

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP Minister for Communications

Belyndy Rowe Senior Associate, Bird & Bird, sits down with **the Hon Michelle Rowland MP**, to discuss the Minister's career and thoughts on International Women's Day. Minister Rowland is the Minister for Communications in the government of Anthony Albanese following the ALP's victory in the 2022 Australian federal election. Prior to entering Parliament, she was a senior lawyer specialising in competition and regulation in the telecommunications, media and technology sectors.

BELYNDY ROWE: Thank you for chatting with us, Minister. Did you always want this job? How did your career path lead you here?

THE HON MICHELLE ROWLAND MP: Being the Minister for Communications, or a Minister at all, was not part of the plan. However, it happens to mark the perfect intersection of communications law and my grounding belief that everybody, regardless of their means or postcode, should have equality of opportunity to succeed in life. And now, it is the greatest privilege of my life to make positive change in my area of policy passion.

BELYNDY: What recent events in the Australian media law landscape occupy your attention?

MICHELLE: The exacerbation of misinformation and disinformation in the digital age, given even greater prominence since the pandemic, is an issue that continues to demand reform in a technical and policy sense, affecting the role I'm in on a day-to-day basis.

Misinformation and disinformation have the real potential to cause harm – from Australian consumers, to the Fourth Estate. We're up against anti-democratic forces at a time where democracy is fragile. Preventing harm that misinformation and disinformation can cause, is part of a bigger protective piece in keeping Australians safe.

The sheer immensity of misinformation and disinformation online means Government must approach this in a collaborative way. And we have: we engage with industry, across portfolios, and are making a clear-eyed assessment of the challenge. Accordingly, we decided we need extra enforcement powers to keep Australians safe from information that can cause harm.

BELYNDY: What's the best work-related advice you've ever received?

MICHELLE: "Pick your battles".

BELYNDY: What energises you about work?

MICHELLE: Being around smart people; including the Department, individuals right across the sector, the agencies in my portfolio, and our Ministerial Office. Everyone wants to solve problems and make Australia better.

You're not in the Communications sector unless you're passionate about this area and the outcomes it can achieve – from broadcasting, to telco, to media. Ultimately, everyone is in it because we want people to be connected, and in a way that is safe.

BELYNDY: What's the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

MICHELLE: The 2010 election was certainly the greatest risk I have taken as a professional. I was elected on the slim margin of less than a whole percentage point, at a 0.8 per cent margin.

By putting my hand up to be the Federal Member for Greenway, I was trading in a challenging but balanced career trajectory as a telecommunications lawyer on the rise, forfeiting a stable professional life and submitting myself to public scrutiny and my family to separation.

I call this a multifaceted risk matrix, and I live with that risk every day. But, the bigger the risk, the bigger the reward – and it continues to be my life's greatest privilege to serve this country and make real reforms. That's why I don't waste a day in the job.



BELYNDY: If you could have dinner with any woman – living or passed, real or fictional, who would it be and why?

MICHELLE: Sansa Stark from Game of Thrones. She had the most difficult life, and still became Queen of the North – the greatest character arc of all time. And she had the best line in screen history: "I'm a slow learner, it's true. But I learn".

BELYNDY: The 2023 International Women's Day campaign theme is #EmbraceEquity. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

MICHELLE: 'Embracing equity' means addressing systemic disadvantages so all women can access opportunities to succeed. It's all about a fair go. Putting this into action, this means reaching out to women who may need an extra hand, anytime and anywhere.

I have always tried to do that and continue to challenge myself to keep true to that.

BELYNDY: Thank you for sharing your wisdom with us! Happy International Women's Day! Thanks very much for your time.