

WAGES, FEMALE TO MALE RATIO

393. Ms WARNOCK to the Minister for Women's Interests:

- (1) Is the minister aware that since the election of a Liberal Party Government in 1993, the female to male pay ratio has dropped from 81 per cent to 77 per cent, compared with the national average of 84 per cent?
- (2) Will the minister explain why this downward trend is occurring?
- (3) Will the minister outline what specific action her department is taking to address this worrying gap between men's and women's wages?

Mrs van de KLASHORST replied:

- (1)-(3) Several weeks ago I pointed out in this Parliament that female employment in Western Australia is at its highest level since records have been kept. This has been positive for women. Women now have a choice of working full time or part time, or to not work at all, because out in the community there are now jobs for them, which were not there under the previous Labor Government. Since 1992, women's paid employment has grown by 32 per cent, representing 100 000 additional jobs. The unemployment rate for women in this State for the September quarter was the lowest ever recorded, down from 5.7 per cent to 4.7 per cent. The overall growth in women's employment has been stronger than the growth in male employment. Women's unemployment has declined steadily ever since the present Government was elected. The Women's Policy Development Office is now looking at the gender pay gap, which does exist in some areas. It must be remembered, however, that women are generally choosing to look after families or elderly people and take part-time employment, and this could skew the figures. The Women's Policy Development Office is also looking at the growth in self-employment and small business, which women are taking up at a greater rate than ever before. I met with a group of women the other day, who are very pleased that they can take up self-employment. The Women's Policy Development Office recognises the need to consider the mix of employment and family responsibilities, and to create new career opportunities.