

**Seventh Australasian Women and Policing
Conference
Making it Happen: Women, Police and
Community**

21-24 August 2011
Hobart, Tasmania



Commissioner Darren Hine
Welcome Address
Monday 22 August 2011

Your Excellency

Distinguished guests and delegates

Welcome to Tasmania and I trust that you have an enjoyable and fruitful conference, and that you find time to relax and enjoy the social side to the conference.

Thanks to Assistant Commissioner Carlene Yorke and members of the management committee of the Australasian Council of Women and Policing for inviting me to speak to you today.

Your Council is important in supporting and encouraging women to build policing careers across Australia.

The growth in the Council's membership, since its formation in 1997, demonstrates firstly, the need for an organization focusing on women in policing and secondly, the impact the Council and its members has within policing.

In its 2008-12 Strategic Plan, the Council has identified a range of directions that it sees as vital to solving the under-representation of women, particularly at senior levels, in Australian police services.

Over the years, I believe policing in Australia has improved greatly in terms of gender equity.

The most noticeable change for women in policing is the increase in police recruit numbers, which now reflect a much improved gender balance in most states and territories.

A study published by the Australian Institute of Criminologyⁱ looking at the career trajectories of women in policing noted that:

At 30 June 2006, 23 per cent of Australian police were women, almost double the percentage in 1996.

More recent data published by the Productivity Commission in January shows a steady increase in the proportion of female staff since 2005-06 across jurisdictions and nationally, 32.4% of police staff was female.

In this jurisdiction, the most recent graduation of recruits occurred in March and Course 2/2010 comprised of 17 females and 26 males.

The total number of females graduating from the last 5 courses equates to around 45%.

However, the AIC study also observed that:

The lack of women within the senior ranks of law enforcement agencies continues to be a problem in Australia as well as overseas. As the proportion of women in policing continues to increase over time, it should be anticipated that the number who occupy senior positions will also increase, albeit slowly.

Critically, researchers examining the data found that a greater proportion of males

have attained higher ranks, although the few females who have done so have attained them faster than their male counterparts.

Of course, this unequal pattern is not confined to policing or even the public sector with Australian statistics confirming few women sit in the management ranks at our biggest publicly listed companies.ⁱⁱ

But the gender gap isn't just an image problem with research suggesting that it can have real implications for organisational performance.

A global survey by HR firm Mercerⁱⁱⁱ released earlier this year on women in leadership in the workforce noted that:

There is an increasing body of research globally that shows there is a positive correlation between leadership and business performance, and referred to studies have directly linked a higher ratio of women in management positions with increased profitability and performance. The reasons for this are varied and often debated, and range from a greater understanding of consumer needs to being less likely to undertake unnecessary risks.

Police organisations have evolved and the traditional autocratic leadership has given way to a more adaptive leadership style which is able to operate in, and switch between, the leadership, management and command modes, as required^{iv}.

In Tasmania Police this difference in approach seeks to empower and recognise individual police officers and reflected in the development of capability profiles which emphasise dimensions of leadership, communications, personal drive and integrity, thinking and managing strategically, collaborative policing and achieving results.

These kinds of changes are important if we are to ensure we have a work environment that meets contemporary needs and less like one that looks like one created for men, by men^v described in Wendy Austin's paper at your first conference.

In that paper, it was noted that police forces generally gave greater value to masculine traits such as physical strength - traditionally seen as essential to good police work although much less so today.

It also highlighted the erroneous belief that a woman police officer could be something of a liability in a physical confrontation.

Whilst there may be a few dark holes where such beliefs are still held, the majority of officers reject such notions.

The leaders of Australian policing organisations have demonstrated genuine commitment and action towards changing that old culture.

While much has been achieved, more needs to be done as evidenced by launch of the *Gender Equality Blueprint 2010*^{vi} by the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick.

That cultural change needs to occur not just within law enforcement organisations but more broadly within the community, in schools, in families as well as workplaces so that men as well as women can also achieve gender equity, including for example, non-judgmental access to flexible work practices and the sharing of care.

This is all possible and conferences like this provide encouragement in pursuit of equality and I look forward to engaging with the Council as it develops policy directions from themes being discussed here today.

Thank you and enjoy the conference and what Hobart has to offer.

ⁱ Irving, R (2009) Career trajectories of women in policing in Australia. *Trends & Issues in crime and criminal justice* no.370.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/opinion/companies-all-talk-little-action-on-gender-issues/story-e6frg9if-1226031611833> (accessed 19 August 2011)

ⁱⁱⁱ [http://www.mercer.com.au/press-\(accessed](http://www.mercer.com.au/press-(accessed) 19 August 2011)

^{iv} Fleming, J and Hall, R (2008) 'Police Leadership' in t'Hart, P and Uhr, J (eds) *Public Leadership – perspectives and practices*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 165-176.

^v Wendy Austin "The socialisation of women police: Male officer hostility to female police officers" paper presented at the *Australian Institute of Criminology Conference First Australasian Women Police Conference* Sydney 29-31 July 1998.

^{vi} Gender Equality Blueprint 2010, Australian Human Rights Commission, www.hreoc.gov.au/sex_discrimination/publication/blueprint/index.html (accessed 19 August 2011)