

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD — GRACE FOWLER**

*Statement by Minister for Science*

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Science)** [9.09 am]: Earlier this month on the International Day of the Girl Child, 19 girl guides took over Parliament House to experience what it is like to be a politician for the day. I had the privilege of meeting and working alongside Grace Fowler, a 15-year-old who is passionate about science, technology, engineering and mathematics opportunities and getting more girls involved in science fields. Grace gave a passionate speech about STEM, which will be of interest to members. According to my notes, it reads —

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math industries represent the future of Australia’s economic and technological development, yet this year only 8 percent of girls will study physics in their final year of schooling.

Teachers dumb down science for girls from the age of 8 as they assume girls were less interested in science because of gender stereotypes. Adults also assumed that girls weren’t as academically capable as boys in the field of physics.

A new study released by Macquarie University found that the most significant reason Australian girls are not studying STEM subjects is gender stereotyping by adults and teachers. The study found adult assumptions about girl’s STEM capabilities meant that science education was effectively “dumbed down” for girls from the age of 8. These gender stereotypes that led to reduced access to teaching meant that girls did not develop early science expertise.

Such early educational experiences were one of three identified reasons why women are underrepresented in STEM fields. The study also found that women were not taking up STEM careers due to a reduced confidence in their own ability and the masculine culture in science and technology industries.

Today is International Day of the Girl yet we are failing our brightest and most capable female students because of stereotypical assumptions by adults. This needs to change. The more inquiring minds we have in our science industries, the greater the benefit for our communities and country. As C.S. Lewis said, “Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction.”

I thank Grace for sharing her views and her passion on this very important matter.