

TRANSCRIPT OF KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
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BY THE MACQUARIE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

***WOMEN IN THE MILITARY:  
IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES***

**INTRODUCTION**

I was very pleased to be asked to come and make this contribution to the Conference this morning for a particular reason. And that particular reason is to recognise the contribution Clare Burton made to much of what we have achieved.

Clare did a hell of a lot of work in leading us down the path of change. And I wanted to particularly acknowledge, and those of you who knew Clare would know about this, she was always advising us to be very cautious about how difficult making these changes would be.

But finally to say that if Clare had been alive today, to see the performance of young Australians, working harmoniously together in East Timor from September last year, I think she would have recognised how far we have come and, I expect, would have been very proud of the lead that we are now showing the rest of the world.

The second reason for being here, this Conference - having looked through the papers and thought about it, it is a wide ranging conference, dealing with many issues of concern to leaders, managers and organisations all over Australia.

Providing an opportunity, an outstanding opportunity in my view, for reflection of important issues and I hope setting an agenda for action for the future.

And finally, involving a strong field of presenters, many of whom I know, from personal involvement and who are leading experts in their field.

In that context I hope I can do some justice to your expectations in delivering this keynote address. I am going to focus on the main points as I see them in identifying and overcoming obstacles for the employment of women in the ADF and I will extend that to talk on the ADF as a whole.

Valerie talked about many of the factors that govern my organisation. Let me give you just some of my background as I see it.

## **My Experience**

I am a normal Australian, growing up with all the prejudices of childhood in the 1950s, a limited involvement with liberation of social mores in the 1960s, in an early Navy career. A service at that time which was closely modelled and had a strong association with the Royal Navy. Thinking about many of the issues that confronted Australians with significant national change agendas in the 1970s, and then assuming more responsible leadership and management positions in the 1980s and 1990s, within the Navy and Defence organisation as a whole.

To add a little bit to Val's context I'm in my third marriage, I've had 32 moves and therefore, 'I've Been Moved'.

But just let's think about the ADF and the Defence Organisation.

- It is a large organisation involving civilians, part-timers and full timers, totaling about 100,000.
- It's complex. It's involved in most business enterprises that you can get to know about in Australia today.
- But its unique quality is of course about delivering combat capabilities in the use of armed force in Australia's national interest;
- Its hierarchical;
- It's based on a power and authority structure which provides unlimited opportunities for its using people in the workplace.

- It comes from a culture which is very macho male which strongly influenced the way people behave. And yet in contrast it has grown out of a history in which Australians had a very strong sense of fairness and their contribution to shape and build a better world.

So that's the organisation that I am talking about.

The employment of women in my organisation is as important to the Defence Force as it is for all other organisations in Australia today. Women in the military is a critical issue for future capability, but it can also be one of the most emotional issues you can get to deal with.

For example, with media interest in knowledge that the Chiefs of Staff Committee had taken a paper in late 1998 about women in combat, I was painting my house in January and I started to read all this claptrap in the media about women in combat. Frankly, the debate itself was flawed, was highly emotional, and was highly charged, it was of course being run at a time when there was not much media news about. But significantly demonstrated that many of the issues that we are dealing with at this Conference still lie just below the surface, but nonetheless I am pleased to say it didn't get a run beyond a couple of weeks and I think that does demonstrate that for many Australians things are changing.

The real issue of course - and let me explain why I think the role of women in my organisation is important - is that Australia is going to have a small population well into the foreseeable future. By the year 2050 it is estimated that we will have about 22 million people and yet we will have security responsibilities for about one tenth of the earth's surface; and of course, our strategic environment is increasingly becoming uncertain.

And if we're going to be successful in achieving our tasks in providing Australians with the security they deserve, we are going to have to maximise the skills of ALL our people to maintain the capability edge that we will need.

We are also competing in a very aggressive employment market place and all employers of course are striving to attract the best people from the same demographics that we know about. In my view, we have to work that much harder to attract and retain the best of our young people, regardless of gender, so that we can effectively meet the demands being placed on us.

So for me, the issue of 'women in the military' is not some social policy initiative. Rather, it is a very pragmatic initiative, intended to harness the skills and talents of each

individual to ensure operational success. Moreover, in the bigger picture, being successful in this regard we will make a significant contribution to a prosperous future for all Australians, because there is no freedom without security.

So now let me address, or tell you the story of, how things have changed so dramatically over the last ten years or so, and then how it looks for me today.

## **THE PAST**

Women being involved in the military is not a new subject. Women have been associated with our military since the turn of the last century. For example, some served: as nursing sisters in the Boer War, and again at Gallipoli, and later in France. Women have in many ways been at the very centre of the events which have shaped our military, its approach and its very character. But it was not until very recently that we saw the start of long term reform.

- The fact is that it was not until 1969 that women could remain in service following marriage.
- It was not until 1974 that pregnancy did *not* automatically mean discharge.
- And it was not until 1979 that we provided equal pay for men and women.

Importantly, and almost ironically I think as a consequence of the process, from that point onwards women struggled to become identified as full members of the ADF according to the functional role, and their membership being based on work value and not on gender. From the late 1970s, more and more jobs became available to women to compete on equal terms with their male colleagues.

I would just like to break at this point though to recognise the work of women who were pioneers in this regard. I know some of them and I know it was an enormous struggle, mentally, physically and emotionally, to put up with the claptrap that they had to deal with. Some of them fell by the way side because they simply did not have the resources to continue to cope. But I think that without their contribution and their efforts we wouldn't be where we are today.

## **THE PRESENT**

So where are we now? What role can and should women fill in the modern Defence Force?

On the surface this seems a pretty straightforward question. But of course there does continue to be strong public interest and in some parts of society a very polarised and emotional debate on this question. More often than not the question seems to boil down to whether or not women should be able to serve in our combat force, and potentially engage in combat. This is a particularly emotive issue which is not solely a matter of an individuals' abilities or rights, but also, and more importantly I suspect, where that fits with our community values.

To my mind, the guiding principle in the debate must be to seek the solution which enhances the combat capability of the Australian Defence Force, and that is not a decision that we can make alone. There is a cultural, social and institutional context needed to make the answer to this issue a fundamental one for every Australian, and I'll talk about this a little bit more later.

In the meantime, there are some pretty stark statistics that we do need to continue to think about. The primary ADF recruitment base of people aged between 15 to 24 is expected to decline to 18.9 per cent of population by 2005; the recruiting base, in an all volunteer force, will be increasingly multicultural for entry level recruits, and women entering the workforce will outnumber men within the next 8 to 10 years. And we will also have seen the relative participation rate of women in higher education increase from 20 per cent less than men in 1979 to 15 per cent more than men in 1996.

So that's the sort of context! How have we gone about dismantling the internal obstacles to the equitable employment of women in the ADF?

## **IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS**

History suggests that for many of these frame-breaking issues, the catalyst for true progress seems to be from incidents which force people to become publicly accountable for their actions. This of course is highly relevant to the context I described earlier.

My own personal involvement began with the harassment incident on board HMAS SWAN in 1992. And this is a particular case study I think. One incident resulted in the commissioning of a Senate Inquiry Into Sexual Harassment in the Australian Defence Force in 1993, and the findings were reported in 1994.

At the same time I was charged with responsibility of leading a team and going around throughout the Navy, a team of three people, to try and encourage people to understand that behaviours would change at that time. And if people weren't prepared to change their behaviours then they could go and find another job.

As a result of the findings out of the SWAN incident a nine point action plan was developed and that included:

- reviewing our existing policies on sexual harassment;
- integrating women into the implementation of training programmes; and
- providing literature to make all of our people aware of gender issues.

Part of the action plan included engaging Clare Burton to conduct studies into career development and expectations of women in the Australian Defence Force. Clare's work was aimed at identifying cultural and institutional barriers to the progress of women; and also identifying those factors that inhibit more women from making the ADF a long-term career.

Her study, called 'Women in the ADF', found that a more systematic and strategic approach was required to eliminate gender-based discrimination. Our Chiefs of Staff Committee in taking Clare's Report, endorsed all 20 recommendations which were designed to address a range of personnel, management and leadership issues including employment practice, equity training and performance appraisal. The broad aim included equity policy and training, job competencies, human resource management practices, balancing work and family responsibilities and demands, employment practices and equity performance reviews.

One of the other positive consequences of this work by an outsider was that it clearly highlighted issues that we intuitively knew about, but the significance of which we had not fully understood. For example, the posting of small numbers of women into units and structures composed entirely of men can cause difficulties and in many senses were set up to fail.

As a result of Clare Burton's study and subsequent Report, an implementation team' was established. That team was charged with the responsibility of implementing the recommendations by the close of 1998. The approach taken was to, wherever possible, complement existing initiatives and to embed equity principles and standards into everyday work practices.

The project had a three year timeframe and many of the major tasks undertaken included:

- a review of equity training throughout the Defence Force;
- a development of an equity training package for career managers; and
- planning of a social research program to monitor progress and development of a methodology to document job competencies for all jobs in the military.

And that's probably an appropriate point to say that much of that work was done by Bronwyn Grey and that's why she's been appropriately recognised.

Have we been successful? Well frankly we have come a long way – of course I'm not sure the job will ever be truly complete, because managing relationships between people will go on being a core leadership responsibility, no matter what. There is no doubt that there is still some effort required to address some of the barriers that impede women's progress to higher ranks, and provide equity for women in other areas of our activity. The critical success factor will always be strong leadership support and management behaviours which are consistent with policy objectives. Without this fundamental support, change of the magnitude that's required cannot be achieved.

## **WOMEN IN COMBAT**

Now let me talk to the issue of women in combat. It is clearly one of the most vexatious issues we face.

The policy on the employment of women in combat was reviewed in 1998 and the findings were tabled in the 'Ferguson Report'.

Rather than being seen as a gender issue it was approached as an equity issue focussing on employment competency and the requirement to maintain combat capability -

my new words, enhance combat capability. The research found that the arguments against widening women's employment in the ADF had no empirical evidence to support them - they were simply based on emotion.

The result of this study was that the employment options for women in the ADF were expanded, with the only restricted employment areas being those linked directly to combat operations. Women are now able to serve in 88% of ADF employment categories. The exceptions are:

- for the Navy in the Clearance Divers,
- for Army in Armour, Artillery, Infantry, and Combat Engineers, and
- in the Air Force - Ground Defence Officers and Air Defence Guards.

We have had to place some other restrictions on the employment of women for occupational health and safety reasons. For example, the use of embryo-toxic substances for surface finishers and electroplaters within the RAAF does pose an unacceptable risk until we can find a better way of doing those processes. In the process of increasing opportunities by removing artificial barriers, the need to maintain our duty of care cannot be ignored.

The important and the central issue is that gender should not be an issue in deciding whether any individual can do any particular job.

The overall result of the review has been a decision that the Australian Defence Force employment policy would be competency based. And that means right now that physical competencies are being developed for the ADF Combat Arms categories. They're the ones I just mentioned - Combat Engineers, Artillery, Armour, Infantry, Air Defence Guards and Navy Clearance Divers - and if Simon Willis is successful, we will complete the work by the middle of next year.

For example, the approach being adopted in the review of Navy's Clearance Divers ensures that not only competencies will be developed, but physical standards will also be reviewed and rationally based. That work has already yielded a benefit to all those personnel currently employed in this category as a result of some of *the heavy lift requirements* being modified.

In the process of the transition management for the inclusion of women, we will also need comprehensive implementation plans. We must make sure that we do not set up

individuals to fail. And I think there will be a management issue to work through how 'critical mass', education and support requirements can be managed.

As part of this process, gender should only be a consideration when making judgements about how units and organisations can operate effectively as social and work groups. When we talk about integrating women into more roles in the Australian Defence Force, we need to consider whether or not adequate social and psychological support will be available for individuals to be able to perform to their potential. And it is in this area that we need to place a great deal of emphasis on education and training, supported by strong leadership and management commitment. We do need that 'critical mass' of women in particular specialisations or units to facilitate the process of opening up combat employment categories.

Finally on this issue, at the end of the day, the decision on women in combat is not one for the Australian Defence Force or the Department of Defence to make. It is one for the Government and the Australian people to make and I think that this is an important factor that we must not forget.

## **OTHER INITIATIVES**

To outline a number of other initiatives that demonstrate how serious we are about logically overcoming the obstacles let me just point to the research work.

We have established the Directorate of Strategic Personnel Planning and Research (DSPPR) as our own research agency and that is responsible for doing a lot of research into the things I've just talked about. For example, in 1999 the research directorate conducted a review seeking to improve our understanding of the operational effectiveness of women in the ADF.

Moreover, there have been a number of attitudinal studies conducted throughout the organisation. The ADF must continue to learn and improve as a result of its ongoing commitment to such research programmes because they will provide us with ongoing information on which to make future decisions, as well as giving an opportunity to monitor progress.

Another important initiative that is reaping the benefits of this research is the integration of women into the Submarine Squadron. At present we have a submarine in Hawaii and it has four women in the crew. As part of the process we ran a number of focus groups from 1996 to 1999 with submariners and their partners to try and identify any concerns they might have had. Subsequently we put in place a significant training and education system, since 1996, to facilitate the entry of women into billets on submarines.

A benefit of this project has been the introduction of an enhanced selection procedure for all submariners. It is a weeklong period and involves a night spent on board a submarine and now applies to both men and women.

The Submarine Squadron has also commenced or planned a number of reviews including:

- a submarine stress study;
- survey research on gender integration;
- research on professional development and career progression of women and submariners;
- development of a discussion paper - this is a case study - on gender integration; and
- interactive workshops.

Flexible work practices have been introduced also for men and women as good employee relationships and leadership and management practice. New Certified Agreements are permitting Defence to adopt and develop more flexible work arrangements. And I think these arrangements and agreements enhance the perception of our strong commitment to the people in our workforce.

The Defence Women's Network (DWN) has been very successful in supporting and promoting gender equity issues. That particular organisation is open to all Defence personnel, and I sponsor it along with the Secretary of the Department.

The Women's Network aims to be both a support network for women and an effective means of enhancing workplace equity. It does provide a forum, for military and

Australian Public Service people, to exchange information, promote interaction and reduce any sense of isolation.

The Defence Equity Organisation, which Bronwyn heads, was formed specifically to address the major behavioural and attitudinal problems that we were facing. For just over three years the Organisation has been established, and its mission is to inform, educate, encourage and ensure that equitable policies, processes and practices form an integral part of doing business in the Organisation.

There is a Defence Equity Advisers Network with our Equity Coordinators in each state or territory and a number of Equity Advisers located in most workplaces. The Network itself provides trained Equity Advisers who are able to support commanders and managers and workers in the implementation of equity and diversity initiatives and providing all people with support, information and options for the resolution of workplace equity and diversity issues.

The DEO, as we know it, has a policy section that ensures that our policy is current and supports the organisational aims. It demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that everyone has a 'fair go': It values the difference in people and utilises the contributions that individuals can make because of their different backgrounds, skills and talents. Importantly the DEO is an important element of our aim in providing a working environment free of harassment and discrimination.

The DEO is responsible for monitoring the workplace and Equity Diversity Plan. The plan incorporates a number of recommendations that flowed straight out of Clare Burton's Report.

Consequently many initiatives for women have been progressively 'mainstreamed'. The real point out of all of this is that both men and women have derived benefit from it. For example, we do now have provision for part-time work, temporary home located work and flexible working hours. These initiatives enable all our people who might otherwise have had to resign due to temporary external commitments to continue their service to the benefit of all.

## **CONCLUSION**

So what does this mean for the future? Well I hope that, over time, the significant initiatives resulting from Clare Burton's work, the efforts of the Defence Equity Organisation, and the commitment of our top leadership group - to the worth of equity and diversity will

increase the numbers of young women who want to join the Australian Defence Force. In my view, young women who would find it a challenging and rewarding career, and one that allows them to progress to the highest levels they can achieve.

I see the development of competencies as an important means of eliminating discrimination, getting rid of the emotionalism and enhancing gender integration. This task is significant, it's ground-breaking and it's a serious demonstration that the ADF is more than willing to work constructively to make the most of all our people. In my view, the whole force, both men and women, full timers and part timers are going to benefit from this work.

While we can be reasonably pleased with what we have achieved over the last ten years, there is still much work to be done. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the initiatives I have talked about, and that's not all of them – pulling together diverse elements of research, education, support networks, management behaviour, and leadership requirements - will enable us to use all our people's skills and abilities to meet the challenges that face us.

This will be through a process of integration and recognition of the contribution that women can make and are making to Defence through their demonstrated performance. They will continue to take their place in the 'mainstream' in the Australian Defence Force – just as they are in the rest of our community.

Finally, I am confident that we are on the right path and all our young Australians can stand shoulder-to-shoulder together regardless of gender, to face the challenges of the modern world, to provide all Australians with the security we need, and yet be able to have the satisfaction of knowing that their skills and talents are contributing to building a better world. That is what I saw in East Timor on my visits there, and that is what we will continue to see in our world-class Defence Force.

Thank you