

Hon Julie Bishop MP, Federal Member for Curtin

Closing speech of the 12th APEC WLN meeting

I feel energised and rewarded after the last two days.

On behalf of the Australian Government I thank all of you for your invaluable input to the outcomes of this, the 12th APEC Women Leaders' Network meeting.

We're pleased to have hosted such an important event.

In an earlier speech I said that as a group of women leaders from around the world we form a powerhouse—a group with great energy, strength, talent, and influence.

Over the last two days—and also at the Women in Export trade event held on the 24th—we proved this to be true.

As I moved from session to session and spoke with many of you I was inspired by those I met and am proud of the practical and real outcomes we've generated during our time together.

When the first meeting of the Women Leaders' Network was held in Manila in 1996 it must have been a very special experience and I want to applaud those who have been involved since the beginning.

The first meeting was attended by women leaders from 14 APEC economies. It was recognised then that gender issues had to be taken into account in the trade liberalisation and facilitation process promoted by APEC.

With support from the then President Ramos of the Philippines, the APEC leaders acknowledged the role of the Women Leaders' Network and agreed to include a paragraph recognising their needs—and the needs of youth—in their Leaders' Statement.

That was a strong beginning for the Women Leaders' Network.

The second meeting, held in Canada, focused on developing a consultative process that would allow participants to feed into draft recommendations to be presented to APEC Ministerial fora.

This was another great achievement for women leaders in the Asia Pacific Region.

Since the first two meetings the Women Leaders' Network has met another 10 times and each time the Network has worked hard to make a positive contribution to the APEC agenda.

Today we can once more be proud of our achievements.

We have worked hard to move ahead with confidence and use our collective thinking to formulate ways APEC Ministers and leaders, policy and decision makers, and business influencers can initiate change.

At the beginning of this 12th APEC Women Leaders' Network meeting we committed to developing substantial recommendations. We've fulfilled our commitment.

This reflects the tenacity, commitment and strength of every woman in this room.

We are, as I said at the beginning of our time together, a powerhouse—a group with great energy, strength, talent, and influence.

We began by asking how we should move forward to make full use of our potential and reinforce the critical role women play in the economic realities of our region, today and tomorrow.

Throughout the past two days we've looked at some current, authoritative, indisputable research and data. The need to include women and close the gender gap is an economic reality, not a 'nice-to-have'.

The need to fully capitalise on both sexes is the only way the competitive potential of our individual economies and the region as a whole will strengthen.

The recommendations we will put forward begin with the need to organise more valuable and successful events such as the Women in Export Day which was the lead-up to formal proceedings.

It was the first time the Women Leaders' Network has held such an event and I'm glad we did.

The Women in Export Day was educational and practical and those who attended now have more information and tools to work with as they negotiate their way through the exciting and often lucrative world of exporting.

The day was:

- about the steps to take when exporting
- about how to use e-business and online technologies to enhance export success
- about how to develop a business model to exporting services, and
- about mastering cross cultural communications and negotiation.

We want to hold more meaningful events like this in years to come and will recommend this to APEC ministers and leaders.

We will also recommend how critical it is to continue to conduct sound research so our future decisions are based on data not on emotion and conjecture.

This is why we will work with the Gender Focal Point Network to conduct more research.

And it's why we should each talk openly when we go back to our respective economies about the value and importance of the authoritative literature we've learned about here in Port Douglas.

We're thirsty for information which is why the recommendation to establish a web portal is paramount.

The portal will be a fountain of information and a source of practical training resources and tools. It's part of our process of strengthening the capacity of each of us as women and also our leaders' network.

We also need to spread our wings and break into new sectors. While we're strongly represented in some areas we know we're weak in others. Let's change that.

And as I also mentioned in an earlier speech, let's not, as seasoned leaders who are accustomed to thinking about the future, forget to inspire those younger than us to close the gender gap.

Although young, they need to understand our strategy to focus on the business case of women and economics and how to balance the gender imbalance.

Let's teach them about 'womenomics' and the importance of women in the global marketplace as workers, but also as consumers, entrepreneurs, managers, and investors.

Without the commitment and participation of up-and-coming young leaders our work will slowly fade away.

Without their commitment it may well take 150 years to close the gender gap and we don't want that.

The themes for the 2007 APEC Women Leaders' Network meeting were deliberately chosen to complement APEC Australia 2007 and its theme: '*Strengthening our community, building a sustainable future.*'

As a Minister for Women and also a Minister for Education I believe we've travelled a long way in fleshing out this theme. And I congratulate everyone in their room for their strong and considered intellectual input.

In closing I want to once again thank the Women Leaders' Network Reference Group for making this a fantastic meeting. I also want to thank our inspiring speakers who have covered such a broad range of topics so thoughtfully.

But most importantly I want to thank you, and your commitment and willingness in many cases to travel great distances to share your views and make a contribution.

I know many of you will visit Peru in 2008 to carry on your work.

On behalf of the Australian Government I wish Peru, as 2008 host, all the best.

Thank you.