense of belonging? Nothing could give you a better sense of belonging than participating in a team at any level at all. I knew of course, it's not only young people who prosper from sport and from recreational exercise. I know it from first-hand experience. I know what I feel like when I go walking with my friends. The walk is great, but the chatter is even better. Just being together doing something active is something that makes you feel good.

When it came to AFL, I was always particularly impressed that although it didn't necessarily have to, and although it didn't necessarily always get everything right, it was a code that it was at least trying to address some of the big social issues. Drugs, respect for women, depression, diversity, topics that often aren't discussed unless there's a sitting in which they can safely arise. What was missing in footy when I was involved particularly before I joined the Commission and I was involved in one of the clubs, What was missing then in footy and in most other sports was enough opportunities for girls and women in participation. They were embraced as supporters. I think that every sport knows the value of embracing the full pool of supporters. But certainly it was some years after I joined the commission that the conversation kept deepening and widening about how important it was to have more women and girls in this great sporting nation participating in sport of all sorts.

Thank goodness for the inquiry that was cheered by Peggy O'Neil in 2015. From which the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation emerged. In turn, from which this Change Our Game initiative then sprang. Since then, we've seen AFLW grow. We've seen women's net ball continue to flourish. We see cricket and soccer for women going from strength to strength. We see so many other sports that young girls and women know are not closed off to them in any way. A particular favourite amongst the various campaigns in my mind is the This Girl Can Campaign run by VicHealth. Encouraging girls and women at any level of ability and wearing any gear they choose. Not worrying about whether it's fashionable lycra or not. Any ‘trackie dacks’ will do. Just get out and to get out and have exercise.

All these initiatives are helping to promote and normalize the idea of girls and women being athletically skilled just as boys and men are and as physically active as boys and men. I wanted to say today, congratulations to all those involved. I know many of you are in this room. It's a fantastic room because many of you are actually out there achieving the things that others amongst us are lucky enough to talk about. You're the ones doing the hard work to make sure that it comes about. What a wonderful ripple effect your work will have because increasing the health and wellbeing of women will increase their confidence too. In educating men that women and girls have just as much capacity for sport and recreational exercise will mean some acknowledgment of the equality of their partners, their sisters, their daughters, and colleagues.

All that said, we all know there is still much room for improvement when it comes to the growth of support for women and girls in sport. Or to put it positively, many more opportunities still to seize. Indeed, more work to be done to equalise the playing field. Not only at an elite level, but also when it comes to grass roots sporting clubs and in sport for kids. I think that simply reflects where we are at when it comes to gender parity generally. You probably could guess that you weren't going to escape an International Women's Day lunch without me just making a couple of general comments too. I talk a lot about how we will prosper when we have gender parity in our community. When I say we, I do mean we. I mean we in every sense including that we share a collective responsibility. Men and women share a collective responsibility to ensure that one day hopefully in less than the 108 years that's predicted, we do have gender parity in our country.

Where men and women are treated equally and it's not just seen as a women's issue, something for women to worry about for women. Although a year round effort is required, I think that International Women's Day is important because in our busy lives it gives us a chance to stop, to reflect, to gather together, and to talk about the importance of a gender parity and to recommit to how urgent the attention is in this regard. I've been talking about these issues as many others have in the room for a very long time. Perhaps I've been talking about them longer just by sheer force of years. What troubles me is that many of the issues we talk about today are the same issues that we've been talking about across many decades. Do you know still in December last year, the world economic forum gave its ranking as it does each year on global gender gap in their index that they put out?

You would think that Australia is such a lucky country, such a prosperous country, such an advanced country would rate very highly amongst the 144 countries that are rated. We come in at 39th. What's troubling about that is that a year or two earlier we were 35th. In fact, we've slipped back just a little bit. I'd like to applaud everyone in this room for the role that they play whether in their professional or personal lives in working towards gender equality. The UN theme for the 2009 International Women's Day is think equal, build smart, innovate for change. I think that these concepts are embedded within the DNA of the Change Our Game initiative. The striving for equality with a smart strategy and an innovative approach. That really does leave me to thank all of you working in that particular campaign and 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 not only maximized, but absolutely normalised and entrenched. We thank you for that and I wish everyone a happy 2019. Could be 2009 on some of the figures, but 2019 International Women's Day. Thank you.

**[State Government of Victoria logo]**

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