

# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter

MARCH 2025



### ESF's IWD Event 2025: Accelerate Action

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) brought together over 200 professionals from across the emergency management sector to celebrate International Women's Day 2025. This year's theme, Accelerate Action, focused on driving momentum toward greater diversity and inclusion within the sector to break down the barriers that women face in both their professional and personal lives. At the event, we proudly presented four awards recognising individuals and initiatives championing these values.

Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Neil Paterson opened our forum by sharing his lived experience as an openly gay leader within the force and challenges he has faced in his own journey. He provided valuable insight into the five key priorities that organisations must focus on to sustain momentum in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI): leadership accountability, policy and practice, mentoring and employee networks, feedback and metrics and what he believes is most crucial, the power of storytelling.



Neil highlighted how storytelling plays a pivotal role in “changing the hearts and minds of colleagues on the importance of DEI initiatives”, emphasising that it can “humanise” the cause and reinforce the need for equality-driven change. He encouraged current and future leaders to take an active role in “champion[ing] the DEI space” and demonstrating visible commitment to these initiatives.

Life Saving Victoria (LSV) members’ Jess Sincock and Hannah Tzimokas were moved by Neil’s presentation, noting that his “vulnerability and storytelling were eye-opening and showed the importance of prioritising diversity and inclusion in your organisation”.

Amy Salmon, WorkSafe’s Principal Psychological Health and Safety Specialist, explored the complexities of workplace bullying and harassment. She highlighted how the 'inherent psychosocial hazards' that emergency workers face, such as exposure to traumatic events, can increase the risk of these harmful workplace behaviors and through case studies encouraged the importance of proactively identifying and managing these underlying risks to create psychologically safe work environments.



The Feeling Inspired segment featured an engaging Q&A with four remarkable women in the sector, facilitated by Kate Fitzgerald, Deputy Secretary Emergency Management. Jess Sincock (LSV), Tegwyn McManamny (AV), Diana Batley (SES), and Jacinta Thomson (000VIC) shared their personal experiences and the challenges they have overcome as women in a predominantly male sector. Tegwyn emphasised the need for “intentional, visible strategies that actively aim to seek out women and gender-diverse people”, like SES’ Women in Rescue or FRV’s Women in Firefighting programs. Importantly, they also discussed their responsibility as senior leaders in uplifting women of colour and how the emergency management sector can implement strategies to ensure greater equity.

Jacinta Thomson reinforced this, stating, 'We all have a responsibility to support [women of colour],' adding that as momentum builds in bridging the gender equality gap, “there [should be] a re-focus that we [all apply] to be more inclusive and understanding of their individual experience” in the sector.



Next, the impact of perimenopause and menopause on women in the workplace was highlighted by Georgie Drury, co-founder & CEO of MetLuma, and Paula Treacy, FRV’s Women’s Support Coordinator. These wonderful leaders addressed that although women over 40 are the fastest-growing demographic in the workforce, they likely take on roles with less responsibility due to menopause symptoms, despite being at their most productive and experienced stage of life.



Georgie emphasised the need to 'Accelerate Action' - aligning with this year's IWD theme - by fostering education, open conversations, and a supportive work environment. Then, Paula shared how FRV is taking a data-driven approach to support women in their workforce by providing practical support, education and open conversations regarding perimenopause and menopause. Paula reinforced the power of normalising these discussions, stating, "The more you talk about stuff, the less people are scared of these things".

Dr. Hugo Fernandes from Newlife IVF spoke about the importance of supporting employees facing fertility challenges. He provided insight into the IVF process and highlighted the significant physical and emotional toll it can take, including stress, anxiety, depression and relationship strain. Dr. Fernandes reinforced the role of workplaces in creating a supportive environment, outlining key adjustments that can make a meaningful difference during the IVF journey, including fertility policies, staff education, greater flexibility and facilitating access to relevant support services.

The 2025 Diversity and Inclusion Awards were both judged and presented by Niki Vincent, Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, and Ro Allen, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner.





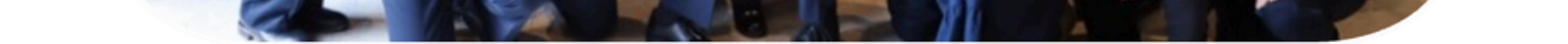
The first award, the *Gender Inclusivity Initiative Encouragement Award*, was presented to the CFA Young Leaders Mentoring Program in recognition of its commitment to fostering inclusion and empowering the next generation of leaders in the CFA.

The *Women's Equality Initiative* award went to VICSES Women in Rescue, celebrating their efforts to empower women in the emergency services through practical hands-on training. In their acceptance, they reflected on the strength and capability of women in rescue operations, highlighting the importance of training and opportunity in building confidence and breaking gender stereotypes.

The *Diversity and Inclusion Champion* award was jointly awarded to Paul Santamaria and Norieul Kinross. Paul credited the strong role models in his life, his mother and grandmother, and reinforced the importance of active listening and thoughtful leadership in driving change. He spoke about the challenge of calling out outdated attitudes, particularly in leadership, and emphasised the need to increase diversity across all levels of organisations. Niki Vincent acknowledged Paul's role as a male ally, highlighting the importance of men stepping up in a space often led by women and gender-diverse people.

Norieul Kinross shared how her upbringing in a multicultural community shaped her understanding of social disadvantage and the barriers many face. She reflected on the value of community support and the courage to ask for help. She also acknowledged Ambulance Victoria's role in fostering an inclusive environment and encouraged others to believe in themselves, seek support, and embrace the power of saying, 'I don't know' as a step toward learning and growth.





The day ended with a powerful discussion featuring Catherine Greaves (LSV), Nichola Krey (Red Cross), Jenni Rigby (EMV), and Mariela Diaz (ERV), facilitated by Lauren Cain (DEECA). The panel explored the challenge of work-life balance, emphasising that while women can achieve success, it doesn't have to happen all at once. They highlighted the importance of backing oneself in male-dominated spaces, confronting sexist language, and fostering a culture that uplifts women, rather than diminishes.

As the event came to a close, one thing was clear - momentum is building, and the drive for greater diversity and inclusion in the emergency management sector has never been stronger.

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## RESPONSES

"The word that comes to mind is inspiration. There's wonderful energy in the room, it's amazing to hear from such a great range of inspirational women across the sector. This is intermingled with some really challenging conversations that cause us to stop and reflect on how we can work together."

**Catherine Greaves, LSV CEO**

"The noticeable change in discussions at our ESF IWD event between now and four years ago is that whilst we are still discussing areas that need to be progressed, we are doing so in a positive light on the back of clear improvements. It's no longer a discussion of woe, but one of progress and positivity, with strong, confident women in control of the debate and setting the agenda."

**Tony Pearce, ESF Board Chair**

"Fabulous energy, fabulous women and fabulous event. Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend and be part of such a great celebration. Your IWD events just keep getting better and better."

**Bridget Tehan, President, Australasian Women in Emergencies Network**

"It's great to see how the event has grown. The energy and enthusiasm in the room is amazing."

**Greg Leach, CFA CEO**