**Managing resistance to gender equality for policy and practice**21 March 2018

**Dr Marion Frere:**

Good morning everybody, and I’m going to hold onto my leaf. I always get enormous comfort in the Welcome to Country. I’d like to acknowledge not only Aunty Joyce’s Welcome but acknowledge that I’m speaking on Aboriginal land and pay my respects to Elders past and present, and special acknowledgement to any Aboriginal people who are in the room with us today. I’d also like to acknowledge my team which is pretty much taking up most of the second row. So make sure that during the day, or during the morning, that you say hi.

I’m very, very happy and honoured to be here today. I’m also, building on what Nelly said, like to acknowledge the absolutely ground-breaking work of VicHealth in leading Victoria to its world class stand on preventing violence against women. I was working at the University of Melbourne at the time of some of the very early ground-breaking research on burden of disease and the cost of violence came out, some of which was from VicHealth, and the resistance that Nelly referred to was very, very real. I remember it distinctly. So my job here today, and you can see we've picked up two of the images that Jerril had previously, in terms of the key Victorian strategies, and we've also added one more, which is the Action Plan. So I'm going to speak about these three documents. And my goal in this, if you like, is to give you the context for our work in Victoria, the framework that we're working in and in doing that, I'm going to refer back to the new resource that's been released by VicHealth today, and reflect a little bit about how we frame our work, how we experience resistance generally in terms of these strategies. But as a specific example, I'm going to go into a little bit more detail on our mass behaviour change campaign, the backlash we experienced last time and how we dealt with it. Again, I'm just going to acknowledge Luke Butler who is sitting in the second row, who is our Campaign Manager, and he's going to be around at question time if anybody wants any more detail in some of our strategies in that space.

So if you look at the images behind you, the one on the very left hand side is safe and strong, which is the *Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*. What I would say most of all about that document, I'm not going to go through it in detail, what it sets out is a very strong and clear conceptual framing for the work that we do on gender equality in Victoria. It has two main parts. The first main part is what we call ‘foundational reforms’. And if you think about that, really what we're talking about is the infrastructure for change for achieving gender equality. So it's things like developing baselines so that we can measure progress, developing targets and setting targets, putting strong governance in place so ministerial advisory councils, for example, committing to legislative change, introducing gender impact analysis, gender budget statements, using our purchasing power as a government, and advocacy to the Commonwealth. So there's a little bit more in that, but there's a set of foundational reform saying that actually there's a whole lot of structure, infrastructure, culture that shapes gender inequality, that underpins gender inequality, and we have to think and shift things at that systemic level if we want to achieve change. So that's one big part of what's in the document.

The other big part of what's in the document is what we call ‘early actions’. And really what that is about is a series of initiatives actions that we've all started.

We've already started most of them but they’re settings-based. So they take place in settings such as education and training, work and economic security, health safety and wellbeing, leadership and representation, sport and recreation, media, arts and culture. So in each of those settings you have specifically nuanced, targeted initiatives to see change. Not forgetting that surrounding, underpinning all of that, you have a whole series of systemic structural reforms. And what we're saying in that is you need to work in both spaces at the same time. You need to go for the large structural change, for example, through legislative reform as well as working in place-based and in settings-based initiatives and you know all that, but I think it's really important to recognize that in our Victorian strategy, it's been set out in a really sensible and easy to understand way. And I think one of the advantages that I have in both of these strategies as I came along after they were already developed, so while I now speaker as though I kind of own them, I didn't write them and when I came into the job I was really impressed by the thinking and the way they'd been put together. So they are a wonderful set of documents to implement, which is basically my job.

Just a little bit more on the Gender Equality Strategy; I just wanted to highlight some of the things in there so that we can talk a little bit about backlash. Tonight, actually if anyone’s free you’re all welcome, at ACMI there is a launch of the first year achievements report against the Gender Equality Strategy. So this afternoon there's a women and work conference with about 350 people coming, and in the evening it's the launch of the report, so that's a really big milestone for us. And some of the things that are included in that achievement report are, for example: the progress that's been made on achieving targets in terms of the number of women on paid Government Boards, which is now 53 per cent; the fact that we are now progressing and some of you in this room would have been involved in consultations; gender equality legislation for Victoria; the amount of work that's gone into gender auditing, in departments but also in some other entities and VicHealth’s on our pilot for that. That might not sound very exciting, but actually what gender auditing does, it names the things that matter in terms of an organization that's going to work for gender equality. Things like pay equity, recruitment and promotion, gender segregation, leadership, flexible work, parental leave, organizational culture. So those are the structural things that we need to be able to benchmark and measure organizations and structures against to see that we are achieving change. A couple of other things in there; the gender gap app, so that's a pilot app that individuals can hold and note in gender unequal whatever it might be, we're still working out all the detail. We're doing that with Girl Geek Academy, but in a specific local community: what do you see that makes you feel uncomfortable? That you note is unequal for women? For example, ‘I've gone to my sports club and there's no changeroom for me’, that sort of thing. We're working with local councils on that, so that can be recorded. And gender equal reading list, so providing a set of suggested reading for young women that we're doing in collaboration with the Stella Prize.

So I've just picked a few out of a hat, it's a smattering, there's a broad range of initiatives in that strategy, but what I want to do is have a little bit of a think about those or think about those examples and think about backlash. So if I pull out some of the quotes from the VicHealth resource that Jerril has just launched, “Resistance can be at its greatest when existing structures are threatened.” So that's one of the quotes from the report. Think about the things that I just talked about; setting targets, enacting legislation, conducting gender audits. All of these are about fundamental shifts to structures, empowering women through an app so that they can identify structural inequalities in their local community, providing reading that challenges norms. All of these are, sometimes you might not think they're very radical but they're actually quite radical and they do challenge power structures, they do challenge organizational structures and culture and all of these have the potential to encounter backlash. When we are designing these, we've always got, well, not going to say we're always a little bit worried, but we've always got at the back of our mind and expectation that we will experience some resistance. And as we think about our design, we think about our implementation, we think about how are we going to manage that resistance, but we also think about how we might be able to harness it, to use it for good. And I'll come back to that in a minute. We think about how we frame what we talk about. We think about what allies we can draw on that we can engage, bring in early and we think about those that we can influence. And that's where this resource becomes really helpful because it helps you pinpoint those kinds of strategies that you can use in a really practical way to get a bit ahead of the game.

The next strategy that I want to talk about is the *Free from Violence* strategy, and again, I'm going to just outline this quite briefly and then I'm going to talk about behaviour change in more detail. So *Free from Violence* is the strategy, the original strategy, that was launched in May 2017, the image on the right is the *Action Plan* that was launched at the end of May. In this Action Plan, so this is the Victorian government plan to prevent violence and all forms of violence, sorry, family violence and all forms of violence against women. It has five pillars, so again like the *Gender Equality Strategy* it's got quite a kind of conceptual framework that underpins it. The first pillar is about research and evaluation, about building knowledge, about what we work, about what works. While the evidence base on violence against women is quite strong, we continually need to build it, but we certainly need to build more knowledge in the prevention of family violence space. That's pillar one. Pillar two is innovate and inform, so where do we see promising practice, where might we try something new? The third pillar is scaling up and building on what we know. So where we do have good evidence or we have good promising evidence, we want to go from our smaller pilots to our large rollout. The fourth pillar is about engagement with the community which involves a range of different campaign approaches, including mass behaviour change. And the final pillar is about building structures and systems. So then that's about the architecture: in what kind of bodies do you situate this type of work? How do we link them, how do we monitor and govern this work? So those are the five pillars that the shaping of the work and our actions in this space take place in a range of settings and there's many of you in this room that we partner with on this work; women's health, local government, university settings, media. A bit like the list that Jerril… every person everywhere really is part of the message and we try to make sense of it and target it in the right way.

The final set of ideas that I wanted to share with you today was to just delve a little bit more into the mass behaviour change campaign and think a bit about backlash in that context. So in December 2016, the first State Government family mass communications campaign on the prevention of family violence was launched, you may recall the ad, there were two TV ads. They focused on family violence committed by men against women in front of children and the tagline was ‘Respect women for children's sake’. That campaign, there were controversies all over the place, but that campaign, and I'll come back to those, that campaign successfully reached one in four Victorians and the results which are quite rigorously assessed in terms of shifting behaviour change results were very strong. Now, when we do a campaign like this, as a regular practice, we tried to get up front and we prepare our media lines, we have our press releases ready, we have the kind of lines ready for when people call in so that we can respond, but I would have to say, and Luke lived and breathed this, we were totally, not totally, we were almost totally unprepared for the wave of backlash that hit us after that campaign. It was much larger than we'd anticipated, more than a thousand individual emails and letters were sent back to us in response to the campaign between December 2016 and March 2017. We had anticipated some of the grounds for complaints around the campaign, including ‘women do it too’. The counter-arguments focused on provocation, justifying abuse and the assertion that the ads were sexist and that not all men were perpetrators. All of this reflects some form of resistance or backlash to a social campaign that is about ending men's violence against women, that is about trying to shift culture, shift power, shift structures and I should acknowledge that the complaints ranged enormously in messaging from hostile calls, which, and I know in the resource the emphasis given to self-care, a range of self-care mechanisms had to be put in place to staff in dealing with some of these calls, and so we had some very aggressive responses, to less aggressive or less strong, lesser forms of resistance. The complaints came across from a broad range of channels, a broad range of medias, you know, phone, email, the lot really. And they were repeated and they kept coming back. Every time we responded, they kept coming back. Our formal feedback mechanisms were completely stretched and complainants entered into regular correspondence with individuals. And I guess I would say one of my takeouts from this book as well, is that when we threw back facts and figures, it didn't work, like they just kept coming back and back. Complainants also unsuccessfully complained to the Advertising Standards Bureau and the Independent Standards Board, none of which were upheld. So Luke was ready to lie down and have a nap a lot more than that. This was very overwhelming for the team. We couldn't, we were kind of cycling, couldn't quite work out how to get out of it.

So in March 2017, so three months after the launch of the campaign and continued back and forward, we decided to try a different approach and what we wanted to do was to see what could we actually get, what positives could we draw from this? What, why, how could we turn this into something that was potentially beneficial. We wanted to see if there were ways we could incorporate the views of the complainants into the conversation so that their voices could be heard and also we wanted to stop wasting our resources in terms of the constant back and forward. So what we did at that point, three months after, a thousand emails later, was we asked complainants to provide us with their email addresses and phone numbers so we could have a direct conversation with them. The majority refuse to take part. Out of about a thousand people, we had 100 who provided us with their personal contact details, email or phone numbers. The other 900 stopped coming back and forward at that point. Almost half of the hundred who agreed to directly engage with us had direct personal experience of family violence that they disclosed to us in the conversation; about 20 per cent of them were men, about 80 per cent were women, and approximately five per cent identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender or intersex. As the research indicates, we kind of got the research after, as the research indicates, we thought that we should be channelling our resources towards changing the attitudes and behaviours of those resistant people who were prepared to engage and might be more open to shifting attitudes. We learnt about building allies to those that we could engage with and we hope that of have these hundred people, there were a number that would be genuinely open to conversation and they were. The feedback from these people helped us to better understand the type of language that we needed to use for a campaign to resonate with a broader range of people, the channels that the new ads needed to focus on in order to have an impact and the type of messaging that would engage more individuals in the conversation. Which takes us to the second wave of the campaign, which is due to be released next Thursday the 29 March, on the 2nd anniversary of the *Royal Commission into Family Violence*, handing down its recommendations. In addition to what we successfully learned from the resisters of the last campaign, those hundred people who engaged with us, we've also had almost 50 other consultations with many of you in the room, people in the field, victim survivors in particular, domestic violence, family violence, women's health and prevention sectors and all of that has greatly assisted us in shaping the new campaign. We expect that backlash this time as well. And despite our best efforts to frame and engage, we will get it. But I'm going to turn as my final line to that other kind of nugget in the report which Jerril referred to, and that is that you often know you're starting to get results with your gender equality initiatives when you meet resistance. So we're going hang on to that and when that resistance comes in, we're going to know that we are making an impact.