

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

June 2021

Women in Climate and Health – networking breakfast

Good morning! Just to start with a bit of an introduction, as I'm a relatively new member to the Legislative Assembly I am meeting many of you for the first time. In October last year I was humbled to be elected to represent the people of the electorate of Murrumbidgee. Prior to entering into this world of politics, I worked as a researcher at the ANU and was the Director of the Centre for Gambling Research.

I started on this political journey because I'm passionate about my local community and I have a real interest in helping to influence positive, pragmatic and practical outcomes that impact our daily lives. I am interested in bringing an evidence based lens to tackling large and complex policy issues including social justice, mental health, equality and climate change in our community.

My academic background is in anthropology and participatory development. Through this work I have been fortunate to live and work with remote Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, and across Australia more broadly. My experiences living and working in remote communities with our First Nations people, have instilled in me a deep and richer understanding of our environment and the history of our environment. I was taught by elders out on the most remote country, camped out on floodplanes, in outstations, the stories of creation and the stories, the song lines that are both the physical and spiritual maps of our country.

Those stories and song lines provide a living, verbal history that is thousands of years old, but also a stark reference point for Aboriginal people in explicitly understanding environment and climate changes that have occurred. And as an aside point, recognizing and valuing Indigenous knowledge and input in the actions we take to protect our environment is a critical step going forward in addressing climate change.

To begin, I thought it would be nice to provide some context for the meeting today and to firstly acknowledge Dr Sophie Lewis, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, and Dr Arnagretta Hunter, in this event being a joint event here at the Legislative Assembly today.

Firstly, with World Environment Day having been recognised just last week on Saturday 5 June, the timing seemed appropriate.

But more than that, I attended my first function of Women in Climate and Health on the 16th March this year at the National Rose Garden in Barton.

The day before, the 15th March, the March 4 Justice rallies happened around the country and at Parliament House – with women and men around the country strongly calling for an end to sexual violence in this country. Prior to this for a good month or so, media reporting and headlines had been dominated by stories of sexual violence and so many of the both personal and professional conversations that I had had with people were dominated by this topic – as it rightly disturbed so many of us. So, the day after the March, that Tuesday morning, I attended the Women in Climate and Health breakfast. I went to the women's breakfast not really knowing what to expect, but feeling relatively emotionally drained from the day before.

However, the function provided respite. Sitting in the Rose Garden at old Parliament House, on a cool, but stunning morning as the sun rose, with a group of passionate and dedicated women, all looking to the future to create something better – provided such a welcome contrast and antidote from the previous weeks. And it was from that point on that I knew this was a moment of people that I wanted to be involved with.

We're in the midst of a global pandemic and constantly reminded of what an unprecedented times we are living through. Globally there are also significant conflicts, social issues – racism, oppression, injustice and inequality that many people round the world face on a daily basis, all now significantly magnified by the pandemic. However, arguably climate change is the biggest issue we face globally. All those other issues will only get worse if we cannot reside on an environmentally health planet.

No one shoulders the responsibility of climate change individually; yet we all have a responsibility to find and action solutions. We need constructive, pragmatic outcomes to break this seemingly insurmountable issue down, to ensure each and every one of us is part of the solution. Which is why I am so excited you are all here today to discuss this.

Last week in the Legislative Assembly, I called on the ACT Government to investigate 'National Park City' status for the ACT. National Park City status does not create any legislative or regularly constraints, rather it is a celebration of cities round the world that embrace and protect their environment and make active policy commitments towards addressing climate change. It's a status that would require collaboration and cohesion across all levels of our community, of business government, individuals and organisations. It would require action from grass-roots to

strategic policy setting and agenda. And I think Canberra is so well placed to make this happen.

Becoming a National Park City would enable us to commit further to what many of you are already working on so passionately in creating a sustainable, green, healthy city.

I'm excited to hear this morning from our guest panel about things that can be done, particularly by families and communities – the activities, actions and changes that are achievable and beneficial for today, and which provide meaningful, long-term outcomes.

I'm inspired by the commitment of everyone in this room and I urge you all to please keep up the work; keep up your positivity and strength; and keep up the connections and collaboration.

In closing, I'd just like to thank Arnagretta and Sophie, as well as the staff from the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, who have been instrumental in helping coordinate this morning's event.

Also, I'd like to thank Sunita and Sanjay from Daana catering in Curtin. If you haven't yet visited their multi award-winning Indian restaurant, I encourage you to do so.

I first met Sunita here in this room in November last year, when she was awarded Canberra's Business Woman of the Year. Sanjay has also received accolades, awarded the 2020 ACT chef of the year and, together, they have received multiple other awards for Daana restaurant.

So again, thank you very much and please enjoy the panel discussion.

Thank you.