

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TRIBUNAL, WOMEN MEMBERS

167. Hon HELEN HODGSON to the Attorney General:

- (1) Is the minister aware that, following the recent appointments of Mr Dharmananda and Mr Donaldson to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, there are no women members of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal?
- (2) How many women applied for appointment to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal following the initial call for applications?
- (3) Is there any government policy in place regarding the appointment of women to tribunals, particularly the Equal Opportunity Tribunal?

Hon PETER FOSS replied:

- (1)-(3) I am sure the member is aware that following the appointment of Mr Dharmananda, there is now an ethnic person on the tribunal.

Hon Cheryl Davenport: It is not good enough.

Hon PETER FOSS: Hon Cheryl Davenport obviously thinks that being a woman is more important than being ethnic. It is quite interesting that for years we have managed without a person of any ethnic background whatsoever. When we had women on the tribunal, nobody raised a word about there not being a person on the Equal Opportunity Tribunal who might understand the prejudice and race issues. However, as soon as there is not a woman on the tribunal, we hear the suggestion that there should be.

It is government policy to try to ensure that women are appointed. The important point is that the most appropriate person is appointed. I have a very good record on appointing appropriately qualified people to the bench. I draw members' attention to the fact that two courts in Western Australia have the highest percentage of women: The Family Court of Western Australia comprises 40 per cent women and the District Court of Western Australia comprises 25 per cent women. My record of ensuring that ably qualified women are appointed to the bench is quite clear. If I did not believe the people who offered themselves for appointment were appropriate and would be appropriately qualified to carry out that duty, I would not appoint them. Of every female appointment I have made -

Hon Kim Chance: There are 900 000 women in Western Australia.

Hon PETER FOSS: They did not all apply for this job.

Hon N.F. Moore: You should make them apply! Don't be so wishy-washy; make them apply!

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, I should make them apply. I can say with considerable confidence that every woman whom I have appointed to the bench - I must confess that I have not had a question congratulating me on that - was appointed on merit.

Hon Ken Travers: Will a woman be the next Chief Justice?

Hon PETER FOSS: There is no suggestion at this stage that the Chief Justice will resign. He is a relatively young person in the full vigour of his professional life. I have not heard any suggestion that he is intending to resign.