



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE
BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN/ADVANCE AUSTRALIA AWARD-
SOUTHERN CROSS HOTEL, MELBOURNE
5 OCTOBER 1985

Thank you for your introduction, Bev.

Mr and Mrs Spencer, Miss Michel, our special guest, US
Astronaut Dr Shannon Lucid, BPW members and guests.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here tonight to
announce the winners of the Business and Professional
Women/Advance Australia Award for 1985.

In making the award, the sponsors adopted as their
criteria the Affirmative Action principles outlined by
the Government last year when we established the
Affirmative Action Pilot Program and provided guidance
for employers on how best to plan systematically to
improve employment opportunities for women.

It is particularly gratifying to see the Government's
approach complemented by this important award.

I have been delighted at the co-operation the Government
has received from private sector and higher education
employers and from unions in putting to the practical
test the Government's Affirmative Action policies and
principles.

Our 12-month Pilot Program, which concluded in July,
demonstrated that it is possible, and indeed beneficial
to both employer and employee, for our approach to
improving women's job opportunities to be adopted.
Indeed, the private sector participants in the Pilot
Program have described it as "a unique and innovative
step".

Earlier this week, I announced the Government's intention to legislate for Affirmative Action for women in higher education employment and in those companies employing more than 100 persons. Let me detail the main feature of the legislation.

The Government will introduce legislation into Federal Parliament in the Autumn Session in 1986. That legislation will require employers to report annually to the Government on their progress in developing an 8-step Affirmative Action Program.

We shall be proclaiming our legislation in stages. It is my strong view that this will enable the legislation to be implemented in a planned and non-disruptive fashion. It will enable a new Agency - to be created within the Employment and Industrial Relations portfolio to administer the Act - to establish its procedures, prepare the resources necessary to assist companies and institutions and have adequate time to develop co-operative relations with those organisations affected by the legislation.

All those covered by the new Act will have to submit a short report which will be available to the public, providing general employment data by sex and some general comments on the overall progress of their program.

In addition, a longer and confidential report setting out in more detail how the employer is progressing with the implementation of the 8-step program will be required.

The last thing that I and the Government wants to see is our principal objective of improving women's job opportunities becoming subsumed by excessively bureaucratic procedures or administrative difficulties caused by too large a number of organisations being required to comply simultaneously.

What we propose instead is that that part of the legislation covering higher education come into operation immediately the legislation is passed, expected to be around August 1986. That part of the legislation covering the private sector will be operational six months later, around February 1987.

By February 1988, 262 companies employing more than 1,000 people would submit their first reports. By February 1989 317 companies with between 500 and 999 employees would begin compliance and by February 1990 those 2890 companies with between 100 and 499 employees would have begun their compliance.

It is my expectation that most large Australian companies will adopt a very responsible attitude towards their present and potential women employees and will not wait until they are bound by the letter of the law to start developing affirmative action strategies for improving women's job prospects.

In this connexion, I am very pleased that the Business Council of Australia and the Confederation of Australian Industry have decided to establish a Council for Equal Employment Opportunity to encourage companies to begin immediately to introduce affirmative action.

I see that self-regulatory proposal as being totally compatible with the Government's legislative approach. I note that the proposed Council is expected to have a 5-year life span - in other words it will go out of existence by the time that all Australian companies employing more than 100 people are covered by our legislation.

The Government will co-operate and support business' self-regulatory approach because we want the important question of developing new employment opportunities for women to be adopted with enthusiasm and creativity by companies.

Importantly, I am pleased to announce that the Government's legislation will be supplemented by a number of other measures which we believe will support the development of equal opportunity for women.

We plan to act in three areas: education, child care and legislative restrictions to women's employment.

The Government accepts its responsibilities for ensuring that our education and training systems are providing maximum opportunities for young women to acquire a wide range of qualifications and skills to enhance their job prospects. Recently we announced the establishment of the Australian Traineeships System - a program to enhance the training and work experience of 16 and 17 year olds.

We are also currently developing a national policy on the education of girls. This will be finalised by the end of the year and will set goals and identify priorities for the achievement of equality in educational outcomes for girls.

We are also aware that the numbers of women undertaking engineering courses is still very, very small and that Pilot Program employers expressed difficulty in recruiting engineers. Accordingly Senator Susan Ryan, has developed a proposal for a pilot program aimed at increasing the numbers of women engineering graduates.

This pilot will be based in Melbourne and will link educational institutions providing engineering courses to potential employers of engineers and to schools.

Through the pilot program, the Commonwealth will assist schools and tertiary institutions to present engineering as a realistic career option for young women and to make it more accessible for them. The project will seek to involve companies which employ engineers in orientation and work experience activities.

The Government recognises that without access to child care, many women's job opportunities are restricted. Since we came to Office the Government has more than doubled spending on child care under the Children's Services Program and has added 20,000 places to those existing when we assumed Office. In the recent Budget we confirmed the Government's intention to proceed with the establishment of an additional 20,000 places over the next three years. In other words, in just 5 years we will have more than doubled the supply of child care places throughout Australia. This exemplifies my Government's continuing commitment to taking measures to improve the Status of Women.

A number of companies participating in the Pilot Program expressed interest in providing work-based child care facilities for their employees. However, they also conveyed to the Government their extraordinary frustration at the mire of regulations at all levels of Government which they had to contend with in order to even investigate the provision of such facilities.

It is consistent with my Government's interest in deregulating where appropriate to examine some of the regulations governing the location of child care centres to see whether unnecessary and archaic restrictions could be removed. To this end, I have decided to approach the States to ask them to remove existing licensing requirements and regulations restricting child care facilities to ground floor locations. This will not be at the expense of the quality of child care. After all some children's hospitals are multi-storey and children live in high rise apartments. In addition to attempting to facilitate employers wanting to use their own premises to provide child care my Government is prepared to offer a range of tax deductions and depreciation provisions to employers who make child care available. We have recently announced that this will not be treated as fringe benefits for taxation purposes.

Finally, perhaps the most consistent complaint of employers during the Pilot Program was the existence of a range of legislative, regulatory or award restrictions on women's employment which limit the types of jobs available to women which prevent their advancement.

Perhaps the most contentious of these restrictions are the State laws prohibiting women from lifting more than 16 kilograms in weight.

It is our intention to convene a special conference of unions, employers, State Governments and other interested parties to examine and make recommendations in respect of legislative, regulatory or award restrictions. I hope that as a result of this Conference we can reach agreement on how to ensure that no law in this country stands in the way of women doing whatever job for which they are qualified.

In my view, many employers are already acting in a responsible and enlightened fashion and tonight's award is timely recognition of this.

I am now very happy to announce the winners of the 1985 BPW Advance Australia Award.

It has been decided to make two awards this year, one to an organisation and one to an outstanding individual.

Each award recognises a unique contribution made by the winners to encouraging the employment of women in areas where in the past they would not have been employed.

The Organisation Winner of the 1985 Award is the Greater Newcastle Building Society.

The Individual Winner is the Chairman and Chief Executive of Esso Australia Limited, Mr J.F. Kirk.

The Greater Newcastle Building Society has women at all three levels of its management. Its Chairman is Professor Beryl Nashar and it is the only major corporation in Australia with a woman as Chairman.

At the middle level, one of its two Regional Managers is a woman. And at the lower level of management women manage a significant number of the Building Society's Branches. In Newcastle itself there are 13 women managers of 24 Branches. I am advised that the present ratio of men to women throughout the industry is 2 to 1. The Greater Newcastle Building Society has gone against the trend and has recognised the talents and skills of women. I think it is particularly significant that Australia's rapidly expanding finance sector should be a first winner of this award.

Mr Jim Kirk, the winner of the Individual Award is well known for his pioneering contribution in introducing Affirmative Action principles to Esso Australia at a time when these strategies were barely accepted by managers in Australia.