**DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**22 March 2023**

**International Women’s Day Speech**

Start

*Speech is 869 words (approx. 7 mins)*

**INTRO**

Thank you, Mr deputy Speaker. And, thank you to Minister Berry for bringing forward an executive motion for International Women’s Day.

I am proud of all that this Government has done in support of women in the ACT, and for advancing gender equity.

As many in the Assembly know, I am passionate about gender equity, and I am passionate about minimising gambling harm in our community.

This International Women’s Day I wanted to raise awareness for gender equity in sport and highlight why moving towards a gender equitable future in sport is connected to minimising the proliferation of gambling in our community.

Gender & Sport

Australia’s major sporting codes all actively work to improve women and girls’ participation in sport. While we still have a long way to go, there are shifts and moves afoot from the local to the professional level to address gender equity in sport.

Just as there are attempts to push a major cultural shift in gender equity in Australian sport, from the Board level, to the wages and facilities that are provided to players, to the behaviour of fans at games, there is more that can be done.

On a local level, I have been particularly excited to see the work of the Canberra Royals Rugby Union club and all the good work that they are doing to support Royals women and girls through their club. In addition, I am really boyed by examples of small changes that can make a big difference. I commend Minister Berry on her commitment to upgrading the ACT’s sports grounds to ensure that change rooms and facilities to cater for women and girls – and there is a shining example of this in Rivett oval where small, simple changes have made a really big difference towards a more gender inclusive future for sport in the ACT.

Something that has really concerned me is Australia’s sporting codes reliance on advertising revenue from online wagering companies. The extent to which sees advertising contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. These international companies do not contribute anything to our society – no jobs, no community facilities, no social contribution – all these companies do is take billions of dollars from our community. Aside from the fact that children and young people are exposed to advertising of an adult product that is potentially harmful, there is very little public critique of the actual messages that are being perpetuated through gambling ads in Australia. Every 91 seconds there is a gambling ad on Australian TV. So, my IWD argument is that despite all the good work that Australian sporting codes are doing to promote gender equality – every 91 seconds their sponsors perpetuate messages that contradict this. Many of these messages from gambling advertising companies reinforce harmful gender stereotype, and the research is eye-opening.

Research

Research has long shown that gender has been a primary identity marker used in ads, with much research outlining the targeted the ways in which stereotypical gender roles are used to sell products and market messages to the public.

When it comes to gambling adverts, UNSW researcher Dr Emily Deans found that most Australian adverts were targeted to young men. They feature male friends engaging in gambling, when a women is featured in an advert they are hyper-sexualised and passive objects present only to serve the men in the adverts. The settings of these ads are generally pubs, barbecues and parties, and referrals are made to “mate”, “boys” and “lads”. The central actors in all of these adverts are primarily Caucasian, heteronormative men in positions of power in relation to the women.

We know how gender stereotyping reinforces inequalities, promotes sexist behaviour, and attitudes and perpetuates violence against women. It is simply not good enough to let these adverts slide, especially whilst Australian sporting codes have been doing so much to address gender equity in sport.

Louise Burrows

It is not only researchers and gambling harm minimisation advocates who are concerned about this growing issue, but so too are the players themselves.

During International Women’s Day I spoke to professional rugby player, Louise Burrows about this gender equity in sport, and the impact of the advertising and she told me:

“Women’s sport in Australia is growing and as a female athlete we are always grateful for the opportunities we have to play at all levels from grassroots to elite. There is however such a long way to go in many aspects as a female being involved in sport especially at the professional level. Being involved in elite level sport for almost 3 decades it is disappointing to see we are still underrepresented in the majority of sports from participants, coaches, administrators and board members compared to our male counterparts.

Sport is often seen as an opportunity for women to feel respected equal and empowered. Unfortunately, through certain sponsorships displayed on team uniforms and advertising that play on TV throughout sporting games these only perpetuate the gender stereotypes that we work so hard to address. We need to do better, be better now and for the future.”

I agree with Louise, we need to do better, and I believe we can.

IWD Action

This International Women’s Day my action was to write to the Coalition of Major Professional and Participation Sports and all the ACT branches of these sports including: the Australian Football League, Cricket Australia, Football Australia, the National Rugby League, Netball Australia, Rugby Australia, and Tennis Australia to express my concerns about this issue.

Conclusion

I look forward to continuing my conversations and working with Australian sports to ensure that the harm from gambling is minimised. I am passionate about seeing a future where gender equity is realised, and gambling companies no longer dominate our sport.

ENDS