



EVENTS COVERAGE



7th November 2016

SIR JOHN FORREST ORATION 2016: GENDER INCLUSION INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY

It has long been recognised that for a country to prosper it needs to access the productivity of all its citizens. At a Women in Leadership Event on the 13th of September, attendees learned that much progress has been made in the inclusion of women in the Australian Defence Force.

The Event was co-organised by the Australian Industry and Defence Network of WA (AIDN-WA) and the Australian Institute of Management Western Australia (AIM WA) at an after-hours event attended by over 100 people from Perth businesses. Serge DeSilva-Ranasinghe, President of AIDN-WA moderated the program.

Speaking from her 36 years of experience in the ADF, Captain Angela Bond celebrated progress in gender inclusion and noted that young service women of today do not consider they are prevented from any career they choose. This is both indicative of the attitude and self-belief of young women today and due to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) having opened all roles, including those in combat, to women.

Captain Bond, in her last appointment, commanded Australia's largest naval base, HMAS Stirling, in WA and had responsibility for all its personnel. She said that women today can progress in an ADF career similarly to men, even with career breaks. She pointed out that men take career breaks too. By contrast, it appeared, having left the ADF, it was going to be much more difficult for her to obtain senior positions in the private sector.

In spite of a solid commitment to inclusion, however, only 16% of ADF personnel and 10.9% of senior leadership are women. This raises the question to what extent the disparity is a matter of applicant choice or caused by obstacles to the involvement of women.

Nicole Curtin, Acting Assistant Secretary, Culture and People Development, Department of Defence, spoke of the programs she leads to identify and remove unnecessary obstacles.

One initiative under consideration, for example, is the “anonymous job application”. This involves the personnel department removing from job applications any references to names, gender and ethnic background before the selection panel considers them. In this way it is hoped to eliminate unconscious bias and ensure that only skills and achievements are considered when making selections.

Ms Curtin said she had to navigate a career path with few female peers and this made it more difficult for her to assert her place on board tables. She gives credit to men who mentored her during those

times. The Department of Defence continues to seek ways of attracting and retaining women in senior positions with initiatives such as a women's speaker series, networking groups, pilot scholarships, and work experience programs.

Bringing a view from a wider perspective was Board member of the Joint Education and Training Advisory Board in the Department of Defence, Laura Anderson. Ms Anderson also has a strong private sector record of achievement, being the Chair of multiple organisations and a founding partner of KPMG Australia's Risk and Advisory Services for Industry Practice.

Illustrating from her own life and career experiences, Laura gave a motivating speech on what can be achieved by women in today's workforce and encouraged others with her philosophies and approaches. She related an account of when she was young, female and upwardly mobile she was mistaken by men as staff and asked for coffee, only for the men to be embarrassed when she stood to take her role as speaker.

Some “take home” messages for women were to help and support other women; focus on the 85% of the things they can do, rather than the 15% they cannot; and not to compromise their femininity to get a job.

The speakers were followed by a lively question and answer session, and then a networking session, during which attendees were treated to AIM WA's hospitality.

The event served several purposes, continuing to address the issues facing women in defence, encouraging the sharing of experiences between women leaders across a diverse range of sectors and serving as AIDN-WA's third annual Sir John Forrest Oration keynote event. AIDN WA President Serge DeSilva-Ranasinghe commented: “We were delighted to have been the first organisation in WA to host a Women in Defence speaker event in 2015 in partnership with AmCham. To build further on this momentum with a follow up event, this time in partnership with AIM WA, is another significant milestone for WA's growing Defence Sector. AIDN-WA looks forward to facilitating more events of this nature in future that promote a constructive message of reform within our Sector”.

AIDN-WA President Serge DeSilva-Ranasinghe said that it was his intention to cooperate with significant organisations, such as AIM WA, for future events. Doing so brings together the largest range of industry players to benefit from the quality speakers AIDN WA is sourcing for its membership.

Photographs of the event can be viewed on the following link:

<http://www.aidn-wa.org.au/page-18107>

Testimonials:

“The Women in Leadership Panel co-hosted by AIDN-WA and AIM WA gave me the opportunity to hear about the great work that is happening in diversity and equity in the Australian Defence Force. I enjoyed hearing from the panelists about their own unique experiences and how each of them have made a contribution towards creating a more diverse and equitable environment for women.

“The panel was a great way to engage young leaders and those considering their own diversity footprints in the private and public sectors and how they too can make a difference in their own workplaces”. – **Rachel L. Cooke, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Perth.**

"It was interesting to hear the Department of Defence's strategies on workforce diversity and gender equity; both important challenges for all industries. Over 100 members and guests attended the session and provided some important opportunities for cross-sector networking between members of both professional associations". – **Emeritus Professor Gary Martin, CEO, AIM WA.**

"I had the privilege over the years to have met and worked with women leaders that worked hard for the success of their teams, who lead through communicating well and who were not intimidated by the challenges in front of them. Likewise, your guest speakers Nicole Curtin, Laura Anderson and Captain Angela Bond were just the same but also excellent in the way they chose to share their experiences and learnings with the audience. I am sure that their words will inspire many of those attending." – **Peter Iancov, Managing Director, Chronos Advisory Pty Ltd**

"As Chairman of Defence Reserves Support Western Australia I was privileged to attend an event co-hosted by AIDN WA and AIM WA on Women in Defence. As a Chair I am mandated to promote gender diversity and equality within the context of the committee and its actions, what this event demonstrated quite eloquently was the abundance of capable individuals who have and continue to contribute to the fabric of defence orientated life.

"From within the Public Service through to the Board room, the capability and resolve to get on with the job in spite of the circumstances was inspiring. I commend AIDN WA and AIM WA for seizing the initiative and providing a platform from which we can all contribute and learn from." – **David L Trench, Chairman Defence Reserves Support Council WA**

"I was delighted to be able to attend the Women in Leadership event jointly sponsored by AIDN-WA and AIM WA. The quality of the three speakers was outstanding with each of them giving a fresh insight into leadership based on their own personal experiences.

"Nicole Curtin, Laura Anderson and Captain Angela Bond have each achieved impressive careers in the male dominated world of defence. They spoke from the heart about gender equality, cultural change and equity and diversity. The most remarkable thing that struck me, however, was that their experiences provided lessons on leadership useful for both genders. Congratulations to AIDN-WA and AIM WA for a very successful event". – **Mike Deeks CSC, Managing Director, Forgas Defence**
