

Dragons Abreast Australia

Senator CROSSIN (Northern Territory) (10.09 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about an inspiring group, Dragons Abreast Australia. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Dragons Abreast Australia, a group which has its origins in Darwin in the Northern Territory. Dragons Abreast is a not-for-profit group of breast cancer survivors, who regularly get together to paddle dragon boats.

In October 1998 a group of women breast cancer survivors from the Northern Territory attended the National Breast Cancer Conference for Women in Canberra. Whilst there, they encountered a Canadian journalist, Sharon Batt, who mentioned that survivors of breast cancer had formed dragon boat teams in Canada. One of the Northern Territory delegates at the time, Michelle Hanton, was instantly inspired as dragon boating had recently begun in Darwin. She started up a team of breast cancer survivors and took to the waters of Lake Alexander, on the Fannie Bay foreshore, in December 1998. They became the first Australian breast cancer crew, paddling under the name of Northern Territory Breast Cancer Voice, the consumer group in the Northern Territory, which came first.

In early 1999 a breast cancer survivor crew had also formed in Canberra, which regularly paddled in Lake Burley Griffin, under the leadership of Anna Wellington Booth. By September that year, Dragons Abreast was officially formed as a national team with crews in New South Wales, the ACT and the Northern Territory. In 2000 a team competed in the Australian National Dragon Boat Titles in Penrith, New South Wales, and in local regattas in Darwin, Newcastle, Canberra and Sydney. It was from here that Dragons Abreast spread nationwide and became a national institution.

Janelle Gamble, from Queensland, was a lone paddler at the 2000 nationals and, inspired by Dragons Abreast, returned to Brisbane with a mission to form a Dragons Abreast team there. Western Australia soon followed in 2001. A group formed in South Australia in October of the same year and then a Melbourne support group formed their own team. There are now over 30 groups across Australia who take to the lakes and harbours in every state and territory, paddling as a united voice for breast cancer awareness.

Dragons Abreast was founded on principles of participation and inclusiveness. Participants consider themselves to be winners by simply being in the group and being able to paddle. Competitiveness is a secondary outcome. Breast cancer is a debilitating disease and recovery from treatment can often be long and stressful. Dragon boating has been shown to have benefits for women recovering from breast cancer. Research done by Professor Don McKenzie, an exercise physiologist from British Columbia, discovered that the impact of dragon boating on this group, which had

women of all ages participating, was positive in the physical sense and, more importantly, the psychological sense. Dragon boating also impacted on other breast cancer survivors who were not in the group. It gave them inspiration to lead full and active lives.

The number of women diagnosed with breast cancer has risen in the last 20 years. In 2002 just over 12,000 women were diagnosed, compared to just over 5,000 in 1983, and that number is expected to continue to rise. The good news is that a woman's risk of dying from breast cancer before the age of 85 is declining from a one in 29 risk in 1983 to a one in 36 risk in 2004. Australia has one of the best survival rates from breast cancer—higher than that of New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The Dragons Abreast group paddle to show that there is quality of life despite breast cancer. The focus on team work helps to create a bond between survivors who are helping one another gain self-confidence and a sense of control in their lives in an unpredictable situation. The team also helps individuals to understand that they are not alone in having breast cancer and that there are other survivors out there who provide inspiration to each other to keep moving forward and get a renewed passion for life.

The physical aspect of the sport allows survivors to see their accomplishments; they can feel themselves getting fitter and stronger each time they paddle. It is truly inspiring to see the pink dragon boat, with its survivors on board, paddling across Cullen Bay Marina in Darwin. One Sunday I had the pleasure of being able to paddle with them and, I have to say, it was only once that I attempted to do that. It is incredibly physically demanding, and my admiration goes to those women who pursue this sport in the face of the illness from which they have suffered.

The Dragons Abreast Australia founder, Michelle Hanton, is a Darwinite, and she should not be forgotten. In fact, I know she will be long remembered for her efforts in this area. It is due to her grit, determination and passion that Dragons Abreast was established, and is now nationwide. Michelle was herself diagnosed with breast cancer in 1997, and 10 years later she is still working tirelessly to support other survivors. In June this year she was given an Order of Australia Medal in recognition for services to women's health, particularly as the founder of Dragons Abreast Australia. She has also been honoured with the Chief Minister's Women's Achievement Award in 2001, and was named Northern Territory Business Woman of the Year in 2004. It is not hard to see why she has won such prestigious awards.

Michelle was absolutely instrumental in helping Dragons Abreast reach all corners of Australia. She helped branches establish themselves, even visiting those branches to provide that much needed support,

drive, relentless energy and enthusiasm. It is pretty hard to say no to Michelle, I have to say. She made herself available to members for support and advice on all matters relating to dragon boating and surviving breast cancer. As if this was not enough, inspired by the first international breast cancer survivor dragon boat regatta in Canada in 2005, she headed up the organising committee for Abreast in Australia, the first dragon boat regatta in this country where every participant was a breast cancer survivor. This was held in the last weekend of September 2007 on the Sunshine Coast and involved many trips interstate to organise sponsorship and to attend meetings. The regatta had 2,000 participants from across the globe, including survivors from Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Hong Kong and Singapore. Michelle is also a founding member of what is now known as Internationally Abreast, an Australian-Canadian initiative.

I want to take this occasion this evening to congratulate Michelle, to put on record my acknowledgement of her well-deserved Order of Australia Medal and to congratulate Dragons Abreast Australia, with all its participating members, on a fantastic cause that brings hope and inspiration to countless breast cancer sufferers. This keeps the focus on increasing awareness of breast cancer and on giving hope to those who have just been diagnosed, and it helps women improve their fitness and their strength, allowing them to live full and active lives despite having been diagnosed with breast cancer. The organisation also helps in keeping their representatives educated and skilled to enable them to assist those who need it. In the Northern Territory there is the Northern Territory Breast Cancer Support Group, and it is so vital in helping women to assist each other, and allowing them to talk to someone who has had the same experience and who can provide assistance to them if they need it. This is done through workshops and, in some instances, through attendance at conferences and courses that will further their skills in specific areas. It is due to these representatives that Dragons Abreast is able to help so many women so effectively. They provide much needed support and enthusiasm to give women diagnosed with breast cancer the encouragement to fight on and survive.

So once again this evening I want to congratulate Michelle Hanton and Dragons Abreast Australia on the fantastic work they have done these past ten years. This Saturday, in the Northern Territory, they will be celebrating their 10th anniversary with a dinner at Parliament House, hosted by the Speaker, Jane Aagaard, who herself is a survivor of breast cancer. I hope that they continue their mission to inspire women and to give them hope for life after breast cancer, and I certainly want to put on record my congratulations once again in reaching their 10th anniversary. I know that this will be the first decade of celebrations of this group, with many more to come.

Gynaecological Cancer

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (10.20 pm)—There seems to be a bit of a theme going on this evening, Senator Crossin! Last Saturday night, my friend former Senator Ruth Webber and I, and several hundred other people, gathered together at the Roundhouse Theatre at the University of New South Wales for the third Comedy for Cancer event. We were very fortunate in 2006 to meet an extraordinary woman, Tanya Smith. She gave evidence in Perth to our inquiry into gynaecological cancer. Tanya submitted her story of being diagnosed, as a young woman of 40, with ovarian cancer. As she said in her evidence, she did not even know what it was when she got the diagnosis, but she knew there was something wrong. So Tanya gave us a submission and a chance to see into her life and the life of her partner, Cathy. But there was much more. Tanya was not prepared to just go through the medical process; she was absolutely determined that through her efforts money would be raised for the ongoing treatment of ovarian cancer in this country. She had been fortunate enough to be involved in clinical trials. In a number of the inquiries that the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs has done on this issue, the absolute importance of clinical trials in the ongoing treatment of people who have cancer, and also their future survival, has been reiterated over and over again by professional people and also by those of us who are working through the process ourselves.

In Tanya's evidence in August 2006 she said that it was important for her to be involved in the clinical trial. But, as she said, in the long term:

... anyone who has been in a trial realises that you do so not only to try to benefit yourself, which is probably unlikely in the short term; in the long term it is benefiting everybody who has ovarian cancer. The information is invaluable.

In her submission, Tanya talked about the support that she had been given by Professor Michael Friedlander, who was also a submitter to our inquiry. Professor Friedlander is involved with an organisation with the most unattractive name, ANZGOG, the Australia and New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group. This group is a network of clinicians and researchers dedicated to improving prevention, detection, treatment and end of life care for women with gynaecological cancers. It is made up of technicians and professionals from across a range of areas who volunteer to be involved in this process and to identify services that can be provided to women who are working through their own processes.

Professor Friedlander says that clinical trials are widely recognised as the best way to improve outcomes for all cancers. Gynaecological cancers are no exception. There are a range of trials going on at the moment across the world, and ANZGOG makes sure that Australian women can be part of that, but it costs a