

Women's Climate Leadership

Panel discussion hosted by the British High Commission, Canberra

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Report by Kirsten Anker

After the Women in Climate and Health breakfast event hosted by the Women's Climate Congress with Dr Sophie Lewis (ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment) and Dr Arnagretta Hunter (ANU Medica School, ANU Climate Institute), Janet Salisbury was invited to an evening panel discussion on Women's Climate Leadership hosted by the British High Commission at the Hyatt Hotel in Canberra. Janet was unable to attend at short notice but Congress founding member, Kirsten Anker, was able to take up the invitation.

The UK is promoting its climate credentials ahead of the Glasgow COP meeting later in 2021, and also is promoting women's empowerment. This meeting addressed both those goals.

The key speakers at the meeting were the High Commissioner, Her Excellency Vicki Treadell; Katie Eberle of International Climate Partnerships at Australian Government Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER); former Chief Scientist Professor Penny Sackett; Dr Virginia Marshall, an indigenous lawyer; and Sophia Hamblin Wang of Mineral Carbonation International, a company manufacturing concretous bricks using captured carbon.

The High Commissioner began by emphasising the essential role of indigenous voices at the table, and acknowledged the UK had a role in the current situation of indigenous Australians. The UK wishes to take a leadership role and to 'walk the talk' in relation to climate action, including supporting offshore wind, replacing coal and aiming for 100% new vehicles EVs by 2030 as well as embedding gender equity in domestic policy. She stressed the importance of targets.

Katie Eberle spoke about the work of DISER, including the importance of 'nature-based solutions'. She stressed the importance of diverse voices at the table - whites aren't the only ones with answers. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has done a good job over the years of integrating gender and environment in their development policies: for example, they are sponsoring pacific islander women to attend the COP. We need to ask ourselves how to hear the voices we don't usually hear?

Penny Sackett became aware of the fundamental importance of climate change to everyone during her term as Chief Scientist. She was complimentary about the progress the ACT is making, including legislating interim targets. She commented that the arts will be important in creating a new narrative. She spoke of the importance of listening, especially to vulnerable people who are disproportionately affected by CC. She mourned after the COP outcome in Copenhagen and then realised it was because she had given her agency to the COP process. She urged us to take back our agency and to figure out ourselves how to use that energy to influence the COP — Nation State perspectives are not the only valid ones! She also made reference to the new economists (all women) and their different ways of looking at growth and valuing things.

Virginia Marshall urged people invited onto panels to walk out unless there is an indigenous person on the panel. We need to consciously make space for indigenous people. The law is a powerful tool but should only be a last resort - better to focus on our humanity. Indigenous voices WITH YOU are very powerful. Remember how indigenous people suffer at the damage to the natural world - the loss of species is the loss of their totems, their family. Remember also that Australian First Nations

people are the oldest continuously surviving civilisation in the world – ‘why are we asking advice from others?’ She spoke about the importance of meeting FNs people on their own terms - their knowledge of the environment, their understanding of indicators, their science - before moving on to Western perspectives.

Sophia Hamblin Wang is a young woman who was wondering about her invitation to Davos until she realised that she was the only person in the room who will probably still be alive in 2050. Mineral Carbonation International is based in Canberra and Newcastle. Angus Taylor is very interested in their technology. She spoke about the importance of targets for giving investors certainty and the confidence to begin projects.



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