

A close-up portrait of Elizabeth Broderick, a woman with blonde hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a white top and a necklace with dark beads. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

From the **HEAD** to the **HEART**

Getting some of the most powerful men in Australia to sit and listen to women telling their stories of violence and abuse has become Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick's signature method of fighting for gender equality, writes **Anne Summers**.

LET'S CALL HER SHEILA. She's 60 years of age and is working as a bartender in a club when, without her knowledge, one of her colleagues changes the display name that pops up when she operates the till. For two weeks, Sheila puts with the raucous reactions from customers and other staff members every time GILF (which is an acronym for "Grandmother I'd like to fuck") comes up on the till. She asks her manager to have it changed but he does nothing.

This is everyday sexism in Australian workplaces. It takes different forms but the bottom-line effect is the same: the person to whom it is directed feels belittled, intimidated, powerless. They often feel unable to do their job properly. And it does not just happen with barmaids.

It happened to Elizabeth Broderick, now Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, when she was a young lawyer, just starting out. She'd been introduced at a small drinks party hosted by her firm to a man representing their largest client. The next day he phoned her. She felt unable to refuse his invitation to lunch but then, as she recounted the episode many years later, he told her "the old story of 'my wife doesn't understand me blah, blah'".

The man, who was "as old as my grandfather", continued to call her for weeks, "making me feel exceedingly uncomfortable, unable to enjoy work and spending most of my time thinking of avoidance strategies".

She didn't feel she could tell her boss who was friends with this man and she was worried that a complaint might lose her firm the client. At the time there was no recourse to the *Sex Discrimination Act* (SDA). Since its proclamation in 1984, sexual harassment has been unlawful under the SDA—but only if perpetrated by employers or co-workers. (The SDA was later amended to cover harassment by other people, such as clients and customers.)

Broderick did what many victims of sexual harassment do: she enlisted the help of her "girlfriends at work, concerned bystanders". A plan was hatched, she said as she recounted the story in May last year at the release of the report [Sexual](#)

[Harassment: Know Where the Line Is.](#)

This was a strategy for raising awareness of sexual harassment which she launched alongside ACTU president Ged Kearney, and Kate Carnell, who had just been appointed chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). The document explains what it is (many people are still unsure) and isn't (it doesn't mean you can't flirt with or be attracted to someone). As Broderick put it that day, it's about the "power imbalance" when another worker, customer or boss makes unwanted overtures or uses offensive materials against them.

But back when she was a young lawyer, the harassment was more direct, as was the remedy:

Broderick did what many victims of sexual harassment do: she enlisted the help of her "girlfriends at work, concerned bystanders".

"Every time he rang, someone would transfer him to one of these courageous women who would tell him that unfortunately I was not available," she told the audience. "After a week he stopped calling and I went back to enjoying my work."

An Australian Human Rights Commission (HRC) survey in 2012 found that 33 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men had experienced some form of sexual harassment at work; around 20 per cent of the complaints made under the SDA today relate [to sexual harassment](#).

"What a powerful tool it's been in advancing the status of women," says Quentin Bryce of the SDA. As well as being Australia's first female Governor-

General from 2008 to 2014, Bryce served from 1988 to 1993 as Australia’s second Sex Discrimination Commissioner. “It’s an empowering thing for women to know there’s a law that says you can’t discriminate, that there’s a remedy.”

Sheila left her barmaid job and filed a harassment complaint under the SDA, stating that she had felt humiliated and degraded by the way customers treated her whenever they saw her till name. The club agreed the incident had occurred, but denied it was of a sexual nature and therefore was not sexual harassment.

The HRC, which handles complaints made under any of the sex, race, disability and age discrimination acts, conciliated the matter, as it has many [hundreds of others](#).

Sheila received a private apology, \$3000 in compensation and a statement of service from the club so she could find another job.

THE JOB HAD BEEN VACANT FOR eleven months in September 2007 when Attorney-General Philip Ruddock made the surprise announcement that Elizabeth Broderick had been appointed Sex Discrimination Commissioner (SDC). There was relief that finally the position had been filled but, given the Coalition’s long-standing antipathy to the legislation and previous SDCs, there were questions. Broderick had no background in human rights or women’s policy. Few people outside the law had heard of her.

Since the age of 34, Broderick had been a partner at law firm Blake Dawson Waldron (now Ashurst), where she’d established a ground-breaking online practice and pioneered flexible work practices for herself and other mothers. She was on the firm’s board from 2003 to 2006, and had been 2001–02 NSW Telstra Businesswoman of the Year. She would take a 50 per cent pay cut to become Australia’s sixth Commissioner.

Broderick moved quickly to position herself, announcing she would consult widely on a national listening tour. From November 2007, she began a trip that took her to all states, all major cities and some regional and remote communities, including

a transformative visit to the isolated Western Australian settlement of Fitzroy Crossing.

She met over 1000 people in 90 separate events, and engaged online with a further 39,612 people. In keeping with her consultative style she remains in contact with quite a few of them on various issues. People welcomed the chance to engage and responded to her warmth, and what one person described as her “freshness”.

“There seems little that is rehearsed about 46-year-old Broderick,” wrote the *Age* in 2007 shortly after she’d been appointed.

She laid out three themes before these audiences: economic independence for women, balancing work and family across the life cycle, and freedom from discrimination, harassment and violence. Anyone who is familiar with the work of Liz—as she likes to be called—Broderick will recognize these themes as constants in virtually everything she has done in her eight years in the job. They were, she said in an interview, what she was brought up to believe in and want. They were what her mother wanted for her and her two sisters.

“That is also what I want for my daughter,” she said. It was this listening tour that was “absolutely fundamental to setting me up”, she says today.

“I could have just come in and built on the research that had already been done, and there was some great research,” she told me in our formal interview, in a small conference room in the HRC’s Sydney offices. “But I thought, I need to do more than that, I need to get out and listen deeply to the stories because I learn when I immerse myself in the stories.”

Hearing women’s stories, and using them as instruments for bringing about change, became Broderick’s signature.

IN A JOB THAT HAS A TINY STAFF (two full-time apart from Broderick herself, plus access to legal and media officers), a miniscule budget, and few remaining formal powers, the SDC’s role has become principally one of advocacy. Broderick’s use of women’s own accounts of their lived experiences of oppression and discrimination—their stories—

as tools for her advocacy has had a powerful effect, on her and on the people she makes listen to these stories. They are morally potent, which makes them politically effective.

“I can have the prevalence data, the research in my head,” she told me, “but it’s the stories that actually make me bold.”

Later, that boldness became evident when she engaged with the men who control Australia’s most powerful institutions and made them listen to some of these stories. Her strategy would have profound consequences.

But on 22 July 2008, when Broderick presented the results of her listening tour before an invited audience at a morning tea event at Sydney Girls High School, she was still an unknown quantity. There was a lot of goodwill in the room, as well as anticipation. People, and I was one of them, wanted to see what kind of stuff this new Commissioner was made of.

She did not disappoint.

Some of the elements that would define her tenure were evident that day. Typically, she released a document, [Gender equality: what matters to Australian women and men](#), that laid out in direct and simple language the issues that had to be dealt with if Australia was going to achieve gender equality.

The event itself exemplified Broderick’s practical approach to inclusion. Her presenters included a schoolgirl, a captain of industry, a teacher and, despite it being quite a small event, there was a formal welcome to country performed by Millie Ingram from the Wyanga Aboriginal Elders Group. Her own two kids, at the time tweenagers, were present that day as was her identical twin sister Jane Latimer, who is a medical doctor. They had each joined stages of the listening tour and Broderick soon enlisted Latimer’s help to develop what would become an internationally renowned landmark project on foetal alcohol syndrome at Fitzroy Crossing.

Later, Broderick would sometimes use her daughter as a note-taker at meetings with ministers in Canberra.

“If I can’t work in a way that allows me to

integrate work and family then what chance does anyone else have?” she asks disarmingly.

This is a key Broderick way of working. Using a combination of charm and reasonableness of tone she has the ability to take the sting out of propositions that might otherwise cause consternation or certainly resistance.

The way Broderick argues it, how could you possibly object to a ten-year-old being brought along as a note-taker and needing to go to the toilet in the middle of an important conversation with the Attorney-General?

Another example was her debate in August 2010 with [David Gonski](#), the consummate businessman and company director. Gonski had recently begun to advocate for more women on boards and argued that evening he would do anything to make this happen—except support the use of quotas.

Broderick argued that quotas were a sure-fire means of ensuring that merit is actually recognized and rewarded, unlike in the chummy boardrooms of the time (the numbers have gone up quite significantly in the past four years).

It is hard to think of a more polarizing topic in business circles, yet Broderick won the debate with her earnest and calm rationale. Gonski somehow came across as unreasonable.

Call it charm and disarm.

However you describe Broderick’s style, when combined with her ability to get on with just about anyone, and her endless energy for making the case for gender equality, Broderick’s powers of persuasion are undoubtedly her most lethal weapon.

Underpinning these is an impressive ability to network. She never forgets a name, or fails to return a phone call or a text. She travels almost non-stop and seems to know literally everyone in whatever gathering she finds herself, be it in Canberra, Brussels or New York. Her roles now include international work, which, says Quentin Bryce, puts her in the tradition of other renowned Australian women “from Jessie Street and Elizabeth Reid to Elizabeth Evatt” who have achieved on the world stage.

Broderick is Global Co-Chair of the Women’s Empowerment Leadership Group at the United



Women’s Empowerment Principles Annual Event, New York, 10 March 2015, left to right: Elizabeth Broderick, Co-Chair Women’s Empowerment Principles Leadership Group; Georg Kell, Executive Director, UN Global Compact; Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women; H.E. Manuela Schwesig, Federal Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany; H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General; H.E. Zorana Mihajlović, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Construction, Transport & Infrastructure, Republic of Serbia; Hillary Rodham Clinton, Senator, and U.S. Secretary of State; H.E. Mary Robinson, United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Change, United Nations; Joseph Keefe, President & Chief Executive Officer, Pax World Management and Co-Chair Women’s Empowerment Principles Leadership Group.

Nations, in which capacity in March she conferred honours on several CEOs for their work on empowering women, earning a mention in a [press release](#) issued by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Hillary Clinton (just days before she announced her candidacy for the Democratic Party’s nomination for US President).

Broderick also advises NATO, is a member of the World Bank’s Advisory Council on Gender and Development, and sits on a number of local boards involving Indigenous issues and girls’ education. Today you don’t hear too many people asking Liz Who?

“What a huge difference she’s made,” says former

Senator Helen Coonan. “There is almost universally a high regard for her.”

Notably for someone who juggles so much, Broderick never seems to lose concentration or focus. She is in constant touch with large numbers of people who are her contact group on every issue she is involved with. “She’s a naturally consultative and collaborative person,” says Quentin Bryce. “She brings people together.”

More than that, she gets them to do things they might never have imagined themselves doing before they met Liz Broderick. Just ask the Chief of the Army and the CEOs of some of Australia’s largest companies.

BY THE TIME SHE STEPS DOWN on 4 September, Broderick will have been in the job for eight years, far longer than any previous Sex Discrimination Commissioner, time enough to redefine the role in some important ways.

“She has been pretty strategic in working out where she can make the most difference,” says a former Labor cabinet minister who observed Broderick at work. “And she’s been able to make the institution (the HRC) work for her.”

Broderick has served under four Prime Ministers (five if you count Kevin Rudd twice) and five Attorneys-General. She is the first SDC to have enjoyed strong bipartisan support: she was appointed by a Coalition government, reappointed by Labor in 2012 and had her term extended, in September last year, by the current Coalition government. This is a marked departure from the past when the position was invariably treated in a ferociously partisan way, especially by the Coalition.

The *Sex Discrimination Act* was always Labor’s baby. A version of it was a casualty of the Whitlam dismissal in 1975. It resurfaced in 1981 when Susan Ryan, Labor’s shadow minister for the status of women, introduced a private senator’s bill. After Labor won government, the *Sex Discrimination Act*, proclaimed on 1 August 1984, became a landmark achievement of the Hawke government. The legislation made it unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of their sex, marital status or for being pregnant in employment, education or in the provision of goods and services.

Thirty-one years on, the law sounds unexceptional, tame even. It has been strengthened and extended since. The government’s two reservations—provision of a national paid maternity leave scheme and or allowing women to serve in combat or even combat-related roles in the military—eventually went. As have many of the initial exemptions that meant the law did not apply to, among others things, clubs, superannuation and insurance, sport, religious and charitable organizations.

But even with all these caveats, the proposed law was controversial. There was a large and noisy

campaign against “the sex bill” by conservative and religious groups and it was officially opposed by the Coalition, although several members and senators crossed the floor to vote for the legislation.

When John Howard came to power in 1996 he accused the SDC, Sue Walpole, of being “a Labor stooge”, thereby effectively forcing her resignation. The position remained unfilled for fourteen months. The government considered merging the SDC, the Office of the Status of Women and the Affirmative Action Agency (a version of which survives today



It took some serious lobbying by Liberal women to save the position ... They saved the job, but the powers were severely weakened.

under the name of Women’s Gender Equality Agency). It was a mad idea that could never work but Howard and Attorney-General Daryl Williams nevertheless did their utmost to get rid of the SDC position.

It took some serious lobbying by Liberal women to save the position. Senator Marise Payne, who today is Minister for Human Services, said getting rid of the position was first mooted in 1997.

“We were all furious,” she told me. She and Helen Coonan lobbied Williams. They saved the job, but the powers of HREOC, as the HRC was then known, were severely weakened, with the individual commissioners including the SDC losing their complaint-handling powers. The Commission’s budget was reduced by a staggering 40 per cent.

In 1998 the job went to Susan Halliday who, like Broderick nine years later, was little known but because of her business background it was assumed by the government she'd be politically reliable.

How wrong they were. Halliday did the first important review of pregnancy discrimination and became a vocal critic of government policies, including the continuing efforts to dilute the *Sex Discrimination Act*. Her three-year term was not renewed, attracting strong criticism of the government from Sharan Burrow, then ACTU president.

This time the government moved fast and within two months of Halliday's departure gave the job to Pru Goward, who had run the Office of the Status of Women (not very well, in the opinion of many) and was judged to be a much safer pair of hands. She was appointed for five years.

But in less than a year Goward infuriated the Prime Minister by launching a discussion paper advocating paid maternity leave. She described current arrangements as "limited, haphazard and fall[ing] significantly below what could be considered a national system".

Goward added fuel to the fire in December 2002 with [A Time to Value](#), a report that laid out her recommended option of a paid scheme that would give women fourteen weeks' leave capped at the minimum weekly wage. Her proposal, which was supported by women's organizations and the ACTU, was in direct conflict with Howard's pet Baby Bonus policy that would reward women for leaving the workforce.

"We had to mobilize again to save the position in 2003," recalls Senator Payne, "when Pru put her paid maternity leave proposal, which was very contentious."

Howard introduced legislation in March 2003 that sought to abolish the SDC and other specialist Commissioner positions. The bill was buried in a Senate committee and did not proceed, but Howard was determined there would be no more pesky SDCs. After Goward left in October 2006 to run for a safe Liberal seat in the NSW Parliament, the position remained vacant.

It might never have been filled had it not been for yet further lobbying by Liberal women MPs. "Marise and I went to see the AG and argued for the role not to be folded into the HRC, and to make sure it was not watered down or diluted," Helen Coonan told me.

In September 2007, seemingly out of the blue, and just two months before the federal election that would see the Rudd Labor government brought to power, Liz Broderick's appointment was announced.

IF THERE IS ONE ISSUE THAT CRYSTALLIZES Broderick's views on the barriers to women's equality it is parenthood or, more precisely, motherhood. If we don't solve this, what hope is there for women to be able to "have it all"?

Ever since she found herself pregnant as a young lawyer and wanting to stay at work, Broderick has devoted considerable energy towards identifying and ending the many ways in which women are discriminated against while pregnant and when they want to return to work. (And, following on from Goward, giving strong support to what is now called paid parental leave, which was finally adopted by the Australian government in 2009.) Her most recent report, [Supporting Working Parents](#), released last year, is a strong example of her conviction and a further instance of her collaborative approach. She involved the ACCI, the Australian Industry Group and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association in the launch.

Susan Ryan, who is now the Age Discrimination Commissioner and thus a colleague of Broderick's, says she was "deeply shocked" by the findings of continued discrimination in this report.

"Pregnancy discrimination has been unlawful since 1984!" she said.

But trying to end pregnancy discrimination is not what Liz Broderick is principally known for.

Rather, it is the Male Champions of Change (MCC) and her work with the Australian Defence Force that have defined her—and earned her both high praise and considerable criticism.

Both pieces of work are a million miles away from the more piecemeal, issue-by-issue approach of her predecessors and in their scope and status have



Male Champions of Change Group, November 2013. Back row: Stephen Roberts (Citi), Michael Rennie (McKinsey), Simon Rothery (Goldman Sachs), Elmer Funke Kupper (ASX), Giam Swiegers (Deloitte), Glen Boreham (Non-Executive Director), David Morrison (Army), Dr. Ian Watt (Former Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet), Stephen Sedgwick (Australian Public Service Commission). Front row: Grant O'Brien (Woolworths), Dr. Martin Parkinson (Former Secretary, Department of the Treasury), Andrew Stevens (Non-Executive Director), Alan Joyce (Qantas), Elizabeth Broderick, Ian Narev (CBA), Mike Smith (ANZ), David Thodey (Telstra).

utterly transformed the SDC's role and standing.

Broderick had already instituted a small version of the MCC, with the initial group of eight members growing to twelve by December 2010, when in April 2011 the Skype sex scandal broke at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) and Defence Minister Stephen Smith asked her to undertake a major review of the treatment of women at ADFA and in the military generally.

Technically, these two projects are totally separate. In practice, and in terms of her career, they have become inextricably linked. Both come with significant financial and human resources—funding from Defence and a levy paid by each of the MCC organizations—a far cry from the SDC's core funding. There is some overlap in membership, with the Chief of the Army, Lt General David Morrison a MCC. And it was the Defence work that saved her when Broderick's job seemed to be in peril because of the MCC exercise.

Broderick eventually delivered four reports on the [treatment of women in the military](#) and, as a result, was enlisted by the Department of Defence to advise and guide them on a process of deep cultural reform. Her work in defence has been almost universally applauded.

"It was hard to do what she did," says Marise Payne. "It's the first time in the world there's been a formal relationship between this HRC and the military to change the status of women," Quentin Bryce told me.

This relationship was forged as a result of Broderick's intensive effort to understand the military. She spoke to literally thousands of troops, made 60 visits to bases in Australia, and visited serving forces in the Middle East and other places around the world where the Australian military operates.

Bryce remembers being in Afghanistan for the Dawn Service on Anzac Day in 2012. "Elizabeth was

arriving as I was leaving. We passed each other on the tarmac in our flak jackets,” she said, thinking to herself, “There’s the SDC arriving with the Generals.”

IN EARLY 2010 Broderick had rung several business leaders to establish the initial eight-member MCC because, she told me, she “was frustrated about the pace of change”.

“What I have started to understand,” she says, “is that the closer women come to economic and political power, the greater the forces of exclusion are, so we needed to do something really controversial and disruptive.”

The group’s first formal meeting was a breakfast on 15 December 2010 in the Citi boardroom in Sydney. Joining the initial group of Michael Luscombe (Woolworths), Giam Swiegers (Deloitte), Glen Boreham (IBM), Kevin McCann (Origin Energy), David Thodey (Telstra), Stephen Fitzgerald (Goldman Sachs), Gordon Cairns (non-executive director), Alan Cransberg (Alcoa), Stephen Roberts (Citi Australia) and Robert Elstone (ASX) were new boys Alan Joyce (Qantas), Ralph Norris (CBA) and David Peever (Rio Tinto).

The group pledged to advance gender equality within their organizations and to act as public advocates for the issue. Later the group expanded to 25, and included public-sector leaders such as the heads of the federal Treasury and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the University of Sydney. Between them, these Male Champions employ hundreds of thousands of people. If they actually implemented their pledge, the working lives of countless women would be vastly improved.

“The Male Champions is about men, powerful men, because that’s where it is directed,” says Broderick, “but it has to be done within a feminist framework.”

Broderick also got them give an undertaking not to appear on any conference panel or other event where there was no female representation.

But women’s groups and many in the trade unions were critical of the program. “Working women saw her as just playing with a bunch of CEOs,” ACTU president Ged Kearney told me.

“There was a bit of tension around the Male Champions of Change strategy from the union movement,” Broderick concedes. “They were quite hostile.”

As her term neared its end in 2012, Kearney argued to Attorney-General Nicola Roxon that Broderick was not concerned enough with “real women’s issues” and ought not be reappointed.

There has always been a certain frigidity between the unions and the SDC, with the former wanting sex discrimination to be addressed by unions and industrial courts, currently Fair Work Australia, rather than the HRC.



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But there was little chance of this happening, with the SDA being better known and seen as more accessible for ordinary people. Just as there was no chance that Broderick would not be reappointed, as long as her very strong admirer, Stephen Smith, was Defence Minister and Roxon could see no performance reasons Broderick could not to continue in the job.

But Broderick got the message that bridges needed to be built and she and Kearney had what the ACTU chief describes as “a very frank discussion about the MCC and how the sisterhood did not like it”.

Since then Broderick has worked with the ACTU on a number of working women’s issues and, Kearney says, “In her second term she totally proved herself in my eyes with her work in Defence and on pregnancy.”

But Kearney and a number of other women,

including some in the business world, still criticize the MCC. The complaint is that they are a talking shop that has not achieved measurable change, and whose organizations take contradictory positions on issues such as EOWA gender reporting in gender forums and business forums.

Broderick is undeterred in her championing of the MCC model. She has applied the template to a range of peak bodies and other organizations, including the Property Council of Australia, and elite sport and architecture bodies. There is a nineteen-member group just established by Victorian Human Rights Commissioner, Kate Jenkins, Broderick's state equivalent, whose members include leading CEOs and, being Melbourne, the head of the AFL, Gillon McLachlan.

Broderick has even exported the model. Kevin McCann, now chairman of the Macquarie Group, accompanied her to Tokyo last September to attend Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's World Assembly for Women, which was designed to promote increased workforce participation by Japanese women, and to help set up Male Champions of Change Japan.

On 25 August, just two weeks before she leaves the job, Broderick will showcase all 120 of the local champions, plus the Japanese, at a huge lunch at Sydney's Westin Hotel.

The sceptics will most likely have their opposition reinforced by this event, but for Broderick's fans, the individual MCCs included, the event will be proof that she has made a difference.

"Liz is one of the few people I've met in my life who has actually changed things," says MCC Kevin McCann. "She has a lot to offer this country."

ON 17 NOVEMBER LAST YEAR, Broderick got the Male Champions together for a special, and unusual, meeting. Not all of them were happy that they were going to be sitting down with domestic violence survivors Rosie Batty and Kristy McKellar. Rosie Batty was not yet Australian of the Year, but she was close to being a household name for the way she had urged Australians to bring the issue of family violence out into the open after her son Luke had been murdered earlier in the year by his father.



Monique Coleman (US star of the *High School Musical* trilogy and UN Youth Champion) and Liz Broderick with students at Granville South High School, 2011.

"Men's violence against women is Australia's most significant gender equality issue," is Broderick's remarkable and depressing conclusion reached after almost eight years addressing every aspect of women's inequality. "It is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality."

And so it could no longer be either ignored or compartmentalized from other workplace equality issues. It was necessary for the MCs to meet these survivors, Broderick felt, because all too often the violence and the women who experience it were invisible.

"Most felt this was not an issue for us," Kevin McCann told me. "We felt it was social crusading."

But their colleague David Thodey was co-convening the meeting in Telstra's Sydney boardroom. His involvement was an important signal to the others that their agenda was about to expand in a direction none of them had anticipated when they signed on as Champions.

Batty and McKellar spent nearly three hours trying to explain to the MCs what it is like to hold down a job when you're in an abusive relationship.



With Alex Shehadie, Director of the Review into the Treatment of Women in the ADF, in Tarinkot, Afghanistan, ANZAC Day 2012.

McKellar, in her early thirties, was running support programs in the welfare sector. She had nine direct reports and managed a team of 100 volunteers. She told the men how her husband used to saw the heels off her shoes because he didn't like the fact she was a bit taller than him and that trying to find a pair of shoes for work was often a problem.

She told them how, one day at work, where she was sharing an office with another woman, her husband rang and was horrendously abusive. The other woman heard the "you effing c" coming down the line and after McKellar had hung up said, "They shouldn't make us take calls like that from customers, that's outrageous."

"That was no customer—that was my husband," McKellar said. The woman turned away.

The story was meant to bring home to the Male Champions how hard it is to admit to being a victim of violence, and how especially difficult it is to disclose at work. The lesson for the CEOs was that violence is not just a social issue, it is a workplace one.

Two years earlier, Broderick had done a similar thing when she'd persuaded Army chief Lt General David Morrison to [sit down, out of uniform, and](#)

[listen](#) to the stories of abuse suffered by three of his female soldiers at the hands of their colleagues or supervisors.

The conversations left Morrison a changed man.

"This was not the Army that I had loved and thought I knew," he said afterwards.

Broderick decided it was necessary for a similar exercise, to "take the case for change from the head to the heart", as she puts it.

"The way that I did it with the Male Champions and domestic violence was to get them to listen to Rosie and Kristy," Broderick told me.

Before Luke's death, no one wanted to hear my story of living with violence, Batty told the Champions. "Now everyone does."

And Batty gave it to them straight.

"So the men, they heard from Rosie that Greg's violence against their son was not directed at Luke," Broderick tells me. "It was actually a direct act of violence against Rosie. And she really took them through it, how that violence never leaves you."

To say the Male Champions were stunned would be an understatement.

"They were unbelievable," recounts Broderick. "I



Jane Latimer (Broderick's twin sister), June Oscar AO, Liz Broderick and Emily Carter at Fitzroy Crossing, WA.

saw the flurry of activity in all their organizations in a way that I had never seen before.”

A week later, on 25 November, White Ribbon Day, Telstra announced it was following the example of companies such as NAB, Ikea, McDonald's and Virgin Australia with a [policy of domestic violence leave](#), enabling any of its 34,000 employees who might be affected by such violence to be eligible for up to ten days' paid leave.

The policy has been in the pipeline for some time but the stories the women told that day underscored just how necessary it was. In the first weeks after the policy was announced, a number of women working for Telstra applied for the leave. It was immediately clear that the need was very real.

Lt General David Morrison says the meeting ended with the Champions committing to recognizing their responsibility and accountability to try to do something about domestic violence in Australian workplaces.

Kevin McCann was not present on the day but he heard from his colleagues of the huge impact the “very emotional presentation” had on them.

“We realize now that we have a duty to our people.”

OF HER EIGHT YEARS AS Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Liz Broderick nominates two things that make her most proud.

Getting those three young soldiers, whom Broderick describes as “some of the most disenfranchised and vulnerable women, but in many senses the most courageous women” to be able to connect “directly with the hearts and minds of the most powerful man in the organization”, the Chief of the Army, is one of them.

The other is being able to support women who have fought back against domestic abuse.

One such woman was Catherine Smith, who was tried for the attempted murder of the husband who had subjected her for seventeen years to what has been described as one of the worst cases of domestic abuse that Australia has ever known. Her former husband had used cattle prods, red-hot poker, knives and guns to torture her and force her to have sex with him.

“When I knew she was in court,” Broderick tells me, “I just used to text her and remind her that the skirts of the sisterhood were wrapped around you and holding you tight and women all across this nation who are today living in domestic violent relationships thank you for your bravery.”

Smith broke down in tears during a 2011 ABC-TV *Australian Story* account of her horrific story when she recalled receiving [Broderick's texts](#).

“So it's small things like that,” says Broderick, referring to how she felt hearing Smith mention the texts. “And when I see that come back in an email from someone, or even when she talked about it on this episode, I think, you know what, that actually did make a bit of a difference.” ❖



MEET LIZ BRODERICK

Anne Summers will be in conversation with Elizabeth Broderick on 7 May at the City Recital Hall, Sydney. Male Champions of Change Alan Joyce and Kevin McCann will join them for part of the conversation.

[BOOK ONLINE at www.cityrecitalhall](http://www.cityrecitalhall)



Elizabeth Broderick

**IN CONVERSATION
WITH ANNE SUMMERS**

WITH AUDIENCE Q&A

What needs to change so women can enjoy true equality

As she nears the end of her eight years as Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick and I will talk about what still needs to be done for Australian women to enjoy full gender equality.

During her term, Elizabeth has been a strong advocate for paid parental leave; she has spoken against sexual harassment and domestic violence, has championed the rights of working women, has revealed the extent of pregnancy discrimination in Australian workplaces and reported on the abuse of women in the Australian Defence Force.

Elizabeth created the Male Champions of Change, a group of 25 leading CEOs who have pledged to bring gender equality in their organisations. Two of these champions will join us on stage for part of the conversation.

Elizabeth has also championed gender equality on the international stage, working with the World Bank, NATO and the United Nations. She was recently recognised for this work by Hillary Clinton in New York.

Elizabeth and I will talk frankly about how to overcome the remaining barriers to full equality. Our conversation will be wide-ranging and I expect it to cover many key issues, including the gender pay gap, why women still face workplace discrimination and the current domestic violence crisis.

The evening will also be an opportunity for us to express our gratitude and appreciation to Elizabeth Broderick for all the work she has done for Australian women during her eight years as our longest serving Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

ANNE SUMMERS Editor and Publisher, [Anne Summers Reports](#)

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7 MAY**

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