



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

**RELEASE OF THE REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ADVICE
MECHANISMS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

I am pleased to be here this morning at the release of this review of the Government's policy advice mechanisms on the status of women.

Today marks the opening of a new chapter in the formation of public policy on the status of women in Australia.

Ten years ago the Government embarked on an ambitious program to advance the status of women. The so-called 'radical' policies espoused by Labor then, such as sex discrimination and affirmative action laws, are now an accepted part of our culture.

Since then, the Government has put forward policies to meet the needs and aspirations of women across the many spheres of their lives. We have made significant gains in areas such as employment, education, access to child care and income security for women caring for children.

We have taken on the challenge of ending violence against women and children, acknowledging the enormity of the task.

We know we have more to do in many areas, such as health, retirement income and equality of participation in public life, but in these areas important advances have also been made.

Policies of governments can promote lasting, structural and attitudinal change to promote equality for women.

When we won the election in March this year, I thanked the women of Australia who voted for us believing in the policies of the Government.

The Government is very proud of the role it has played in achieving advances for women over the last decade. But we need to look forward, not backwards, if those achievements are to continue.

That is what this review is about.

It is about ensuring that our policy advice mechanisms remain appropriate, effective and responsive to the changing needs and interests of women.

The Office of the Status of Women, in my Department, has played a key role in achieving major advances for women since 1983.

In its early days it was responsible for putting together the Sex Discrimination and Affirmative Action Acts. But its recent work has been no less important.

Work to produce a National Strategy on Violence Against Women, the new National Agenda for Women and development of important new policies on child care announced earlier this year, are just some examples.

These are all policies that have a real impact on women's lives.

Getting the policies right for women has to be our top priority.

The Government needs a strong Office of the Status of Women which can provide accurate, well-researched and authoritative advice on how to move the agenda forward for Australian women.

I fully endorse the review's recommendation that such policy advice should be the primary focus of the Office of the Status of Women. I also support giving priority to the three critical policy areas identified in the review: women's economic security; the participation of women in public life; and women and the law, with a particular emphasis on eliminating violence against women.

But the Office of the Status of Women and the Government can't get it right without help from women and their organisations.

When I launched the new National Agenda for Women, in February this year, I said that a unique partnership between the women's movement and the Government has contributed greatly to our achievements over the past ten years.

We want that partnership to continue.

That doesn't mean everything has to stay the same. We need to find the most effective ways of working together towards our common goals.

The review sets out an approach to consultation which is designed to be effective and focussed and elicit the views of the diversity of Australian women.

Consultation has to be purposeful, timely and focussed. It must give you the opportunity for real input, and provide us with advice we can use to improve outcomes for women.

Because we want to hear regularly from organisations representing women, we will hold Round Table Meetings with national women's organisations twice each year. The Minister assisting me on the status of women, Senator Crowley, will host these meetings and invite other Ministers as appropriate.

As with today, such meetings will include representatives of the union movement, the business community, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and ethnic communities.

We will also convene specific purpose advisory committees, as necessary, to assist us with discrete tasks. The first such committee will be the Australian Council for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Its role will be to act as a focal point for Australia's preparations for the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995. Senator Crowley will be announcing details of that Committee very soon.

We will also undertake regular research on the views and concerns of women in the community to ensure that we stay in touch and on track.

In closing I would like to thank the Minister assisting me on the status of women, Senator Rosemary Crowley, for undertaking this important review and for her report. I would also thank you for the contributions and comments many of you made on aspects of the review.

I have accepted and welcomed the review's recommendations. I will leave it to my colleague, Senator Crowley, to detail the recommendations and their implications for you. There is however, one recommendation that I would like to comment on.

I take very seriously the first recommendation, that we should have a Minister Assisting representing women's interests in Cabinet.

I do not intend to enter into speculation about how or when this will be achieved. However, I will give serious consideration to the issue at the next appropriate opportunity.

The report of this review outlines some exciting and challenging work for Senator Crowley and the Office of the Status of Women. I look forward to working with Senator Crowley and the Office of the Status of Women, and with you here today, to achieve further progress towards true equality for women.

CANBERRA

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