

# Opening Address

by

## His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC

Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

- The Hon Julie Bishop MP  
Minister for Education, Science and Training  
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues
- Mrs Heather Ridout  
Chair of the 2007 APEC Women Leaders' Network Reference Group
- Heads of delegation and focal points
- Honoured speakers and participants at the 2007 APEC Women Leaders' Network

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this 12th APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting.

It was a special privilege to meet and talk with many of you last night.

This year's theme is on how women in business can contribute to a sustainable and prosperous future. This is, indeed, a worthy topic to be discussed by such a distinguished group of female leaders in business, government, academia and civil society.

I would suggest that in so doing, however, you might consider adding the word 'satisfying' to a sustainable and prosperous future. Sustainability and prosperity are most admirable objectives but, of themselves, do not always lead to total fulfillment.

Your topics will cater to a broad range of interests - trade, education, rural industry, entrepreneurship, and information and communications technology.

But I suggest that impacting on all these issues is the global challenge of climate change - an area I would like to touch on today as a scene setter, if you like, and food for thought for this afternoon's forum on "Strengthening the capacity of business to meet the challenges of climate change."

Because climate change is adding a new dimension to all of our endeavours.

Earlier this year I was asked to address a Business Leaders forum on climate change in Canberra. It was at the time of the release of the Stern Review (and, in fact, Sir Nicolas Stern was a guest speaker), the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, and many other key reports.

It was also at a time when Canberra, at the height of a normally blazing hot, dry summer, experienced a devastating snow and ice storm —a dramatic but relevant prelude to the climate change forum.

Indeed, this beautiful setting at Port Douglas is fronting a stretch of reef that has been named as one of the world's natural wonders and it could be under real threat from the impacts of global warming.

If the IPCC Report proves correct, global warming caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions could see temperatures rise by between 1.5 and 4.5 degrees by the end of the century if we do nothing. This, in turn, could lead to rising sea levels, the displacement of coastal communities and low-lying Pacific nations, and extreme weather events.

Such temperature changes could affect the very lifeblood of our region and, indeed, the globe —namely the availability of adequate rainfall and, thus, supplies of fresh water. Water —its availability and distribution —governs the food we produce and the health of the region's peoples. It is a critical factor in the climate change debate and to a sustainable future.

Since that Canberra forum there have been further reports on global warming and its projected impact on climate change, including very strongly expressed alternative views by intelligent people. For example, some argue that massive variations in the sun's heat radiation and cloud formation may have a greater impact on global warming than accumulating green house gases.

Others consider global warming is a cyclical event only marginally influenced by man's CO2 emissions, and that the science behind some predictions is faulty and inadequate.

Patently, it is essential to invest in continuing high level scientific study to confirm the causes and the potential impacts, and I urge you to use all of your influence to ensure that happens.

Notwithstanding this conundrum, I believe the world is acknowledging that polluting the earth's atmosphere and oceans with billions of tons of CO2 emissions is not wise, whilst the ramifications of doing nothing, to then find such emissions as being causal, is a too risky approach.

The crux of the matter now is to decide to what extent do we respond in an economically and environmentally acceptable manner?

And, thus, the importance of the 21 nations under the APEC umbrella playing their part in a comprehensive and cooperative way and your role of influence within it.

Because, as an international group, APEC does get results. It represents the most economically dynamic region in the world, accounting for about 40%of the world's population, 56%of world GDP and 48%of world trade.

The economic growth and strengthened cooperation in the Asia-Pacific community has resulted in, for example:

- an increase in real GDP for APEC economies by 46%from 1989 to 2003 compared to non-APEC economies which increased by 36%
- an increasing growth of developing APEC economies by 77%over the same period, more than double the non-APEC rate.

In turn, we have seen reductions in poverty, improvements in health and education, and increased access to basic services.

As APEC has matured, it has also reflected the increasing influence of women in business, government and the community.

At least half of the world's population, and hence at least half of its intellectual capacity, comprise women. And, while this is not yet adequately reflected in proportionate leadership positions in public and private sectors, there has been significant improvement in some countries, albeit less so in others.

As such, your APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting provides an essential gender perspective on all APEC agendas and priorities.

And I am hoping you will provide such a perspective on climate change.

So how can we approach the climate change challenge?

We can either see it as an insurmountable problem, or we can see it as a big opportunity; an opportunity to capitalise financially on new technologies, and very importantly, a chance to excite the interest of the younger generation in the study of the environmental sciences and associated technologies.

We can work together on reducing our emissions —implementing new energy efficiency measures, using renewable and low-emission energy technologies, and by conserving energy.

We can also work to adapting to the impacts of climate change, because no matter how well we cut back on emissions, some level of change has already occurred, cannot be reversed and has locked in further future change. An example is the rural industry, where we can diversify crop varieties, employ new technologies, and improve water efficiency.

Hand in hand with these approaches is the need to engage, completely, our skilled scientific communities.

We need to continue to support research institutions in their quest for accurate, balanced climate change science, including the need to improve the accuracy of long-range weather forecasting to minimise the impacts of drought, flood and cyclonic damage. Can we do more through joint research between universities and research institutes of our respective nations powerfully supported by business communities? I think we can and must.

It is interesting to note that financial and economic savings are already being made by major global companies because of energy cost-saving initiatives:

- Du Pont has saved US\$3 billion between 1990 and 2005;
- Dow Chemicals has saved US\$4 billion between 1994 and 2005;
- Westpac has saved over US\$7 million since 1993 on energy costs; and
- Amcor is achieving annual cost savings of AU\$1.5 million from reduced energy use.

One of Australia's wealthiest men, an Australian-born Chinese, has made billions of dollars in just the last few years through the sale of Australian designed solar powered energy systems for domestic homes and buildings in China.

We can all build on this. Businesses around the world —big and small —are recognising that by investing in research and energy efficient technology, they will see growing profits as demand rises.

What I am saying quite simply is that every business decision we make can also be an environmental decision and vice versa.

Throughout my frequent travels across Australia I never fail to be impressed by the number of individuals and organisations addressing climate change now. Often in very small ways, they are, nevertheless, conscious of their carbon footprint and, hopefully, this is true of all APEC member countries.

I believe the challenge for business is to harness this goodwill. By listening to the community and adapting its practices to suit the mood, the business sector will both grow and prosper.

And I suggest this is where the gender perspective must be factored in.

The Women Leaders Network Meeting provides an opportunity to contribute its considered views on climate change and a sustainable future from a broad-sweeping standpoint: from the boardrooms, the market place, the media, and the government: and at the grass roots level, from decisions on housing design, and energy efficiency, to more efficient farming practices and improved systems for water capture, storage and distribution.

Research has long found that most family household finances are managed by women - right down to what light bulbs we buy. You represent a powerful voice.

Since 1996, when the Network was first established, you have provided an important platform for identifying key issues affecting women in the region; highlighting the major contribution by women to their economies; generating solutions for the many challenges women face; and providing female leaders with an opportunity to examine ways in which they can collaborate in different areas; thereby offering a quality pool of expertise from which APEC can draw advice.

It is also a network. And by its very definition, provides a wonderful system for exchanging ideas, setting up partnerships, comparing programs, furthering research and tapping into the insights of that wonderful gender which represents at least half of the world's population and brainpower and probably 70 per cent of its compassion.

Delegates: strengthening the capacity to build sustainable futures is a priority for us all. And considering and taking action on global warming and climate change is a major priority.

I anticipate that over the next three days, the wealth of knowledge present at this meeting will stimulate the development of fresh perspectives, strategies and pragmatic outcomes, not just on global warming but on other key issues impacting our region and our globe.

Please enjoy the 12th APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting which I am now delighted to declare officially open.