

New Ambassador for Women and Girls announced

by Ashlee Betteridge
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Former Democrats leader Natasha Stott Despoja has been **named** as Australia's new Ambassador for Women and Girls.

Many have labelled Stott Despoja's appointment by the new government as a surprise, considering she comes from the other side of politics. However her appointment has been widely welcomed—her role as the founding chair of **The Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and Their Children**, her former life in politics and her considerable public profile as a regular panellist on Channel Ten's *The Project* should raise the profile of regional gender issues with audiences at home.

Her appointment also seems to signal a heightened commitment to gender work in the aid program and Australia's foreign policy. The previous government appointed the first Ambassador for Women and Girls, a career diplomat, Penny Williams. Williams made many **important contributions to the cause** and was a passionate advocate on issues such as gender violence, but she only held the role **part-time** and had a relatively low public profile.

Stott Despoja has said that she will be **'frank and fearless'** in her advice to the government, and **called** the role 'her dream job'.

"I am excited by the fact that this Government has made clear that gender empowerment and gender equality are priorities for Australia's foreign policy," she said.

Stott Despoja identified her desire to see more women in leadership roles, particularly in the Pacific, and the need for more business opportunities for women.

Stott Despoja is joining Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Shadow Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek on a cross-party parliamentary delegation to Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Nauru.

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Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

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