



International Day of Women and Girls in Science

Message from AFPPD Vice-Chairperson • February 11, 2017

“As we celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we must also focus on enabling access to basic education as a resource for all girls – so they can become educated women and advance their nations in the long term.”

In celebration of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) is pleased to share a message from AFPPD Vice-Chairperson, Hon. Ms. Ann Sudmalis (Member of Parliament, Australia), on promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and careers to girls and women in Australia. Recently, Hon. Ms. Sudmalis has participated in AFPPD’s 11th Women Ministers and Parliamentarians Conference in November 2016 where she chaired the session on Women’s Economic Participation. The conference concluded with the adoption of the [Statement of Commitment](#) by 54 Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians and Ministers, advocating for STEM education for girls and women among other commitments.

BACKGROUND



Hon. Ms. Ann Sudmalis

MP, Australia and Vice-Chairperson, AFPPD

Hon. Ms. Ann Sudmalis serves as Member of Parliament, representing the Division of Gilmore in New South Wales. She is the Chair for the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development and a member of AFPPD Standing Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. Hon. Ms. Sudmalis has been a member of the Liberal Party since 2006 and is currently a member of the Coalition Policy Committees for Education, Defence and Veterans

Affairs, Infrastructure and Regional Development. Prior to her political career, Hon. Ms. Sudmalis has taught science for ten years. Apart from being an advocate to improve local projects, she has the parliamentary responsibilities of Committee Member of the Parliamentary Education Office Advisory Committee, Joint Standing Committees of Education and Employment, and Standing Health Committee.

MESSAGE

“I spent ten years as a science teacher, developing programs to promote science literacy.

While there was not a noticeable gender imbalance in the science classroom – there has been a steady decline in overall numbers and the engagement of women in STEM careers.

Originally Science and Maths were compulsory subjects. The Federal Government has developed a number of initiatives to help increase the

participation of all students in STEM subjects, particularly programs targeted for girls. One of these is the **Curious Minds Summer School** hosted by University of New South Wales, where more than 50 girls from across the country share their passion for STEM. Throughout the six month course, the girls have an opportunity to explore all aspects of the STEM subjects in a fun and supportive environment, boosting their confidence and skills as well as helping them make like-minded friends and connections to set them up for a life filled with science and engineering.



The President of IPWEA NSW, Warren Sharpe, Hon. Ann Sudmalis and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Julie Bishop, with cardboard cut-outs of Pocket Sally, happy to support IPWEA NSW's strategy to encourage women in STEM.

In addition, many of national employer professional groups are establishing mentoring and marketing strategies to encourage women to join their ranks. **Pocket Sally** is one example who visits engineering projects all over New South Wales (NSW) to show that women can do anything and go anywhere. Developed by the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) NSW, the strategy involved the Young IPWEA NSW team, and is being well received.

I personally want to encourage our young women not to limit their thinking when it comes to future career options, and Pocket Sally is one highly visual way of doing that.

Recently, I was asked to launch **DigIT**, a summer school initiative developed by Australian Mathematics Trust, funded through the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA). The program includes mentoring students from ICT professionals to encourage discussions about study options and career pathways. Programs like DigIT are critical for this and future generations of students. Employment trends show 75% of Australia's fastest growing careers demand skills in digital literacy, science and technology, engineering or mathematics. The students come from regional and rural backgrounds. There were fewer girls than boys participating, which we will try to improve next year.

We still need to develop processes where girls are given equal opportunities overall.

In countries where educational opportunities are yet to be advanced, we must collectively work on inexpensive strategies that can advantage young women and girls to participate more readily. One example of such a program is the **Western Pacific Sanitation Marketing and Innovation Project**, more simply known as the Water for Women project, coordinated by the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) reference group. It aims to improve access to sanitation for people of all ages, genders and special needs through local enterprise groups. By providing greater access to clean and affordable toilets, it can help improve women's safety, sense of self-worth and health. It enables girls to attend schools safely and is a catalyst for social growth. In this case, there are four organisations combining their efforts: Australian Aid, Live and Learn International, International Water Centre, and the International Women's Development Agency.

Amazing changes for girls' education and their participation in STEM can be gained through these projects. As we celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we must also focus on enabling access to basic education as a resource for all girls – so they can become educated women and advance their nations in the long term.”