



Speech by

Hon. Lindy Nelson-Carr

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard Thursday, 8 March 2007

MOTION: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. LH NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism) (12.25 pm): I feel very privileged to be here today—not only as one of 30 proud female members of parliament but also as a mother, a daughter, a sister and a friend.

Ms Jones: And minister.

Ms Darling: And grandmother.

Ms NELSON-CARR: I thank my colleagues. Thanks to our sisters before us who marched and fought for equality and the vote, being a female parliamentarian is a dream which any woman can aim for. I watch my own daughters as they progress through life, and I am thankful that they have so many opportunities open to them as a result of all of those who have worked so hard for an equal role in this society.

Today we do indeed live in the lucky country. As minister for multiculturalism, I hear so often the plight of women from countries where freedom of speech is suppressed, education is denied and violence is the norm. I am saddened and horrified to hear the plight of women in regions such as the Sudan, where they fight daily for survival as they combat genocide and poverty. When I hear these stories I feel enormously proud that the Beattie government is confirming its commitment to refugees and immigrants through multicultural policies.

For example, the Queensland government's multicultural policy 'Multicultural Queensland—making a world of difference' commits to building a cohesive, united and harmonious society that accepts and respects cultural diversity. Departmental specific multicultural action plans reinforce the government's policy to provide culturally sensitive and inclusive services to a culturally diverse community and address issues of marginalisation, disadvantage and of course discrimination. These policies ensure that new Australian families are provided with the best possible support as they are welcomed into our communities.

There have been many examples of amazing women from diverse cultural backgrounds excelling in business, education, media, sports and the arts. Often they see Australia as a country where they can leave oppression behind and start a new life with their families. I know that the most important factor for many of these women is providing the best possible future for their children.

However, the rights that so many have worked hard for and so many others come to Australia to seek are in grave jeopardy. John Howard's workplace laws have made the workplace an even more unstable place for women than ever before. Equal wages and maternity leave are all under a cloud as the new laws start to unravel a system that will see the survival of the fittest. The Howard government has never been a friend of women. We only have to look at how few women have been represented in the Howard old boys cabinet over the last 11 years. It has been bad enough that Mr Howard and his old boys have kept women out of decision-making roles in government, but now with WorkChoices Howard has launched one of the most savage attacks on the working conditions of women that we have ever seen.

Just today we have seen a new report which shows that women on average still earn \$100 a week less than men. Under WorkChoices this could get worse. WorkChoices makes it legal for unscrupulous employers to pay people different rates for the same jobs. Until WorkChoices a man and a woman working side by side earned the same wages—not anymore. Today everyone is going to have to fend for themselves. Women who often have less time in the workforce due to child rearing and who require more flexible work practices and are impacted by matters such as child care and needing to be able to pick the kids up from school will be the really big losers. The fairness is gone and women will be the big losers.

In contrast, the Beattie government's commitment to women is second to none. In the EPA alone almost half of the workforce—or around a thousand members of staff—are females and 195 of these are rangers. Women make up a significant number of leadership roles in government departments and agencies. The fact that there are five female ministers in cabinet again highlights this fact.

International Women's Day is an opportunity not only to highlight the wonderful work being undertaken by women around our state but also to say let us not be complacent and let the Howard government and others take us back to the early 1900s.