



**Address given on International Women's Day at the
Women's World Cup, North Sydney Oval,
Sunday, 8 March 2009**

Acknowledgements

- His Excellency Dr John Larkindale, New Zealand High Commissioner and his wife Her Excellency Philippa Larkindale
- Senator Kate Lundy
- The Hon Kevin Greene, NSW Minister for Sport and Recreation and his wife Mrs Frances Greene
- Ms Penny Holloway, attending on behalf of the North Sydney Lord Mayor
- The Hon Catherine Branson QC, President of the Human Rights Commission
- Mr Haroon Lorgat, CEO of the International Cricket Council and his wife Farah Lorgat
- Representatives of the National Women's Alliances
- Ladies and gentleman

Thank you Sylvia Scott for your Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners.

I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

On behalf of the Australian Government, I would also like to express my deepest regrets regarding the attack in Lahore, Pakistan last week.

Thank you Nicky (Buckley, MC) for your introduction.

It's great to be here today to celebrate International Women's Day with the Australian and New Zealand women's cricket teams.

It's important that more people value and support our talented female cricketers particularly over the next couple of weeks during the Women's World Cup.

I know it is no surprise to any of you here today that raising the profile and participation of women in sport remains an important challenge.

Only 53 per cent of 14 year old girls compared to 70 per cent of boys participate in organised sport.

And only two per cent of televised sport is women's sport.ⁱⁱ

Looking over the history of women's sport, it is amazing how far we have come.

It was only in 1910 that Dr Clelia Duel Mosher debunked several popular myths of female health, including one claiming women breathe differently than men, which makes them unfit for strenuous exercise!

Full court basketball was not available for women until the 1970's; before that, women restricted to half court play, and before 1914 – it was only one third of the court.

And of course, female athletes still face violence and abuse in some countries where it is considered inappropriate for women to participate.

Fortunately, there are some inspiring tales along the way.

In 1908, Annie Peck, wanting to reach heights higher than anyone else - male or female - became the first person to climb the 21,000 foot Mount Huascarán, the highest peak in Peru – aged 58.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1911, she became the first woman to climb Peru's second highest peak, Mt. Coropuna, and planted a banner proclaiming "Votes for Women" on top.

Sybil Bauer was the first great woman backstroker; in 1922 she bettered the men's world record for the 440 yards backstroke by four seconds.^{iv}

An Australian squash player, Heather Mackay, is arguably the most successful professional athlete ever, only losing two matches in her 20 years playing professionally in the 60s and 70s.

Not only that, but she represented Australia in hockey in that period.

It is partly due to these great women, and others like them, that participation rates of women in sport have grown exponentially, both at grassroots and international level over the years.

While there was not even one official female athlete at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, almost two out of every five of the athletes were women.

At the Beijing Olympics, 46 per cent of Australian athletes were women, winning a staggering 57 per cent of the gold medals for our country!

While physically taking part in events and sports has improved, taking part in the boardroom discussions of sport organisations remains a challenge for many women.

Women remain underrepresented in Australian boardrooms, both in sport and in business.

I believe it is short-sighted of organisations to continue to recruit from such a small pool.

Women chaired only four out of the top 200 Australian companies in 2008 and represent just thirteen per cent of executive positions in our top 40 sporting organisations.^v

New research shows female directors lift the performance of corporate boards with more decision-making, tougher monitoring of the chief executive and more alignment with the interests of shareholders.^{vi}

The Australian Government is committed to supporting and promoting women's leadership in every aspect of Australian society.

That is why the Government supports a partnership between the Office for Women and the Australian Sports Commission to help produce future women leaders sport.

The Sports Leadership Grants for Women are provided to individuals and organisations to undertake accredited training and development in coaching, officiating, governance and management.

Over the seven years the program has been operating, more than \$2 million in grants have been awarded, helping nearly 17,500 Australian women develop high level skills in sport administration.

I am pleased to announce that I am not only continuing this partnership with the Australian Sports Commission, but increasing the funding to the Sports Leadership Grants for Women to \$350,000 in 2009-10.

But back to the cricket...

The ICC and Cricket Australia have put together an exciting program of women's cricket over the next few weeks.

This is the first ICC Women's World Cup and we in Australia are proud to be the host country for such an important event.

I wish all the women who are playing cricket during the next the few weeks, every success.

Thank you.

ENDS

ⁱ Australian Sports Commission, *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport Annual Report 2004*, Table 14 ⁱⁱ ASC *An Illusory image, A Report on the Media Coverage and Portrayal of Women's Sport in Australia* 1996. ⁱⁱⁱ 1999, Fagg Olds, Eliz, *Women of the Four Winds*

^{iv} <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/ba/sybil-bauer-1.html> ^v Australian Sports Commission Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions Policy Document. ^{vi}
"Women in the Boardroom and Their Impact on Governance and Performance," 2008, Pr Renee Adams and Dr Daniel Ferreira, forthcoming Journal of Financial Economics.