



## **Speech on the occasion of EMILY's List's 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday;**

**11 December 2014**

**Tanja Kovac, National Co-Convenor, EMILY's List Australia**

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Tonight we celebrate EMILY's List Australia as she comes of age.

Eighteen is one of those monumental birthdays in life. It's when you get the car keys and the P's; long awaited access to pubs, clubs and bars. And you get to vote. Yes, eighteen is suffrage; a political rite of passage that today's young woman takes for granted but was built on the dedication and sacrifice of feminist women before us.

The journey of influence for an organisation like EMILY's List Australia, parallels the cycle of life. I spend most of my time explaining to the press that, EMILY is not a girl, it's an acronym, but tonight I want you to imagine EMILY without the capital letters.

And think of her as Emily; the lass.

Born from the fumbling, furious passion of start-up, her birth was much anticipated as long overdue. Some say she is the love-child of Keating & Kirner's loss in the early 1990's; others say she is a miracle; a kind of feminist immaculate conception. Emily's infancy was surrounded by a dozen mothers, maiden aunts and wet nurses. On a toddler's shaky foundations of very little funding and no staff, she made landmark firsts. These were cherished, photographed and even made the front page.

But by school age, while there were more milestones and new mentors, the heady days of media excitement about Emily's achievements were no more. Gender equity was no longer the cause celeb of progressive activism. There were other issues, pushing in like irritating siblings, into public debate. Then, on the cusp of being a teenager, the unthinkable happened – a victory so enormous for the labour movement and so significant for Emily; for women. The highest number of women cabinet members in history. A deputy PM.

It is no mistake – entirely predictable in fact – that Julia Gillard’s complex rise to power as Prime Minister should take place during Emily’s teen angst years.

And now Emily is eighteen; with a whole lot of learning under her belt, but so much more to do. And because a woman has to believe that life begins at forty, celebrating this birthday tells us that our best years as an organisation are yet to come. If we’re this good now at 18, where will we be at 50; at 80?

Last night I attended an historic gathering at Melbourne University between Labor and Liberal women, hosted by public policy fellows, former Labor staffer Nick Reece and former member for Indi, Sophie Mirabella. One of our own; the freshly minted Minister in the Andrews Government Jane Garrett was joined by Anna Burke, Kelly O’Dwyer and Mary Wooldridge to discuss matters that have been close to this organisation’s heart for two decades – quotas, targets, mentoring & sexism.

Mary Wooldridge, who last night disclosed her view that the Liberal Party would need quotas to address its gender problem, said *“Congratulations on your birthday. You’re eighteen. And now you are hitting your stride.”*

Liberal women know they will need time to make an impact on gender equity in their party.

Martin Luther King Jr said *“a great leader is a moulder of consensus”*. EMILY’s List – ever the quiet achiever – has been moulding consensus on affirmative action and gender equity within the ALP for eighteen years. But it seems it has also been moulding consensus within even our staunchest opponents.

We have achieved so many things – too many to name. But our biggest social impact has been in the very thing we set out to do - to deliver the talent and skill of progressive women to parliament.

In eighteen pioneering years, a remarkable 164 women have been supported into Parliament, most recently at the Victorian State Election. A record 33 women were supported by us in Victoria with 22 elected. Women are now 47% of the Andrews Labor parliamentary caucus; 9 of the 9 cabinet members are women supported through this network. It’s an extraordinary achievement.

We have so many success stories. All but one Labor woman Premier has been either a creator of or nurtured by EMILY's List Australia. The first indigenous woman MP and first indigenous woman senator has come through our network. That Carol Martin handed the baton to her indigenous sister Josie Farrar in the Kimberley shows the value of our mentoring and the depth of our impact.

We deliver talented, skilful women to parliament.

And many of them are here tonight, including Senator Penny Wong.

### **Introduction to Senator Penny Wong**

Senator Wong is fast becoming an Australian icon with one name cultural currency. If you started a hashtag #bestthingabouttheALP the twittersphere would go into meltdown shouting Penny!

Born in Malaysia and moving to Australia when she was eight years old, Penny cut her teeth in student politics at Adelaide University alongside many of her colleagues in federal parliament. She worked at the CFMEU as an industrial organiser and advocate and as a lawyer in the private sector before taking on an advisory role in the Carr Government in New South Wales.

In 2001, she was elected to the Senate, helping to shepherd affirmative action change from the red leather. Rumours abound, Penny, about the intensity of the role you played, taking on AA opponents – some of them fellow Senators - on the 2002 conference floor. (Tell me more later!)

In December 2007 Penny was a member of Federal Cabinet in the Rudd-Gillard Governments. she was Minister for Climate Change, Water, Energy Efficiency and later finance & deregulation. She is now Labor's leader of the Opposition Business in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Trade & Investment.

Penny, like many of our women, is a champion not of just her gender but of other under-represented groups in our parliament. Icon for the Australian Asian community, an LGBTI trailblazer she is also about to be a mum for a second time. Congratulations to you and Sophie & Alexandra.

Please welcome Senator Penny Wong.

## **In Reply to Penny Wong**

Thank you Penny for all that you do for women. Penny has agreed to be our 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday Year ambassador and will be writing to you in the New Year. One of the consequences of our great success is that there is an ever increasing demand on our financial resources. If we are to continue to support women into parliament at the rate that we are, we will need to significantly increase our fundraising base.

Penny has taken a keen interest in this issue for us and we look forward to talking more with her about these activities.

But for remarkably talented woman who makes it to Green & Red Leather and the front bench, there is an equally talented, wonderful woman who does not make it to a seat in parliament.

EMILY's List has also supported a further 300 women leaders with financial support, political skill training, leadership development and mentoring, often in unwinnable or hard to win seats. These women run mighty campaigns but miss out.

Many of those women who have been candidates for EMILY's List Australia are here tonight. And we honour you. You are all winners to us. Always will be.

I had the pleasure of mentoring one of these women in the state election, Pauline Richards. A superb candidate, Pauline ran an extraordinary campaign in Forest Hill working her guts out for Labor. I was incredibly proud of Pauline.

EMILY's List is a success because we are not just a fairweather network. We are there for our women through good times & tough times of political life.

Earlier this year, Senator Nova Peris came under some fierce personal smear in the press which was both racist and sexist. Behind the scenes our network was in action. Personal and political signs of support by formal and informal mentors in our network came in behind Nova.

This kind of pressure on women in our network is nothing new.

If we have learned anything from Julia Gillard's time in power, it is that female Labor leaders need the deep, integrated support of this network. We need to get in behind our women – regardless of faction or fractions – and support our labor feminists. And our labor feminists need to look to this awesome network of leaders for support too.

Good times and bad times.

I'd like to take an opportunity to acknowledge the recent loss of a wonderful woman and former Victorian Labor Minister, Lynne Kosky. Lynne lost her battle to breast cancer last week and for many people in this room her loss at such a young age is very raw. Lynne achieved so much in her personal and professional life we think it fitting to honour her more richly at an appropriate time, when everyone has had a chance to grieve. Tomorrow a state funeral will be given in her honour and we have arranged an EMILY's List condolence book for you to record memories of Lynne and tributes to her tonight. EMILY's List will present the book to her family.

Good times and tough times.

I'd also like to take an opportunity to send a femme prayer to Jaala Pulford, our Victorian co-convenor who can't be with us today.

But this is, after all a birthday party, and it wouldn't be a party if we didn't have a little bit of gift giving to do.

## **Announcement of Awards and Birthday Honours**

### **The Mollie Smith**

The 2014 Mollie Smith Award for volunteer service to EMILY's List Australia goes jointly to Mavis Robertson & Meredith Newman. Meredith Newman is a member of the Queensland EMILY's List Action Group who works tirelessly for EMILY's List Australia giving up weekends and holidays to provide support to EMILY's List's fundraising activities. Our Queensland work would be impossible without Meredith's dedication and we wanted to thank her for her support.

Mavis Robertson's generosity and support of EMILY's List has over the years been incredibly significant to us. For those of you who don't know, Mavis is one of the founders of superannuation in Australia, a founding Chair of Women in Super and the Mother's Day Classic raising millions for breast cancer research, a cause close to our heart given how many of our women have been touched by it. Mavis has also been a fantastic fundraiser for EMILY's List, leveraging her networks to support our work. Thank you Mavis for everything you do for women.

### **The EMILY Award**

The EMILY Award is given annually to a woman who displays dedication and commitment in her work to EMILY's List's values of equity, diversity, equal pay, childcare and choice. In 2014 the EMILY is awarded to Senator Louise Pratt. Louise is a long term member of the EMILY's List National Committee and a tireless champion for gender equity, working through committees in parliament and outside of it to advance the cause of women. But we award her the EMILY to her in recognition of her work advancing the marriage equality debate in Australia. Louise advocated within her party and the parliamentary caucus, building support for change, often against fierce resistance. We have no doubt that it is only a matter of months, maybe a year or so, before marriage equality is passed by federal parliament. We're only sorry that Louise won't be there to shepherd the legislation through the house.

### **The Top Broad Award**

We also announce the creation of a new award for outstanding service to Victorian women by a State Parliamentarian. The inaugural award goes to Candy Broad for her work decriminalising abortion in Victoria. In honour of Candy, this award will be known hence as the Top Broad Award.

Candy is unable to be here this evening for personal reasons, but was able to make it to our AGM this afternoon where we presented her with a special gift.

### **Our Birthday Honours**

EMILY's List Australia is not for the faint hearted. It is damn hard work managing multiple, delicate women's egos, fundraising for feminism – and we all know how hard that is – and meeting the demands of the 24/7 communications cycle. In Victoria, a small group of women play very instrumental roles in making EMILY's List what it is today and we wanted you to know how special they are and how much they gave to us.

**Firstly, Joan Kirner.**

Apart from lending her public standing, name and ambassadorial might to EL, Joan spent eight years as EMILY's List's CEO. She did this entirely pro bono. A woman without a parliamentary pension I might add. She is still passionately committed to EMILY's List, a regular donor & mentor to our candidates and the organisation's source of inspiration.

**To Kay Setches.**

Kay often likes to recount to me the way her blood pressure and general anxiety dissipated after passing the baton onto the next generation of women to look after EMILY's List. Kay took on one of the toughest roles for EMILY's – to find us funds – and she did that with great success. Thank you Kay.

**To Leonie Morgan**

Leonie's interest in EMILY's List USA provided the foundation for the establishment of our organisation and in 18 years her commitment to our EMILY's List has not waned. She continues to be active on our National Committee and is our National Mentoring Coordinator. Thank you Leonie.

**To Hutch Hussein**

As you can appreciate, there were big shoes to fill when taking over the leadership of EMILY's List Australia, but if anyone could do that it would be Hutch Hussein. Hutch devoted eight years as National Co-Convenor of the organisation, sharing that role with Senator Claire Moore.

A talented and strategic thinker and an incredibly ethical leader, she left the organisation in fantastic shape for Anne and I. I am very proud to present this honour to my friend, Hutch Hussein.

## **To Maree Overall**

Maree doesn't seek too many opportunities for the limelight. But the professionalism we have become used to at EMILY's List events is owed to her organising capacity and skill. Maree is our national fundraising coordinator and we

## **To Emily Lee Ack & Viv Waller**

Being staff of a feminist organisation is tough work and we wanted to acknowledge with gratitude the work of Emily Lee Ack and Viv Waller; two staff members who gave their all to EL and who have gone on to make such important contributions to gender equity in Victoria.

Emily – I thought that the organisation belonged to you when I was younger, such was your level of involvement in it. Thank you for the years of service and all that you are now doing as CEO at Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon-SouthWest

Viv, we are so proud of the work you have been doing supporting victims of crime, sexual assault and child abuse. Your work in the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse is incredibly important advocacy. We know that your time at the helm at EMILY's List delivered you lifelong friendships.

We also wanted to acknowledge two institutional friends of EMILY's List who have helped the organisation get to where it is today.

## **ME Bank and Maurice Blackburn Lawyers.**

For a decade, ME Bank provided EMILY's List with the sponsorship and support it needed to undertake gender gap research. This research has deeply enriched our organisation. We thank ME Bank for the support we received in our start up years.

Maurice Blackburn – not a Victorian event has gone by when there isn't a table or two of Mauri B's people celebrating our successes. We know you don't think it's a lot, but it means a great deal to us and we wanted to thank you for the support you showed us in our early days.

These are our Birthday Honour recipients.

And now for dancing.