



**Australian Government**  

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**Chief Scientist**

**DR ALAN FINKEL AO**

**Male Champions of Change for STEM: Inaugural Event**

**Closing remarks: *Equity – a business imperative***

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

**National Press Club  
CANBERRA**

It's a great pleasure to give the final wrap after an extraordinarily informative summit.

I don't know whether it's coincidental – but today is the United Nation's International Day of the Girl. Pretty auspicious.

Before I respond to some of the things presented today, let me start with a pop quiz.

Have you heard of the Finkel Review? Good – but that's not the quiz.

Of the panel I chaired, experts in science, economics and electricity, what percentage was female?

Sixty percent – three out of five.

One of the recommendations now accepted by the Government was to establish the Energy Security Board for stronger governance in the sector.

It's also got five people on it: managing energy security, overseeing regulation, keeping the lights on.

Question: how many are female?

*Eighty* percent – four out of five – including the person once referred to on talkback radio as That Woman, Audrey Zibelman. Audrey, the superstar Chief Executive of the Australian Energy Market Operator.

But I know I'm unusually lucky to find myself working with panels and organisations that value women, that value them particularly in leadership positions, and respect their talents at every level.

I'm reminded today of the many, many women I know who perform their roles exceptionally well.

The Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, Margaret Gardner.

The Secretary of the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, Heather Smith.

The head of the Australian Research Council, Sue Thomas.

The head of the National Health and Medical Research Council, Anne Kelso.

The CEO of the Academy of Technology and Engineering, Margaret Hartley.

The Chief Executive of the Academy of Science, Anna-Maria Arabia.

The CEO of Science and Technology Australia: Kylie Walker.

And of course, the editor in chief of Cosmos magazine, Elizabeth Finkel.

On the other hand, I've seen some terrible counter-examples.

About three months ago, I was invited to a large corporate dinner for an international engineering company. Cocktails in a beautiful restaurant, one of those long King Arthur tables, 20 places, I sat down... and there were 20 males, myself included. One hundred percent male.

Last week, I went to a function at another engineering company, and I happened to arrive at the national meeting of their middle management.

Same thing: 15 people in the room, 100 percent male.

This week, I was at the Australian Financial Review Energy Summit, where I was the meat in the sandwich between Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten.

Afterwards, there was a panel of thought-leaders in the industry. One hundred percent male, including the moderator.

One of the panel, Andy Vesey from AGL, broke into the discussion and said words to the effect of:

“This is an all-male panel, and I am a Male Champion of Change, and it is fundamentally unacceptable for me to be in this position. I do it only because of circumstance and the importance of this occasion. Please, never make me do it again.”

And the audience cheered.

What we are aspiring to is 100 percent good news stories, no counter-examples, no need for call-outs.

We have made progress.

Consider the fact that if you were a female scientist in the 1960s, working for the CSIRO, and you got married, you had to quit.

The improvements have been massive but, without doubt, there is a long way to go. The discussion today makes it clear that there are no quick fixes.

We heard from our first speaker today, Francesca Maclean, the determination it takes not just to break out of a system, but to change the system for the benefit of others who follow.

The walls that exist might not be physical or legislative, but they are barriers nonetheless. It is those invisible barriers, it is those subtle barriers we have to deal with.

And from our panel speakers, we heard it loud and clear: this is not just for the benefit of individuals, it is a business imperative.

We *all* benefit if we encourage and support women in science. And if you want to lead the charge, you ought to be a good rider.

It is my personal pleasure to be on the Male Champions of Change for STEM, and in particular to see the deep commitment of my colleagues.

This group is outcome orientated. It is looking to the future. And for that, I am very proud.

My congratulations to all who ran the show today and thanks to all for your shared commitment.

**THANK YOU**