

WOMEN'S CONSULTATIVE FORUMS

Statement by Minister for Women's Interests

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Women's Interests) [9.13 am]: I wish to update the house on the successful delivery of a Liberal–National government election commitment in 2015. Leaders from government, academia and industry have, this year, attended three consultative forums to improve strategies addressing issues affecting women. The first forum, themed “attracting talent—promoting non-traditional education and careers to girls”, was co-chaired by myself and the Premier. Significant cultural barriers that impact on the career choices of girls and young women were identified as issues affecting the way our young women make choices about their career paths and, ultimately, their economic independence and future economic security. This forum identified strategies to attract more women into non-traditional trades and careers involving science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The second forum, themed “retaining talent—investing in women”, focused on organisational cultures that are inclusive of women and positively support them to return to, and remain in, the workplace. The discussion at the forum included the need to showcase the great work already being progressed by organisations to help women remain connected to their employers during a period of absence, and to implement flexible work arrangements to support their return. Equitable recruitment and promotion processes were also identified as key strategies.

The third forum, themed “re-engaging talent—women returning to the workforce”, held just two weeks ago, discussed women seeking to return to work after a prolonged career break, and what actions were needed for both women and business to support their return. Many women want to return to work following an absence due to a change in their circumstances. They may also need to return as they face a retirement with insufficient superannuation income. We know that for many women this is a worrying trend. For this reason, at the forum I launched two resources for women to better understand, manage and plan their superannuation. These valuable guides will help to equip working women with the information they need to take control of their retirement income. Forum participants also discussed how helping women to reskill, build lost confidence and reconnect with vital professional networks will improve their chances of returning to work and securing their financial future.

In 2016, we will be working to deliver on the outcomes of these forums, and I look forward to updating members on the progress made to improve women's workforce participation, their access to leadership opportunities and improved economic independence.