



# Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Parliament of Queensland

## Media Statement

Thursday, 23 October 2008

### QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT TO LAUNCH ITS 'PACIFIC SISTERS' PROGRAM IN CAIRNS

Queensland Parliamentary Speaker, Mike Reynolds and former Member for Barron River, Dr Lesley Clark, today launched a unique political mentoring program to support women MP's from Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

The 'Pacific Sisters' program is part of a wider Australian initiative to build the capacity of Parliaments in developing countries across the Pacific in which the Queensland Parliament is "twinning" with the parliaments of Vanuatu and PNG.

The Pacific Sisters proposal, put forward by Dr Lesley Clark earlier this year, has been endorsed by the Australian Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, the peak body representing women MP's in Australia.

"I am delighted as a former Member that the Queensland Parliament will be the first to formally commit to the Pacific Sisters mentoring program," said Dr Clark.

Currently the PNG parliament has only one female member, Dame Carol Kidu, but she has initiated moves that could see three more women appointed into the Parliament as an interim measure until more can be elected into seats reserved for women.

In Vanuatu two women were elected in last month's election, one of them for the first time.

"The Pacific Sisters mentoring program will reach out to new women MP's with support and training in a range of personal and professional areas. The 'Australian Sisters' would be drawn from former or current MP's offering a great opportunity to build cultural understanding and friendships as well as knowledge and skills," said Dr Clark.

Speaker Mike Reynolds said that the Queensland Parliament was ideally placed to play a key role in the Pacific Sisters program.

"We are the only State which shares a tropical environment with our Melanesian neighbours and with 31 women MP's we have the largest number of female members," Mr Reynolds said.

The Speaker said that the program would be developed over the coming months in consultation with the Parliaments of PNG and Vanuatu and he hoped the program would later be expanded to encourage and assist not just MP's but also women seeking elected office in those countries.

"Women constitute only about 3% of Pacific parliaments, the lowest of all regions in the world. I think we have a responsibility to work with our Pacific neighbours to strengthen the role of women in Parliament.

The launch of the Pacific Sisters program is occurring in Cairns to coincide with the Cairns Campaign School for Women, convened by Dr Clark.

Twenty-six women involved in politics from across the Asia Pacific region, including women from PNG and Vanuatu will attend the campaign school.

Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Women in PNG, and the PNG and Vanuatu participants of the Campaign School will be in Cairns next week and available to comment on the Pacific Sisters program.

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