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VICTORIAN WOMEN IN ICT NETWORK SET TO BOOST INDUSTRY

The *Victorian Women in ICT Network* will help to boost a shortage of women in the ICT industry through the development of practical programs designed to attract and retain women in the field, the Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Marsha Thomson, announced today.

“Supported by \$82,000 of Bracks Government funding, the *Victorian Women in ICT Network* is spear-headed by a high-powered group of representatives from the government, corporate and education sector,” Ms Thomson said.

“The ICT industry provides a great opportunity for a fulfilling, exciting and creative career, but one that is not traditionally chosen by women. Only by increasing the number of women in the industry can ICT in Victoria reach its full potential.”

Ms Thomson said the Network, to be launched tonight, would be a critical link between government, business, the education sector and other industry associations to collaborate on, and influence the direction of ICT in Victoria.

“The *Victorian Women in ICT Network* has three objectives: to encourage women to enter the ICT industry, to retain women in the industry, and to enable these women to achieve their full potential within their career,” she said.

The Network will implement a range of tangible initiatives including mentoring programs, scholarships, education forums, professional development workshops, a business network directory, awards program, networking events, marketing programs and promotion of career opportunities.

“Despite 70 per cent growth of ICT jobs since 1996 - with Victoria having the second largest share of ICT roles in Australia – there continues to be very low participation by women in the ICT industry. The percentage of technology graduates who are women has also been in decline since 1989,” Ms Thomson said.

Recent ABS statistics show that of the 335,200 ICT workers in 2003/04, only 16 per cent were women, representing one per cent of the total employed women in the population.

“I am keen to reverse this trend in order to capitalise on the value women can bring to the ICT industry,” Ms Thomson said.

Attitudinal research of current and graduating Year 12 students in 2004, undertaken by Multimedia Victoria, also revealed only three per cent of young women surveyed showed a strong interest in pursuing ICT as a career.

It showed the greatest barrier to a career in ICT for girls was a lack of knowledge about the different types of ICT jobs and courses available. The other major inhibitor was the perception that ICT was boring and involved 'sitting in front of a computer all day'.

"It is these stereotypes the Network aims to address by creating awareness of the diversity of roles in ICT – it's not just traditional ICT roles such as computer programming, but business-based and creative roles such as business analysts, project managers and web designers," Ms Thomson said.

"In order to address the skills gap in ICT, we are also targeting women from other industries with relevant skills such as strategic and management capabilities, design, communication and marketing experience who may be considering a transition to an ICT career."

The Network comprises leading women from a range sectors and professions including:

- Jane Treadwell, Victorian Government CIO;
- Chris Gillies, IT Governance specialist, and non executive director on a number of public and not-for-profit boards;
- Rhonda O'Donnell, Asia Pacific president of Novell;
- Debra Auty, executive manager, ANZ Technology;
- Jenny Barbour, director, Jenny Barbour & Associates, and co-founder of *Women are IT* Network;
- Catherine Lang, lecturer in the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology at Swinburne University;
- Dr Julie Fisher, associate professor School of Information Management and Systems, Monash University; and
- Nicole Dixon, general manager of Morpheum (web development consultancy).

"You only have to look at the depth and diversity of experience of the Network's founding board members to demonstrate that a career in ICT can be a very exciting and successful one. They also provide very strong role models for women currently working in ICT," Ms Thomson said.

Board member Debra Auty, head of Technology at ANZ, said only one out of 10 applicants for an advertised position in ICT was a woman.

"It is crucial that the best person for the position is selected and with these numbers the odds are against the female candidate. This is the heart of what the Victorian Women in ICT Network aims to address," Ms Auty said.

Membership is open to all women in ICT. They can join the Network by emailing queries@mmv.vic.gov.au. Initial programs to be implemented in the coming months include an ANZ Bank scholarship program, a Novell 12-month international professional placement, a breakfast seminar on work/life balance and the *Go Girl Go IT Careers Showcase*.

Five levels of membership will be available, including student (free), individual (\$120), Micro business (\$220-2 memberships), SME (\$300) and Corporate (\$1000).

