

**SELECT COMMITTEE
INTO PUBLIC OBSTETRIC SERVICES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
MONDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2006**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Hon Helen Morton (Chairman)
Hon Anthony Fels
Hon Louise Pratt
Hon Sally Talbot**

Hearing commenced at 11.52 am

UNWIN, MS GEMMA
Manager, Community Engagement,
Office for Women's Policy, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee I welcome you to the meeting. You will have signed a document titled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

Ms Unwin: Yes. I have read and understood the document.

The CHAIRMAN: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make a noise near them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public or media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise that premature publication or disclosure of public evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

I have explained that I will have to leave shortly - in about 10 minutes - and that Hon Sally Talbot will chair the committee in my absence.

Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

Ms Unwin: Yes, I would. I have an opening PowerPoint presentation. I am waiting for it to log on. I want to let you know that prior to my joining the Office for Women's Policy, I worked in the women's bureau of the Department of Education and Training, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, the Disability Services Commission and the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection. I have run search conferences, industry think tanks, community engagement forums and various other community engagement strategies, the outcomes of which have contributed to both policy development and strategic plans in the government and private sectors.

The CHAIRMAN: Shall we have some questions while you are waiting for your presentation to boot up or do you need to concentrate on that?

Ms Unwin: I would not mind concentrating on that and giving the committee some intro. I want to give an idea of my presentation. I want to go through some examples of community engagement and give further information about the way in which we engage with women in the community. I want to raise some issues. There is not a best practice model for community engagement because there are thousands of models.

[12.00 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: I have handed Anthony a line of questioning that I prepared. Gemma, I am going to have to leave. Hopefully, we can pick up with all of this when I meet with you at your office.

Ms Unwin: Yes, that will be great. We are looking forward to you coming in and seeing the office, because we have a variety of programs in place as well as key policy priorities. We have some really exciting things we are planning for next year.

The CHAIRMAN: I am looking forward to it and I am sorry that it was cancelled previously.

Ms Unwin: I understand; my sympathies.

Proceedings suspended from 12.01 to 12.17 pm

Hon SALLY TALBOT (The Acting Chairman): In the meantime I have taken over as chair. That just shows what can happen if you hang around long enough! Have you had all the formalities read to you?

Ms Unwin: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think we are ready now to go straight into evidence; so, over to you.

Ms Unwin: I gave a brief introduction as we were trying to sort out our technical difficulties, but I also wanted you to know that I joined the Office for Women's Policy in 2001, and that was to -

Hon LOUISE PRATT: Excuse me, I am sorry to interrupt, but would you mind not turning those lights off because it is actually better if we can see Gemma's face.

Ms Unwin: Thank you. I joined the office in 2001, basically to conceptualise, organise and deliver the Women's Convention, which was held in 2002. It was entitled "Your Future - Your Say". The Women's Convention was a first in the consultative approach being adopted by the Office for Women's Policy. It was the first major engagement initiative under the new state government. The Office for Women's Policy and our engagement strategies are now giving women a greater say in policy development. As you know - I am probably preaching to the converted - ensuring the views of all of the population, including women, are reflected in policy and program development is vital to a government which is responsive to the needs of the community. At the Office for Women's Policy, ensuring women's voices are heard in policy development is part of our core business. Although the office targets all women, we have a particular emphasis on ensuring those women without power and women who are more marginalised and have a lack of access towards decision making are involved in consultative strategies. We have a particular focus on women on low incomes; women with disabilities; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; women from new and emerging migrant communities, such as particularly African and Muslim women; women living in regional, rural and remote areas; young women; and also lesbian women. In targeting any sector of the population, a one size fits all approach just does not work. Just as there is diversity among women, so is there diversity among community engagement initiatives or strategies. I would like to add at this point that there is also no best practice model for community engagement. The best model is one which is going to suit the goals of the organisation or the goals of the engagement, the complexities of the issues, the requirements of the projects and the stakeholders involved. Of course it has to meet the access requirements of the target group for consultation.

Before I describe to you in detail some of OWP's community engagement strategies, I thought we could spend a few minutes looking at some different models for community engagement. There are many models of community engagement, but this morning I will highlight three different approaches. A citizens jury, which is a community engagement approach, is made up of 12 to 16 lay people chosen through random sampling and representing as much as possible of the diversity within the community in relation to age, gender, cultural background, Aboriginality and religious beliefs. At this point I stress that diversity and the inclusive nature of engagement are really important in terms of getting that broad viewpoint of all parts of the community. Citizens juries are suitable for single issues only. Background information is provided on the subject at hand, but it needs to be objective and neutral. Citizens juries can last between two and five days and they listen to a series of expert witnesses who provide evidence covering new facts and new perspectives. The style of our citizens jury could be seen a couple of years ago when the Drug Summit was held at

Parliament House. Consensus is sought and jurors then provide their findings to the organising authority. The organising authority needs to have the power to act on the decisions arising from a citizens jury. This is a particularly useful model when the issue is contentious or has public significance.

[12.20 pm]

The next model I would like to highlight with you is the deliberative survey. This engagement strategy is used when you try to identify people's attitudes and preferred options. You need a statistically significant sample of the population, and you ask them to participate. Unlike a standard survey, a deliberative survey assesses public opinion first, then provides written information about the topic and issue. The deliberative survey then brings together the participants with facilitators to deliberate over the issue, both in small and large groups. There is no attempt to reach a consensus, but participants are then asked to fill in the survey again. The aim is to gather informed qualitative input and consider choices. The deliberative survey also enables decision makers to understand in what ways information influences choices and opinions.

The third one I would like to present - as you can see, these are all very different - is the people's panel. This is usually a large group of people of between 600 and 2 500 for a state initiative. If it was a national consultation engagement approach, you would be looking at more like 5 000 people to be involved to make it representative and valid. These people are recruited to act as a research sample and need - I mentioned this before - to be representative of the population in terms of age, gender, culture, region, location etc. People's panels are used as sounding boards to test specific opinion. They assess services and develop views about future needs and goals. It is a way to track attitudes among people over a period of time. Its members are asked to participate for five years with a sample topped up when members leave. These members can then participate in telephone surveys, one-to-one interviews, search conferences and focus groups on a range of topics or interest areas. The people's panel is useful for a number of reasons. It provides regular access to a representative group, it has the ability to monitor change over time, it has a fast turnaround, and usually it has a higher response rate than is the case with other survey tools.

Although there is no perfect or best practice example for community engagement, there are some useful components of good community engagement. A good community engagement strategy will involve the community and stakeholders at the very beginning of the consultation, is inclusive of diversity, is authentic and not agenda driven, works at ensuring that all voices are heard - particularly those people who have less power within the community - the outcomes are acted upon, and consultation is transparent and accountable; for example, reports are published, distributed to participants and made available to the public.

For community engagement to be authentic and effective, it needs to focus on areas in which organisers have the decision making power or the capacity to respond to the particular issue at hand. Before I talk about specific details, I wish to contradict my esteemed colleague, Christina Gillgren, on the whole notion of organisers having the power to make decisions and to act on issues raised by those people in a community setting: in my experience of engagement, there is such a thing as consultation fatigue, particularly evident amongst indigenous communities, which represent one of the most over-researched groups in our society. Indigenous women have on many occasions expressed great cynicism referring to the government as seagulls flying in, asking the same questions, hearing the same answers and then flying out again. Portions of our community are over-consulted, and we, as a government, need to be a bit more effective in using the outcomes of this consultation - we need to share it more.

Moving on to the work of the Office of Women's Policy, we are going to look at four strategies that are all different in terms of influencing the policy development process. I will start with the Women's Convention 2002, and then I want to talk about the Indigenous Women's Congress of Western Australia, which is a ministerial advisory group. We will look at the media workshop,

which was a proactive policy initiative of ours, and then the housing strategy, which was the response by the Office of Women's Policy to the review of the five-year housing strategy.

Unlike other government agencies, the Office of Women's Policy uses community engagement as a way of also building on strengths and building capacity within communities; for example, we involve non-government organisations as key stakeholders in planning an initial strategy in the same way that we will involve other stakeholders, such as industry or business groups or various other policy makers from other government agencies, to ensure that in the first instance you have people who will be impacted by the outcomes of the engagement strategy involved in the planning of it. Therefore, the outcomes can be useful for all concerned.

As part of our process, we have also trained and employed women from the community to act as facilitators. One of the benefits of this approach is that it allows women from less represented groups to be profiled in the public arena. For example, indigenous women feel very comfortable in expressing and discussing their issues and concerns with another indigenous woman. When you have indigenous facilitators or facilitators from culturally diverse communities, it enables a far greater deal of interaction from those types of groups. Importantly, it allows women to develop their skills to use back in their communities.

The Office of Women's Policy also profiles the work of women's groups in community organisations. When we are doing community engagement strategies, we tend to identify possible best practice examples of community work or the work women's groups or NGOs are doing to build their awareness and the public awareness of the excellent work taking place in the community. We also have provided financial support to enable communities to run their own community engagement strategies. When we do that, we ensure that one of the engagement forums is done in collaboration with either the government or the non-government sector. Of course, engaging with women provides a qualitative understanding of issues and experiences of women in the community. This needs to be combined with statistical analysis to ensure outcomes of community engagement are also grounded in statistical evidence.

[12.30 pm]

The Women's Convention focused on seven priority areas for women; namely, opportunities, workplace, law, family care, safety, seniors and health. It was an opportunity for women to come together and, as I mentioned before, it heralded the new way the government is doing business. It also empowered women to create a vision for a new Western Australia. They identified high-level goals and priorities in those seven key areas. Community engagement forums followed the Women's Convention 2002, which set a more detailed strategy. I am tabling the "Women's Convention 2002 Report Your Future - Your Say", which details high-level goals and priorities set by the women who attended the convention.

In organising the convention, the Office of Women's Policy consulted key stakeholders very early on. We ran a focus group with government policymakers to ensure that some of their priorities would be reflected in some of the content and direction of the Women's Convention. We ran focus groups with key women's groups and community leaders, which was essential. As we progress you will see that a really large proportion of women attended from the more minority groups, which we usually do not see at a mainstream convention. Almost 20 per cent were indigenous women and a large proportion were from the CALD sector. The attendance of the women who are usually not seen in the community arena or community engagement or consultation events was because we engaged with their leaders or community organisations very early on. We created an event that was accessible and met their access requirements. I emphasise some of these access requirements, because that makes the difference when trying to create an engagement strategy that is inclusive. We need to understand diversity issues and address them in the organisation of an event such as a women's convention or a community engagement forum. I understand Hon Louise Pratt was one of the facilitators of the Women's Convention.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: Yes.

Ms Unwin: We made sure that all convention material was available in braille, large type and audio disc. We ensured that we conducted an access audit of the Perth Concert Hall to ensure it was accessible to people with a range of mobility and sensory disabilities. We not only made sure that the usual ACROD parking bays were identified, but also we identified and created additional ACROD bays for people using wheelchairs. We also identified and printed an “accessible” map of the venue. One of the major issues for people with mobility disabilities - people with wheelchairs and those with cerebral palsy - is that the most accessible path of travel assists them in accessing buildings and participating in meetings. Child care was made available and we provided a range of options to meet the needs of mothers who were attending. We ensured that the main business of the Women’s Convention 2002 occurred during school hours so that women who had to leave to pick up their children could do so. As I said, we made a range of childcare options available to them. We also had a sign language interpreter during the official part of the proceedings. An audio loop was installed so that people who use hearing aids could hear the speeches. Staff were also designated as access support crew for women with disabilities so that specialised people were available for them, and the staff had their eyes open for people with disabilities to make sure they were looked after.

It was encouraging that the Equal Opportunity Commission contacted the Office of Women’s Policy to acknowledge the level of inclusivity in organising the Women’s Convention. Statements were made about our setting best practice examples for access inclusion. I failed to mention earlier that with the catering we ensured that halal and vegetarian food was available. We created a prayer room for Muslim women given that it was a two-day convention and they are required to pray at certain times of the day. We ensured that the prayer room was also rid of symbols of animals and sculptures so that it reflected their own culture and religious beliefs. We provided basins and jugs in the bathrooms to enable Muslim women to wash their hands and feet prior to prayer. Although one might wonder what was the point of that, the provision of that level of facility enabled the women to feel respected, valued and empowered and to participate far better in discussions at the convention. Part of the success of the convention was the engagement of those key women’s groups and NGOs very early on.

We introduced a community-based marketing strategy whereby, rather than use mainstream type promotions through newspapers etc, we distributed posters to a bunch of community organisations, women’s centres and childcare centres. We also distributed registration brochures that included all the access requirements. The brochures had a very non-government appearance. I do not know whether you remember, Louise, that the images on the front of the 2002 report depict cultural diversity. It was an innovative approach and questions were asked about the woman with the pierced tongue. I convinced the more conservative members of my office that that photo was a good thing and that the idea was to reflect a fresh and dynamic approach in trying to make a government initiative more accessible to people in the community. The community-based marketing strategy, in line with the advice provided by the women’s groups and the community leaders, worked.

The Women’s Convention “Your future - Your Say” attracted 400 women to the Perth Concert Hall. Close to 400 women participated in our virtual convention; that is, women from regional rural and remote areas. Were you part of that discussion, Louise? Some of our keynote speakers made themselves available to take part in a room that was set up as a chat room and where we placed bulletin boards. That enabled women living in regional, rural and remote areas to contribute. We circulated booklets that provided background and statistical information - I did not bring one with me - on the seven key priority areas that women could read, think about and discuss with their friends before attending the convention. It also helped women living in regional, rural and remote areas to participate. They had work books and background on various issues so that they could stimulate dialogue.

At the live convention - I have the figures around the wrong way - 18 per cent of participants came from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island backgrounds; 11 per cent from CALD, 18 per cent were senior women, 13 per cent were young women, six per cent were from RRR areas and four per cent were women with disabilities.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: What is CALD?

Ms Unwin: It means culturally and linguistically diverse communities. They reflect a lot of the new and emerging groups that we are working with, such as Muslim and African women. I have worked in the engagement process for a long time and it was unusual to see the proportion of Aboriginal women who attended. That does not usually happen at mainstream conventions. They go to Aboriginal-specific events, but they do not necessarily feel comfortable at mainstream events. They came in such big numbers because of the way we engaged early on and because of the office's ongoing relationships with the indigenous community.

I refer to monitoring of the outcomes of the convention. As you will read in the Women's Convention booklet, a range of high-level goals and key priorities have been identified. We produced the "Women's Report Card: Measuring Women's Progress". We took the main goals from the convention that women had identified and established some key performance indicators to provide some baseline data to measure women's progress so that over time the Office of Women's Policy can measure whether women's lives have improved. I am referring to the women's report card update 2006, which Mike might like to distribute. This is the first report we have released since producing that base-line data. This identifies the position of women compared with 2003 to 2005 or 2006, depending on when the statistics are available.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I need to structure what time remains to us. The committee must wrap up just before 1.00 pm.

Ms Unwin: I can finish by then.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We want to ask you some questions.

Ms Unwin: I will power on and I will not expand too much on my points.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you leave us a good 10 minutes for questions?

Ms Unwin: Absolutely. The other engagement strategy I would like to highlight for the committee is the Indigenous Women's Congress of WA. The congress came out of the Women's Convention. Indigenous women who were there made a very strong recommendation to the Minister for Women's Interests to establish a direct line of reporting to her. The congress is the only ministerial advisory body on indigenous women's issues in Western Australia. There is only one other in Australia - an advisory body that reports to the Premier of Victoria.

There are representatives from seven regions in Western Australia - the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Murchison, the wheatbelt, goldfields, south west and great southern. I have listed some of the areas for which the IWC has provided policy advice, such as input on customary law to the Law Reform Commission; the community development employment program, which will have a profound impact on the economy of many small and isolated indigenous communities; the review of the Department of Indigenous Affairs; the Western Australian state housing strategy - I will go into more detail about this later; the family reunification policy; and amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act. The congress is also very closely involved in identifying the key areas for the "Indigenous Women's Report Card". That is similar to the "Women's Report Card" in that it identifies a range of key indicators to measure indigenous women's wellbeing in the community. It is the first one of its kind in Australia. Unfortunately, it paints a pretty damning and sad picture of the position of indigenous women in Western Australian society. The IWC also provides policy advice into the commonwealth inquiry into stolen wages and the implementation of the recommendations of the Gordon Inquiry. It also informs regional cabinet briefs. Depending on where regional cabinet is meeting, the Indigenous Women's Congress identifies a range of issues or

concerns about government services within the region and provides the information to the minister. When the issues are of significance, cabinet briefs are provided to all ministers, not just the Minister for Women's Interests. The Office of Women's Policy often aids the IWC in participating in policy development by developing an issues paper to aid discussion and debate. This may require some degree of research, but we find that we obtain far better quality advice from the congress if it has a background paper to comment on. It gives us the opportunity to consolidate some fairly diverse information. The IWC has two face-to-face meetings per year and three videoconferences. We have contact with the IWC by e-mail and telephone when we are undertaking consultations on policy advice within the office.

The media workshop was an initiative of the Office of Women's Policy. It was part of Women on Wellness Week. We provided some financial resources that enabled a lot of community organisations and non-government organisations to focus on that. An emphasis of the Office of Women's Policy, based on the outcomes of the convention, is to focus on women's wellness rather than a medical model. We collaborated with the Department of Health in the delivery of the workshop. We undertook a fairly comprehensive approach to identifying existing research on women's portrayal in the media. We looked at television advertising, billboard advertising and magazine and newspaper advertising. Again, we drafted and distributed an issues paper and held a workshop. Fifty people attended the workshop and there was huge diversity, reflecting the make-up of the women's conventions. There were some fantastic comments made and issues raised. The report has been to the minister and it is now back with us. It is soon to be released publicly to participants and other people. We will also distribute it to industry associations, magazines and *The West Australian*. *The West Australian* is particularly biased in its reporting of women's issues.

I should have pre-empted the discussion of the media workshop by describing different approaches to proactive and reactive policy. The media workshop was an initiative of the Office of Women's Policy after we saw that there was a cyclic relationship between marketing and advertising, in which women's bodies are being used in a sexually objectifying way to sell products and services. I am sure the committee remembers the billboard advertisement for men's shoes in which a naked woman was lying on the ground while a man had his boot on her back. Sexualisation in advertising is increasing. It seems to have gone in a complete circle from the late 1970s and early 1980s, so we thought it was important to initiate the media workshop.

The housing strategy - a new engagement that the Office of Women's Policy will examine - was in response to an existing policy review within government. I am trying to highlight the fact that we can be both reactive to something that is already going on within government, and proactive. OWP policy advisors identified women who were most vulnerable with respect to housing needs. These include women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women on low incomes and women from new and emerging migrant groups. I am sure the committee is aware that many new and emerging migrant groups, particularly many African communities, do not necessarily operate as a family unit with two parents and three kids - they often have very large families or extended families. We are keen for the Department of Housing and Works to look at more creative ways to house specific groups of people in our society. As I mentioned, we undertook a comprehensive search for existing research into housing needs for these groups. An issues paper was developed and survey questions were created. We interviewed key women's groups and non-government organisations from particular target groups. For instance, for women with disabilities, we interviewed ACROD. We also interviewed various other key special interest groups that related to the target for our consultation. The survey was circulated on OWP e-mail networks, including the indigenous women's e-mail network and the WINFO alert e-mail network. Each network has 400 women, and it is a fantastic opportunity to get a very quick response to a policy development initiative or an issue emerging in the community. We also sent the survey to our Indigenous Women's Congress members. The results were collated and we then applied a gender-based analysis, which is a model we have been promoting in government that enables the

application of a lens when examining outcomes for both men and women in policies or programs. It enables us to have a more gendered approach to the impact on one particular group. We used these findings and developed a response, which was sent to the Minister for Women's Interests, who approved the policy advice and forwarded it to the Minister for Housing and Works.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Excellent.

Ms Unwin: In conclusion, I reiterate the comment that there is no best practice model for community engagement; it is too variable. However, there are some standards of excellence, some of which I think I have listed. It is necessary to be clear about the purpose of community engagement and to identify the stakeholders - the people who are going to have an impact on that particular policy or program development. Stakeholders and target groups need to be involved early on, and we need to make sure that the participants are actually informed so that they can participate properly. The committee has heard about some of our efforts in structuring community engagements to maximise participation from marginalised groups. Finally, as a government body, we need to be transparent and accountable. That concludes my presentation.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you very much. It was a sterling effort to get through it in that short amount of time. It might be useful for committee members - particularly as our chair had to leave - to have a copy of the presentation.

Ms Unwin: You have one.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We will have it circulated then. Before I ask for other questions from members of the committee, are you familiar with the specific inquiry we are undertaking?

Ms Unwin: I am aware of the specific inquiry, yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you have any comments to make about that? I will have to ask you to be brief, because I know other people have questions.

Ms Unwin: Health is not a priority for the Office of Women's Policy at the moment. We have had a strategic plan endorsed by the minister and we are focusing on four other key policy priority areas, so we have not examined the review, nor provided any policy advice on it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: You have already answered this question in part. With respect to health, the findings of the Women's Convention highlighted issues that intersect with health reform. How have issues raised by the convention been picked up? The Health Department is engaging in a process of reform in the area of women's and children's health. How should the department be engaging with women on these issues?

Ms Unwin: The Office of Women's Policy has not been involved, and nor should it be, in monitoring the performance of other government agencies. We use the statistical key indicators to measure how well the priorities identified through the Women's Convention are being addressed. I am sorry, Louise, I do not know anything about their communication strategies and what they have done, so I am not at liberty to provide any comment on that.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: How would you put a gender analysis approach into health reform?

Ms Unwin: We would like Parliament to adopt gender analysis for every piece of legislation that goes through, but I think that might be a long way off.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: Obstetric services are not to do with legislation; they are to do with obstetricians, midwives and doctors, who all have a ferocious debate about these issues, and women who might give birth once, twice or three times find it very difficult to have a voice in that process. How would you put women's experience at the heart of decision making within the Department of Health on an issue like that?

Ms Unwin: I would say the best port of call would be the Department of Health. Lynnley McGrath would be able to answer that question a lot better than I could in relation to community engagement with women's health. Lynnley has been involved in a trial gender analysis project with the Office of Women's Policy and her unit is aware of, and was trialling, gender analysis within the agency. We have a gender analysis kit - I do not have it here - that provides a very clear process, and one that is not complicated, it is not rocket science, for analysing the impact of the policy or program on groups of people in our community. We encourage intersectionality, Louise, as you heard from my presentation, not just about gender between males and females, but the intersectionality between race and gender, ability and gender and geographical location and gender. I refer to the impact on women living in rural, regional and remote areas. Their experience will be different from that of men living in those areas. We try always to provide that more complex approach.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: You mentioned *The West Australian* was biased in its presentation of women's issues. I want to find out what you meant by that. I guess you would say that if you believe they are reporting badly. Can you explain what you meant by that?

Ms Unwin: Certainly. Just to recount what Helen said earlier, this hearing is private, is it not? I am not going to be done for libel, am I?

Hon ANTHONY FELS: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Should we move into private session?

Hon LOUISE PRATT: Yes. We could resolve to do that. I suppose we need to see whether the question is relevant to our inquiry.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: I was interested as a man. I do not pick up these things when I read the paper. I wanted to know what you meant by the reporting being biased one way or the other. I take your meaning to be that it is biased against women's interests.

Ms Unwin: Yes, it is sensationalised. If one looks at the press through a gender lens, one can start seeing the ways it presents information. For example, on International Women's Day, we had an international expert here and she was presented really negatively. She was photographed in front of a road sign which said "no entry", and on the other side of the page was a story that said "Commonwealth government releases report which says women are getting fatter, less interested in sex" and something else, which is really diabolical. It very much showed a bias. *The West* has adopted almost a tabloid approach to journalism. If one flicks through the paper - it is not on page 3, but one sees at about pages 7 to 11 - it focuses on beauty contests. That section of the paper will objectify women and things like that - things that women are saying to us they find offensive. Once the report from the media workshop comes out, it will be an opportunity to encourage public debate on some of these things that are having an impact on women's self-esteem and their sense of value in the community.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: Getting back to the issue before the committee, the provision of obstetric services, do you view obstetrics primarily as a women's issue?

Ms Unwin: No, I do not think so. It is an issue for the whole community.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: Was the Office of Women's Policy consulted or involved in the consultation process in the decision making on the provision of obstetric services?

Ms Unwin: No, as I mentioned before, health is not one of our priorities at the moment.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: Yes, but were you consulted? Were you asked to provide any information or feedback?

Ms Unwin: Not that I am aware.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: Do you believe you should have been?

Ms Unwin: We are a tiny office. We have 12 staff and we struggle to deal with our own strategic priorities let alone being consulted on a whole range of others. We have tried to be part of every possible review or inquiry across government, but we have found that impossible and untenable with the amount of resources we have.

Hon ANTHONY FELS: The provision of services to women located in rural and regional areas is obviously an issue. What are the office's concerns as far as women's health issues are concerned in rural and regional areas?

Ms Unwin: We have run regional community engagement forums in about four different areas of Western Australia. It is not new information; it is the same information. It is the lack of access to special services, the disadvantage of having to travel to a centre to get health services, the separation from family, and the impact on a farming community when a wife has to move out of the local area to access health services. The major issue in rural and remote areas is access, and trying to attract quality medical services to regional areas.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I hear what you say about health not being a priority and about your comparative lack of resources, but is there a possibility of using some of the mechanisms that you have already established to put in place some kind of community consultation on particular issues? I am thinking particularly of the Indigenous Women's Congress.

Ms Unwin: I cannot answer that. Helen Creed would be a better person to answer that because it is about a resource issue and for us to provide any access or level of support, it would need to come from her as it is about the priorities of the office. We are focusing on women and economic independence, leadership and governance, gender equality, and safety. They are the four priorities. I am sorry, but I cannot commit the office to something for which I do not have the authority.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You have answered my question by going through those four priorities. As there are no further questions, I thank you very much for coming in.

Ms Unwin: It is my pleasure.

Hearing concluded at 12.58 pm
