

## EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 12: THE CHIEF

# WOMEN'S POLICY, WAC AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The CLP has a long history of promoting and supporting Territory women. The CLP membership has always included strong women who have assumed leadership positions throughout the history of the Party. My government like CLP administrations before me was committed to building a community in which women participated fully in all aspects of Territory life.

On becoming Chief Minister in 1995, I inherited a well-run Women's Policy Office under the directorship of the legendary Jennie Gzik. All her staff, together with the members of the Women's Advisory Council and its executive group, the Businesswomen's Consultative Council and its executive group were up and running. Also, officers throughout the NTPS charged with that all-important responsibility of monitoring, developing and promoting strategies that assisted Territory women in their growth and development as equal partners within our community, were in place.

It was occasionally suggested that I had done little to advance the cause of Territory women – me, the Minister who introduced the Territory's first Anti-Discrimination legislation, stood up for nursing mothers in public places and restaurants, who employed senior women on my staff all the way up to Chief of Staff wasn't doing enough? This criticism flew in the face of my concerted efforts to promote and mentor women on their merits. My mother Pam Stone a political pioneer in her own right imbued me with a sense of responsibility to assist women where I could climb up that elusive rope ladder. My wife Josephine a lawyer and activist in her own right and member of the Women's Advisory Council would have let me know were I failing her expectations. I believe action speaks louder than words and frankly the record speaks for itself. Whether as a Minister, Chief Minister, Party President or corporate executive many women will attest to my active support and encouragement in giving them a go – on the merits.

I am very proud of the achievements of my Government, and previous CLP administrations, in the initiatives and strategies that were carried into effect in support of Territory women. We brought a 'whole of Government approach' to women's policy unlike other Governments around Australia who had similar agencies tucked away in a silo out of the way. In the CLP we did more than simply pay lip-service to these very important issues, and I believe that is widely recognised throughout Australia to this day. The fact that a small jurisdiction such as the Northern Territory was applauded for its initiatives on domestic violence, for example, speaks for itself. The very pro-active way in which we worked tirelessly to assist Territory women to make a go of it in the commercial sector has also not escaped the attention of other State administrations over the years.

I delivered a Ministerial Statement to the Assembly 'Initiatives to Support the Development of Territory Women' on 25 August 1998.<sup>99</sup> I have drawn heavily on that Statement in this Chapter as it is a contemporaneous account written by me and others over fourteen years ago. It sets out in some detail our policies, our strategies, our hopes and our aspirations for Territory women at that time. I had a very clear plan for the future and the CLP government was absolutely determined to see through those strategies for the benefit of all Territory women.

The population split on my watch was 48 percent to 52 percent and a labour force participation rate of almost 65 percent which was 10 percent higher than the national average. Further some 1.5 percent of Territory women owned or operated a small business on my watch. Territory women tended to be independent, self-sufficient and well-informed. They were very much the product of the Territory environment, also the demographic was markedly younger than the rest of Australia with an average age overall of twenty seven years thereabouts. It was just plain good politics to be a champion of Territory women. As Mao Zedong wisely observed:

“Women hold up half the sky”

I had long committed to programs and initiatives to ensure that Territory women could fully participate in the life of the NT. I had created the Ministry of Women's Policy and retained it within my portfolio as head of government. I also had a system in place, along with specific projects and programs, to ensure that my Government was well informed on a wide range of policy priorities for women throughout the Territory.

The Businesswomen's Consultative Council and the Women's Advisory Council were two peak advisory groups that assisted in keeping the government informed. These two councils interacted and worked to develop cooperative alliances with other Territory committees and groups. The Businesswomen's Consultative Council, for example, meet jointly with the Business and Professional Women's Association. Two members of the Women's Advisory Council were members of the Businesswomen's Consultative Council to ensure interaction between the two councils.

Operating within the department of the Chief Minister was the Office of Women's Policy. Its primary charter was to advance Territory women's policy priorities. It interacted strategically with the Businesswomen's Consultative Council and the Women's Advisory Council as well as with other groups and committees. Government agencies including the Office of Youth Affairs, the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal Development, advised the Office of Women's Policy to ensure that initiatives relevant and suited to the Territory's diverse population were met. The Office of Women's Policy also convened the Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee to advise on the implementation of the CLP Government's Domestic Violence Strategy, an initiative dating from the Perron Government. Territorians will recall it was badged as:

### 'It's Got To Stop'.

The chair of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee reported directly to me as head of Government. Other agencies also had structures in place to ensure that women's aspirations were integrated in government planning. Territory Health Services, for example, had a women's health adviser who was active in that agency as well as on other committees and advisory structures. The framework provided my Government with information that encompassed diverse groups, special interests, professional issues, regional matters and discrete projects. The information was used to develop and form policy initiatives and resource allocations. Programs were aligned with the CLP government's existing strategic direction for women, as detailed in the Plan of Action for Women in the Northern Territory to the Year 2000. The directions set out in the plan included four key reform areas: women's status in society, women's economic security and independence, the elimination of violence against women, and the health and wellbeing of Territory women. Policy directions for the government were primarily guided by this plan of action. The plan encouraged government agencies to extend activities beyond the requirements set out as a base line. The plan was developed with input from women of different backgrounds, interests and circumstances throughout the Territory. Consultations encompassed women in urban centres and remote localities, in small and large communities, on properties and in mining towns. The plan reflected the priorities that Territory women themselves identified as important. They included ensuring strong accountability measures were in place to monitor the plan's progress.

Both the Business Women's Consultative Council and the Women's Advisory Council reported directly to government. The work of government agencies was detailed in the Women in the Budget paper each year. This paper provided an overview of government programs, activities, achievements and expenditure, particularly in relation to the plan of action for women. Advancing the reform objective in improving women's status in society comprised a wide range of initiatives.

The Northern Territory Women's Advisory Council (WAC) gave women in the community a direct pathway into the decision-making of government. For a time my wife Josephine served on the Council and took a special interest in superannuation reform. The Council provided my colleagues and me with an important conduit to the community. Territory women, through the Council, had helped the government turn this pathway into an active and productive channel for communicating, networking and injecting a woman's priorities into the business of government. The Women's Advisory Council worked to ensure women throughout the Territory were informed

about and involved in policy development and the decision-making process. In the initial period as Minister for Women's Policy I approved a total of \$30,000 in additional funding for the Council's annual budget to support the process. The WAC, with support and membership from the Business and Professional Women's Association, CLP Women, Labor Women and the Greens actively worked to involve more women in the political process. A Women and Politics reference group was formed in Darwin and Alice Springs in 1997. The Council initiated a survey to find out what Territory women wanted to know more about in regard to the political process. As a result, a forum took place in Alice Springs on the most frequently mentioned topic - understanding, creating and implementing policy. Forums were subsequently held in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Darwin. The Council considered how best to respond on the other topics which were identified: media skills, public speaking, leadership styles, understanding the Constitution and parliamentary procedure. A Women and Politics function held in Darwin in 1997 attracted close to 100 Territory women.

Importantly, the Women's Advisory Council and the Businesswomen's Consultative Council were represented in the Northern Territory Statehood Convention. This gave women input into an important event in our history and ensured that their priorities were taken into account in the deliberations of the Convention. An important new initiative of my government was the rural women's strategy.

In 1997, research released by the National Farmers Federation showed that 32 percent of Australia's farm workforce was female, and that around 40 percent of all business partners in broadacre and dairy farms were women. At the same time, women occupied less than 20 percent of paid management and board positions in the agricultural sector. It was intended that the strategy would give rural women a new decision-making and planning system through which they could advise government on issues such as telecommunications, roads and transport, power and mail services. This was an innovative strategy involving rural women in building a more responsive, competitive and sustainable rural sector. Further the Office of Youth Affairs in my department had been formed to initiate, oversee and coordinate a whole of government responses to policy priorities for young Territorians.

I also created the Ministry for Young Territorians within my own portfolio to oversee this process. The Round Table of Young Territorians regularly held regional forums. The inaugural Northern Territory Youth Festival was held from August to October 1997. It attracted some 11500 young participants. Moira O'Brien, a member of the Chief Minister's Round Table, was the Territory youth delegate to the national Constitutional Convention. Young women showed a high level of interest in the Round Table and demonstrated their readiness to take a leading role in shaping our future. Around 75 percent of all applications to join the Round Table were from young women. At that time, 80 percent of participants in regional forums were young women. The Office sponsored the Student Citizenship awards that are presented each Australia Day. In 1998, 80 percent of the 100 recipients nominated by their schools were female. Mentoring was another area under active consideration in government and business in the Territory. Women showed a keen interest in mentoring as a way to both enhance competence in their current role and position them for promotion.

At the time of the 1997 general election, I made a commitment to publish mentoring options and guidelines. Specific activities took place during the course of 1998 to increase discussion and debate of these issues, and strategies were tested in some government agencies. Publications, workshops, seminars and forums on mentoring were advertised and available in the major population centres Darwin and Alice Springs. A number of high-profile Territorians presented a personal and professional perspective on mentoring at the seminars. Implementation guidelines had been produced and were launched at the first mentoring seminar in March 1998.

The result of a survey undertaken in the NTPS by the Office of Women's Policy was made available for the seminar to provide an informed basis for discussion. Early results of the survey revealed that Territory experiences did not necessarily reflect many of the assumptions that appeared to underpin practices in other Australian States or overseas. An early and subsequent analysis indicated that the mentoring experiences and work-based aspirations of Territory women and men were more closely aligned than different.

Additionally, plans were implemented in the public sector to involve women more actively in decision-making. The percentage of women on peak boards, authorities and committees in the Territory had risen from 20.6 percent in 1995-96 to 23.49 percent in June 1997. This figure further increased in 1998 my last full year in Government. I advised during the 1997 Territory election that women's input in decision-making and policy advice to government would be expanded by the direct involvement of chief executive officers in the appointment of women to boards and committees. Public sector agencies thereafter were required to advise my department of any committee vacancies 6 months prior to the vacancy occurring. This provided time to ensure well-qualified, experienced and suitable candidates were identified. My department continued to publish the gender representation on boards and committees in its annual report. The public sector had a number of best management practices in place to complement other initiatives. Equal opportunity management plans were routinely undertaken. New models emerged to improve work and family options and to respond to changing patterns of work, and women's career development options were enhanced through specific women-in-management courses as well as public sector management courses (see Archives Images).

During the 1990s, we were going through a period of rapid technological change and this in turn impacted the way we accessed information and did business. Territory women including those in remote and rural centres benefited from an increase in the use and number of communication technologies. The WAC in conjunction with the Northern Territory Library Service and the Department of Communications and Advanced Technology designed an information network that could be accessed via the telephone, the Internet, and in libraries, health centres and through other public places. This system provided a relevant, accessible and simple service to women.

An interactive homepage was developed by the Office of Women's Policy during the course of 1998 to inform women about policy development initiatives. The website provided access to information and included pathways for Territory women to comment on policy and discussion papers. An Internet website was also developed by the Office of Youth Affairs to provide customers of that office with access to resource and reference material.

The Department of Arts and Museums also launched a website to allow easier access to information on such things as sponsorships, art directories, and calendars of events, programs and facilities. This newly-formed department of Arts and Museums also arranged for cultural programs, touring exhibitions, regional activities and events and workshops that enhanced and showcased women's artistic work. The Museums and Art Galleries division achieved at least 50 percent representation of women artists in its exhibition program. Through the regional museums program Arts and Museums installed a photographic exhibition of Extraordinary Lives in the national Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame.

Arts sponsorship programs for Territory women in 1998 exceeded \$150,000. Ten sponsorships were provided specifically to enable female artists to professionally develop their artistic skills and their networks with other artists. A public art exhibition by the Alice Springs Women's Shelter also received sponsorship. The exhibition contributed to a display on national 'Stop Violence Against Women Day' in April 1998. Other sponsored projects included an artistic skills exchange between three Aboriginal women artists in Ramingining and central Australia writing on Territory arts activities in national journals, and encouraged the participation of young women artists in community events such as the inaugural Northern Territory Youth Festival. Through a joint sponsorship of \$10,000 from the Department of Arts and Museums and \$5,000 through the Office of Women's Policy an innovative dance theatre production entitled What Silence Knows by Sarah Calver and Karyn Sassella focusing on domestic violence was performed in the Territory as part of Women's Own Work in 1998.

A number of awards and events recognised the development of women was initiated by my government. I introduced the Chief Minister's Northern Territory Women's Achievement Award. I was strongly of the view that Territory women be encouraged to meet the challenges that life brings and so help create a dynamic and vibrant Territory society. It was my intention to recognise such endeavours through this new award. The winner or winners of the Women's Achievement Award were announced each year in March in celebration of International Women's Day I set aside 9 March 1998 to launch the award and make the first presentation.

The Northern Territory Women's Fellowship was established to assist women, or groups of women, implement and report on projects that were of professional interest and that also assisted to advance Government policy priorities as identified in action our plans. The Fellowship was subsequently re-badged as the Chief Minister's Scholarship for Women. Valued at \$15,000, funding at this level was noteworthy. Over the years, the Fellowship had been used to assist Territory women to enhance professional skills and to record Territory women's histories.



Women's Fellowship Award 1998 winner Anja Tait received her award from Chief Minister Stone in the presence of past winners at Parliament House Darwin 25 November 1998

In 1997, I presented the Fellowship to Leonie Norrington, who was using a mix of oral recording and writing techniques to capture Territory women's opinions and experiences and so develop their confidence and skills as writers. On 25 November 1998 I presented the Fellowship to Anja Tait. The Fellowship was first awarded in 1988 and 1998 marked the first decade of the Fellowship. All past winners were invited to take part in a planned special event in the Hall of the Parliament in Darwin (Archives Images). Since 1995 Telstra had been conducting national businesswomen's awards. My government also provided \$15,000 towards these awards. The Territory was the only jurisdiction to provide such support to the Telstra awards (see Archives Images).



Telstra Business Women's Awards Finalists, Sponsors and Judges with Chief Minister Stone. Penni Tastula (centre) overall winner 1997. Brenda Elferink Telstra organiser of the Awards left Chief Minister Stone

In addition to formal awards the research of local historians had contributed to a public awareness of what women have given to the Territory. For example the 1997 publication 'Fit for the Gentler Sex' written by Helen Wilson and Barbara James and launched by the Women's Advisory Council, was an excellent example of the quality publications available. The Alicia Johnston lecture, also arranged by the Women's Advisory Council was held to commemorate the work of an outstanding young lawyer who was particularly concerned with disadvantaged youth and women who had experienced domestic violence and sexual assault. In a unique way each contributed to advancing Territory women.

My government was keen to involve women further in the economic development of the Territory and to provide opportunities for women to enhance their economic security and independence. To this end, the Business Women's Consultative Council reported on economic issues that impacted on Territory businesswomen. The Council recognised and built on the fact that women are significant contributors to our economic growth. Established in 1993 when I was Minister for Industries and Development the Council arose from an increasing awareness of the number of women in the small business sector. The Council worked to capitalise on opportunities and address key issues relating to business, to provide businesswomen from all regional areas with an opportunity to have input into government on issues, and to assist the integration of women into the business community. Council members brought a wealth of information, experience and expertise to activities. I valued their advice greatly. Council delegates attended conferences in Australia and Asia to keep members up to date on economic issues and to maximize trade and economic development opportunities. This was an important connection which the Territory continued to pursue in spite of the volatility created by the Asian Financial Crisis affecting the economies of some of our near neighbours.

The Business Women's Consultative Council also hosted forums and seminars. Members worked with the Australian Council of Businesswomen to hold a Northern Territory Business Women's Summit in Darwin in 1997. The Council assisted the Department of Asian Relations, Trade and Industry to promote October Business Month in the Territory. The Australian Council of Businesswomen would later adopt from the agenda of their NT counterpart the topic

concerning skills shortage in regional, rural and remote Australia. A paper prepared in the Territory on this theme has been circulated nationally before going to Prime Minister Howard.

The Business Women's Consultative Council worked with the Northern Territory Retail Industry Training and Advisory Board to encourage young people to enter the retail sector and consider going into small business as a credible alternative to academic studies and careers. It also contributed to the debate on tax reform and superannuation at a local and national level, and assisted in the development of joint venture partnerships as a result of interaction in the region, such as the one between Centralian College and Cybernetics Training Co in Malaysia, trading as Training Solutions. Further the council worked to improve women's access to information services, to develop women's leadership skills and to encourage the delivery of customer focused businesses. The Council's activities promoted women's excellence in the private and public business area. As I stated at the time of its inauguration, the establishment of the Council was a step forward for women in business in the Territory.

During the 1997 election campaign, I reiterated that research would take place on women's financial independence, that a financial planning kit for women would be developed, and that research would be undertaken for a paper on women's wealth. The financial planning kit for women was well under way when I left office. In keeping with the need to adopt a customer focus, a Territory-wide survey was undertaken in 1997. This survey investigated the attitudes of Territorians to the financial services available and on whether a kit for women would be useful. A total of 880 responses were received from across the Territory.<sup>100</sup>

The results provided an early direction for the financial planning kit. The survey was complemented by focus groups of young women, indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure that many opinions were taken into account. The kit also benefited from new and local research, through the Office of Women's Policy, to report on how women create, store, display and disperse their wealth. I also directed that the WAC consider the important issue of superannuation, particularly as it affects women. This was an area of particular concern to me because I had seen the impact that a lack of superannuation planning can have on women. The Council produced and distributed a fact sheet and articles for information and organised regional forums on superannuation.

I had made a detailed Ministerial Statement on domestic violence and sexual abuse in November 1997. I was determined to strive for a Territory that was safe from violence at home and in public places. It was one of the key reform areas identified by Territory women and further the Territory programs had engendered respect throughout Australia. Our coordinated model was viewed with some envy as a best-practice response, and many of our programs were copied in other jurisdictions. The Territory had also received prestigious National awards for specific programs. Territory initiatives that attracted particular praise and attention included: the Aboriginal family violence strategy, which was designed with indigenous Territorians to initiate, support and monitor community-based responses; the Territory-wide data collection project set up to establish, track and report on the incidence of domestic violence across the Territory; the development and accreditation of the only formally available and recognized domestic violence training course in Australia at that time the Diploma in Human Service Work (Domestic Violence); and the 'It's Got To Stop ...' community education program which helped to change NT community attitudes to violence and abuse.

My Government spent approximately \$3.6 million a year directly on combating domestic violence. This spending was well above the reported per capita spending of the larger States. Under my Government, money had been provided to improve crisis accommodation services and to extend available counselling and support services. In 1997, some 80 women and their families were provided with priority housing because of the need to escape from domestic violence. In the same period, 31 safe rooms were installed in properties for women who needed additional security in their home. An additional \$256,226 had been provided for a major upgrade to Dawn House, \$180,000 for a purpose-built centre for the Yarralin community, and \$50,000 for the Nhulunbuy Crisis Accommodation Centre. The Darwin Women's Housing Association received a total grant of \$640,000 to purchase and upgrade housing under the community housing program. The Katherine Women's Crisis Centre received \$25,400 prior to the devastating flood. My

government monitored the needs of Katherine post the flood given the emotionally charged atmosphere that flows from natural disasters. I also charged the chair of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee with responsibility to keep me fully informed about the crisis centre.

The fourth reform area identified by Territory women was health and wellbeing. The Northern Territory women's health policy continued to be implemented through Territory Health Services. The policy incorporated the women's cancer prevention programs, the National women's health program, the domestic violence program and the alternative birthing services program. The Women's Health Unit developed protocols, minimum standards and a training package for Territory Health Services staff that provided services to sexual assault victims. The link between sexual assault and alcohol had been researched and increased funding provided for sexual assault services in Darwin and Alice Springs. Additionally, resources had been allocated to provide a sexual assault counsellor in both Katherine and Tennant Creek.

A Northern Territory birthing services policy had been developed to increase access to alternative birthing services to those offered by the traditional maternity wards in our hospitals. Four pilot programs were initiated: the antenatal and postnatal care was provided by Wurlu Wurlinjang, with birthing support from the Katherine Hospital; Aboriginal health workers were made available in all Alice Springs Hospital maternity areas; the Darwin Rural Health Service working with Oenpelli and surrounding communities to develop antenatal information for Aboriginal women; and the Danila Dilba Aboriginal Medical Service organising a 2 day Top End women's forum to discuss women's health and birthing. Culturally appropriate, community-based antenatal support was also provided through the Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture program. This program was introduced in 8 Top End and 2 central Australian communities, and was adopted for use in the Pilbara and Kimberley areas of Western Australia. The Darwin Homebirth Group received \$10,000 to host the 17th National Homebirth Conference in Darwin in August 1997. The theme of this conference was Birthing Our Way - Birthing Across Cultures.

The Alice Springs Community Health Services postnatal depression project was implemented to increase nurses' awareness of the symptoms and incidence of postnatal depression. This project assisted nurses to identify women suffering from postnatal depression and to respond appropriately. The program was extended to the Palmerston area during 1998.

The Living With Alcohol program expanded its work to reduce the personal, social and economic cost of alcohol-related harm in the Territory. The program focused on interventions at the early stages of drug and alcohol abuse. Programs continued to target women in relation to alcohol and tobacco consumption. Territory Health Services maintained a number of positions to assist women in rural and remote communities to develop local education packages in relation to the transmission of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

The Territory's active participation in programs that aimed to reduce the incidence of, and deaths from, breast and cervical cancer in Territory women was most significant. The women's cancer prevention program, jointly funded by the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments worked to increase the number of women having tests and provide early detection of any existing problems. Under the Northern Territory breast screening program, 7000 women had been screened since 1995. 2438 women were screened for the first time in 1997. Screening and assessment centres were established in Darwin and Alice Springs and a screening unit visited Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy. There was a marked increase in the number of Territory women having Pap smears. The Territory women's cancer prevention program was contracted by the Commonwealth to organise the first national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Well Women's Workshop in Alice Springs in 1997. Nearly 200 women from all over Australia attended, including many from remote communities.

In January 1998, my Government announced funding of \$90,500 for a Central Australia residential facility. This was used to provide a multipurpose supported accommodation facility for people with a disability. It allowed for indigenous people from that area to be placed closer to their families and land.

The Women in Sport and Recreation (WISAR) program and the Start program encouraged women to be active participants in sport and recreation. Both these programs were offered in

1998. Indigenous women in small communities in particular were encouraged to participate. The success of these programs was demonstrated by the number of women who participated. An estimated 8000 took part in the last WISAR program. The Northern Territory Institute of Sport had been set up to assess and monitor high-performance athletes from all sports. It also provided the opportunity for talent identification. In 1997, 54 women received squad and elite sport scholarships totalling \$120 000.

I have not covered all of my Government's specific initiatives and achievements on women's policy but I hope the reader gets the flavour that my Government, as CLP Governments before me, made a substantial contribution to good policy and strategies properly funded that impacted Territory women. Women's policy priorities were firmly on my Government's agenda. We were doing what Territory women asked us. We were working with women to improve their status in society, to increase their economic security and independence, to eliminate violence from their lives and to improve their health and wellbeing within our community. I was determined to ensure that the Territory continued to advance those areas that Territory women considered important. As we approach the next century, it was vital that Territory women were able to participate actively in all spheres of Territory life and that the enormous contribution they made was recognised. Territory women needed to seize the moment and be authors of their own destiny and I and my colleagues were determined to play our role in delivering that outcome.