



# informed

Issue 389

January 2009

## Inside this issue:

Feminism's Achievements 1970-2008	3
WEL letter to Federal Government	5
Paid Parental Leave	8
Reform of Same Sex Relationships—Comment	9
Reviews of 'Making Women Count'	10

## WELCOME TO 2009 - WHY AREN'T WE 'THERE' YET?

"There" is a utopian society where women's participation and potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected and where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

Despite the dire world financial situation, there is some hope for positive changes in the Federal arena. We are delighted about the amount of consultation occurring, after so many years of effectively being sidelined or ignored, but have a concern about the resources required in community groups staffed by volunteers to respond to this new situation.

As in 2008, there will be much activity on the Federal scene this year, including decisions to be made in two key areas affecting women: Paid Parental Leave and pension and tax changes.

During 2008, we made submissions on those issues as well as on:

- Budget planning - January 2008
- Fair Pay Commission
- Government machinery for women's issues
- 2020 Summit (and the lack of women leaders)
- Effectiveness of the Sex Discrimination Act
- Review of the Abortion Ban for AusAid
- National women's health policy
- Budget analysis - May 2008
- Gender wage gap
- Violence against women
- Pension review

More submissions will shortly be required on:

- Child care

Next WEL Meeting will be held on

Monday

2nd February 2009

6-8pm

at the WEL office

66 Albion Street

Surry Hills

ALL WELCOME

WEL NSW Inc is a member of WEL Australia and is dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected, where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

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All members are invited and encouraged to contribute or comment. Ideas, comments, articles or clippings from other media all gratefully accepted. Content may be edited.

The editor(s) happily read emails sent to welnsw@comcen.com.au and hard copy articles or letters can be posted to the WEL office.

Deadlines for contributions to the next editions: 9 February, 9 March. There is no newsletter in December. WEL-Informed is copyright. Material may be reproduced, acknowledgement required.

Editor for this edition: Lorraine Slade, Advice/Mailout Team: WELNSW Executive, Saskia Maia

Join the national WEL email list, email your name, email address and your WEL group (eg NSW) to owner-wel-members@lists.nwjc.org.au

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Views expressed in WEL-Informed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect WEL policy. Unsigned material, apart from inserts, is by the WEL-Informed editorial team.

- Tax and pensions
- Fair Pay Commission and IR legislation
- Human Rights Legislation

But in NSW it is a different story... There are stories of gloom and doom in most of the newspapers and from political reporters, with many examples given of how the current government appears to have lost its way. There is much wrangling over infrastructure investment decisions while provision of services is in danger of being put on one side. The NSW Government appears to have pulled up the drawbridge and is not in consulting mode.

We made submissions on Child Protection and there is an Inquiry into Domestic Violence, but not much seems to happen, even when we do lobby.

The NSW State Plan, introduced in 2007 and criticised by WEL and other women's groups for its lack of specific policies for women, has not resurfaced and has not been commented upon by the bureaucrats. The setting up of a Domestic Violence Unit in the Premier's Department may prove to be an advantage - but we are still waiting for the benefits said to come from the collapse of the Department for Women into the Office for Women in the Premier's Department. So far, women's issues do not seem to be on the agenda of the Premier.

Women's groups need to be active and vocal and remind politicians and bureaucrats, **yet again**, that women are 52% of the population and have some different needs and issues than men. If we don't do it, we can be sure that the "blokes" won't.

The theme for IWD in 2009 is "**Why aren't we 'there' yet?**" and it seems appropriate to raise this question at this time. WEL has been promoting change for the 37 years of its existence - and some of the issues are the same now as then. We are impatiently waiting for the power brokers (usually men) to become enlightened and recognise these needs.

It seems unforgivable that in 2009 the economic argument "can't afford to implement these changes" is being floated for the non-introduction of paid maternity leave. Yet we see business run rampant and almost destroy child care services through greed and bad policy, and financial institutions undermined through unfettered and risky investment decisions.

WEL has written to all Federal politicians to urge them not to miss this opportunity of implementing Paid Maternity Leave and therefore recognising the importance of the paid and unpaid work of women.

We wish you all a Happy New Year and invite you to contact the WEL NSW office to discuss issues that you would like to see highlighted on the political agenda and areas where you feel you'd like to be more active.

***The Executive of WEL NSW***

## FEMINISM'S ACHIEVEMENTS

BY JOAN BIELSKI

Some thoughts for 2009 and for giving to those women and men who think women now have equality -

### Achievements 1970-2008:

- Greater acceptance of women's claims for equality in education, training and employment, in law and social life generally.
- Equal pay for equal work and the minimum wage for women workers legalised.
- Many more women accessing higher education and training and having greater access to well paid jobs.
- A more efficient economy in that it benefits from the better developing, using and the better rewarding the talents of the female half of the population.
- More women in high status decision making and influential positions in politics, (approx. 30%), the judiciary, public administrations, business, unions and in major NGOs.
- Greater access to child care for working mothers.
- Women's greater control of their lives through better control of their fertility because of better access to information and medically administered abortion being available.
- Less need and willingness for women to tolerate unhappy marriages plus marriage laws which are more protective of women as mothers and which provide for fairer division of family assets on the dissolution

of marriage.

- Better provision for female specific health care, for fertility control and abortion.
- Feminists documented violence against women as a feminist issue and established Women's Refuges, demanding and getting public funding for this purpose.
- Federal and State Anti-Discrimination legislation as a base for asserting individual women's rights and for setting benchmark decisions and precedents which can engender systems change.
- A less sexist society reflected in a somewhat less sexist language.

### Countervailing Forces and Unfinished Business:

- Feminism now unfashionable while its job is unfinished.
- Feminism no longer news and when mentioned it is often in derogatory terms and depicted as divisive, anti-motherhood and anti-femininity.
- Media still reporting women achievers in government, business, politics, sport and the professions by first referring to their marital and maternal status and still failing to report on and analyse matters of significance to women's welfare and their socioeconomic status.
- A growing conservatism being articulated by politicians, churchmen, public pundits and

Read 'Making Women Count' the WEL History for more detail of feminism's achievements

their female allies in the media.

- While Federal and State Anti-discrimination legislation is successful in many individual cases, and in setting precedents which forcing attitude and practice change, it is sometimes too slow, too painful and expensive for some individual complainants and does not as yet address systemic discrimination, an example of which is how the national tax and social security system interact to discriminate against women with children who work for a wage.
- Men in high places in government, public administration, the judiciary, business and unions still making policy and decisions about what is good for women according to their views about women and without consulting women's organisations and welfare groups.
- Women candidates for public office still disadvantaged by the fact that women rarely have access to big money and by individual politicians and political parties accepting large donations, which corrupts the political process and advantages those already in control of the political parties.
- A labour market which still does not provide for pay equity and does not enforce equal pay or equal opportunity in employment or education and training.
- Women in high places frequently do not use their influence to assist other women.
- Many female beneficiaries of the feminist gains, especially some high achievers not willing to acknowledge their debt to feminism, sometimes publicly distancing themselves from it and not supportive of other women.
- Women politicians cannot always be relied upon to further women's rights and welfare. For example, so far few have not spoken out on paid maternity leave.
- Complacency among younger women, taking their present wellbeing for granted, not aware that our gains can be taken away or circumvented or negated by such measures as Work Choices.
- Women on average everywhere are still less well paid than men, so they have less chance to accumulate wealth than men and are more likely to be impoverished in old age.
- Child care sometimes not available where wanted, often expensive, under staffed and dominated by the profit motivated sector.
- Abortion is still contentious and not yet legitimised by legislation, except in Victoria.
- Limited success in fertility control information in reaching the young and the socially and economically disadvantaged reflected in the numbers of abortions, which in turn may endanger the availability of abortion as a right.
- Divisive pro-natalist policies (eg baby bonus) instead of paid maternity leave.
- Women remain the primary carers for children, for the aged and the disabled in the absence of males taking equal responsibility. as well as the less than adequate public provision of services.
- Violence against women, including rape and spouse murder still occurring at all levels of society, as evidenced in crime and rape statistics both in both civil society and in war zones. (In 2004, Access Economics report stated that the 408 100 reported cases of violence against women, estimated as 87% of all cases, cost the Australian economy \$8.1 billion per annum in health, justice system and welfare payments.)
- Growth of industries hostile to feminism, such as the pornography industry and raunch culture.
- Excesses in the women's fashion magazines and the fashion industry which attack women's feelings of self worth with their emphasis on and the definition of beauty as thin and youth, and which promote fashions that emphasise women's sexuality rather than comfort and utility.

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Continued from page 4)

- The movement's failure to make a significant difference for women in poor countries.
- Failure to have restrictive conditions on fertility control in the AUSAID Guidelines.
- The growth of sex slave traffic in Australia and internationally.
- The splintering of the movement into women's welfare and single issue lobbies.
- Tiredness and loss of membership in the organized feminist movement and failure to attract sufficient young members to renew and reinvent the movement, especially organized advocacy feminism.

**Joan Bielski**

## **WEL LETTER TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

*Recently, WEL sent a letter to all Government MPs and Senators urging them to hold firm on providing Paid Maternity Leave, as supported by the (interim) Productivity Commission Report, for a range of compelling reasons including social equity, welfare of babies and economic. Though it's not a great time of year for lobbying, please keep the pressure up by emailing or writing to your local member and federal politicians on this matter. Budget decisions for 2009 will be made in early 2009, so it's important to avoid us being seen as an easy target. Specific letters could be sent to key decision makers: Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, Wayne Swan, Lindsay Tanner, Jenny Macklin, Tanya Plibersek and Chris Bowen. Titles and contact details can be found on the Parliament of Australia website: [www.aph.com.au](http://www.aph.com.au). The text of the message is as follows:*

"WEL urges you to support the introduction of paid maternity leave in the 2009 budget, based on the recommendations of the Productivity Commission, namely the introduction of 18 weeks' publicly funded leave paid at the minimum wage rate, plus two weeks for partners on a take it or lose it basis.

While the Productivity Commission's recommendations do not meet the more desirable target of 26 weeks' leave, they represent a major progressive leap forward by recognising that caring for babies is a workplace issue for both women and men.

The recommended approach by the Productivity Commission is particularly welcome in targeting lower paid and vulnerable workers. It is essential for the well-being of babies and their mothers.

We believe that this Labor Government was elected with a clear understanding that paid maternity leave would be introduced in some form or other. This initiative, designed to bring Australia up to international paid parental leave standards, has received widespread support in the community.

Despite the global financial crisis, now is not the time to step back from this initiative.

The stated costs of introducing paid maternity leave is substantially reduced with the redirection of existing entitlements such as the baby bonus. In effect, the first 13 weeks of the scheme is already covered through the transfer of existing expenditure. There are economic benefits in increasing participation rates of women in the workforce and in retaining skilled workers.

Above all, this is an issue that goes to the heart of social justice and quality of life for women and their families, especially the most vulnerable. Paid maternity leave is an initiative whose time has come and its introduction in this coming budget will be seen as one of the major achievements of the Rudd Labor Government. We urge you not to let this opportunity slip away."

Josefa Green  
WEL NSW

## WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION KIT LAUNCHED

**The Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Government Office for Women today [18 December 2008] released Women's Human Rights, an educational kit of fact sheets about the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).**

Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick said, "The Women's Human Rights education kit provides people with a clear and basic understanding of international human rights, particularly as they relate to women."

CEDAW enshrines women's right to be free from discrimination in all areas of life including education, health, employment, public and political life, law, economic life, sport and culture. It is the key international human rights document which ensures that the human rights of women are protected and fulfilled. The Australian Government reports to the CEDAW Committee in the UN every four years.

"The Women's Human Rights kit will increase community understanding about how to use the human rights standards enshrined in CEDAW," Ms Broderick said. "Understanding our rights is a good step towards

ensuring that they are protected and fulfilled, so I hope this kit gives people a good grounding to engage with the human rights of women in their work and every day life."

The kit also includes new information about the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which comes into force in Australia in March 2009. The Optional Protocol gives women in Australia the ability to

take a complaint about a breach of their rights under CEDAW to the CEDAW Committee.

Commissioner Broderick said that 2008 had seen a number of positive opportunities in relation to women's rights in Australia, such as the national consultation into human rights protections, the Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Sex Discrimination Act and the government's consideration of a national paid parental leave scheme.

Ms Broderick said she was hopeful that the new year would bring with it many more opportunities to strengthen the protection and fulfilment of women's rights.

"I want all of us to work towards a future where all people in Australia have the same access to services, opportunities, choices and freedoms, regardless of their gender," Commissioner Broderick said.

"The Women's Human Rights education pack will help give people an understanding of the international framework which supports this goal."

The kit can be downloaded from the Australian Human Rights Commission website at

[www.humanrights.gov.au/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/)

"I want all of us to work towards a future where all people in Australia have the same access to services, opportunities, choices and freedoms, regardless of their gender,"

## VIRGINIA BELL TO REPLACE KIRBY ON HIGH COURT

Michael Pelly  
December 15, 2008 *The Australian*

NSW Supreme Court judge Virginia Bell was today named as the replacement for Justice Michael Kirby on the High Court.

**Justice Bell** began her legal career with the Redfern Legal Service in 1978 before enjoying a stellar career as a criminal barrister until her elevation to the bench in 1999.

Today's announcement by the federal

Government means that three of the last four appointments to the court have been females.

Justice Bell joins Susan Crennan and Susan Kiefel on the court, which was an all-male affair when Mary Gaudron retired in 2003.

Justice Kirby will retire on February 2, with Justice Bell to be sworn in the following day as the 48th judge of the court.

### ON A LIGHTER NOTE -

Recent attempts by Ref. Fred Nile and MP Paul Gibson to curb **women** topless sunbathers (not men of course) have been soundly routed by Emily Maguire's article SMH tongue-in-cheek article about how women have learned to deal with inappropriate lust - so why can't men?"

Emily Maguire's article can be found at -

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/the-truth-on-perving-women-are-better-than-men-at-controllingtheir-lust/2009/01/01/1230681658492.html>

Our reader particularly liked the following extract from Emily's article -

"They [women] know, for example, that no matter how gorgeous a passing man is, it's not OK to scream out an invitation for sex from across the street (although a polite, situation-appropriate compliment is almost always appreciated)."

#### **Contribution from a WEL-Informed Reader**

The Rudd Government is encouraging older women to become more physically active, with a new report released (on 14 November 08) which highlights the health benefits of exercise for women over the age of 45.

The *Physical Activity and Health in Mid-Age and Older Women* report, commissioned by the Office for Women, found that exercise is physically and mentally beneficial for middle-aged and older women.

The report found that between 2001 and 2004, the percentage of mid-age women doing 30 minutes of physical activity on most days rose from 45 to 54 per cent. This was primarily attributed to walking.

Copies of the report are available online at [www.ofw.facsia.gov.au/publications](http://www.ofw.facsia.gov.au/publications).

New Report Finds It's  
Never Too Late for  
Older Women to  
Exercise

## PAID PARENTAL LEAVE – AUSTRALIA SAYS YES

The national Women's Secretariats today called on the Federal Minister for the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek, to ensure that Australian women and men with children are able to stay in the workforce through the provision of appropriate paid parental leave.

The Secretariats, whose affiliated organisations represent over two million women throughout Australia, were responding to media speculation after comments made by Federal Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner that paid maternity leave would be added to the list of items likely to bite the global economic crisis dust.

In June 2007 women's organisations decided to bring this issue back onto the political agenda, stressing the need to bring Australia up to international paid parental leave standards. A NewsPoll survey commissioned in partnership with infant and child development groups showed overwhelming support for paid parental leave – news that was presented to political party leaders.

Kevin Rudd, in a pre-election promise, committed to paid parental leave being reviewed by the Productivity Commission. In office, he has said "it's time to bite the bullet".

The Productivity Commission's interim report recommends Australian women receive 18 weeks of paid parental leave, with two weeks paid paternity leave available to all fathers, on a take it or leave it basis.

"We need to increase the participation of women in the workforce to address Australia's labour shortage" said Caroline Lambert, Executive Director of the YWCA Australia.

"Now more than ever before we need skilled women who are in the workforce to remain in the workforce" said Marie Coleman, Chair of the Social Policy Committee of the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW).

"The Commission's draft recommendations are generous for low income women, who are the least likely to have an employer-provided scheme" she said. "They make important points about the well-being of babies and their mothers at a time when the infant needs a parent's full-time attention - which a paid parental leave scheme can ensure."

"In the era of evidence based policy I would hope that the days of government policy being dictated by finance ministers are gone forever." said Caroline Lambert. "The community is determined that paid parental leave does not become another casualty of the global financial crisis" she said.

### Media Contacts

Marie Coleman Chair, Social Policy Committee, National Foundation for Australian Women 0414483067

Caroline Lambert Executive Director, YWCA Australia 0422598008

"In the era of evidence based policy I would hope that the days of government policy being dictated by finance ministers are gone forever."



## SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS REFORMS

The Federal government has passed legislation that counters many of the discrimination that exists against same sex couples. This will bring many benefits for Gay and Lesbian couples. However, there are some particular problems that will occur because of changes in the areas of income support and social security with same sex pairs now be assessed as financially linked couples, even if they have always kept their finances separate. This will affect those low income women, for instance, who may be on parenting payments and Newstart, who may lose their independent income because the other partner earns a higher income, and may cause problems and distress where two aged pensioners are living together.

The model is that of a marriage, where one member is assumed to earn more and support the other. These ideas are residues of past gender inequalities and need to be adjusted in recognition of changing economic and social mores re living together, Given that more heterosexual couples choose not to 'marry' in the conventional sense, the whole idea of enforcing a de facto relationship on people just to save government spending is problematic. This assumption of cohabiting is used against many sole parents now.

Should these inappropriate ways of defining an interdependent financial relationship in income support payments be extended to same sex couples? Is it sensible to add even more confusion to an already somewhat fraught area by putting same sex couples into the same constraints that fail to serve the current recipients well?

These are more logical way of defining financial interdependency and the cur-

rent system is flawed and will cause distress to some particularly vulnerable groups. This includes older recipients who have had neither the time to arrange their affairs to optimise payments, nor the experiences of past encouragement of communal pooling of resources that tax and other systems have encouraged.

Lesbian couples may have particular problems as their histories often include long experience of lower pay, often fragmented employment records, little or no superannuation and sex discrimination in their early working years. Some have come out of marriages and have raised children. Fewer women than men have any super, most will have a third or less than the same aged man. Older women (70 plus) are not likely to have any and will not inherit the super contributions of their male partner when he dies first. Women also live longer than men and there are more in all the older age brackets.

Women also may share premises with other women, maybe in some cases without ever having spelled out their relationships with other family or friends. Sharing with a same sex best friend would be seen as normal for non married women but still a bit suss for a male. Paid work would not necessarily produce savings and super and may well have been interrupted by care for relatives or others. Work in low paid areas such as nursing, community support and child care also reduced lifetime earnings. These households which have been able to manage on two single pension rates, with little

*(Continued on page 10)*

Is it sensible to add even more confusion to an already somewhat fraught area by putting same sex couples into the same constraints that fail to serve the current recipients well?

## SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS REFORMS .....CONT'D

*(Continued from page 9)*

or no savings, will find managing on the married rate problematic. Those over 70 are also moving into age groups where their costs increase.

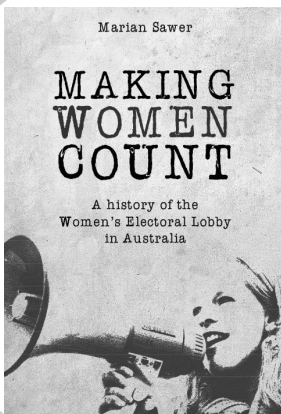
The government should Grandfather existing Age pensioners and older recipients of the Disability Support Payment, so they retain the current

payments. Future recipients would then have a decade to both allocate their money to savings differentially and to practice sharing. This is why it is reasonable to being this in for those over 55. Grandfathering allows a period of adjustment at relatively low costs.

**Eva Cox**

## REVIEWS OF MARIAN SAWER'S 'MAKING WOMEN COUNT'

The following quotes are extracts from two recent reviews of Marian Sawer's 'Making Women Count—a History of the Women's Electoral Lobby in Australia'



The first is by Sarah Maddison, University of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW -

'.....what do we make of the persistence of social movement organisations long after the peak of mobilisation has passed?

It is this [latter] question that frames Marian Sawer's excellent and extraordinarily detailed history of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). Based on the rich vein of data mined for the ARC funded WEL History project – including survey and focus group data and archive material from all over Australia – Sawer has been forensic in her documentation of the emergence, development and decline of WEL.'

The full review can be found at -

<http://www.assa.edu.au/Publications/Dialogue/dial32008.pdf>  
page 62

The second is by lawyer, Angela Mende. The full review can be found in the December 2008 edition of the Law Society Journal -

'WEL was influential in three areas. It galvanised educated, generally middle-class women, many with strong personal political connections, into political activism. Its agenda coincided with, or was acceptable to, largely leftist politics of the period. It also pushed for what has been described as Australia's femocrat experiment, whereby so-called women's affairs were given cabinet status and new career paths such as in equal-opportunity units. Female politicians and ministers of the period were often affiliated to WEL.'



# connected

## WEL Executive Meeting

Monday

2nd February

6pm

66 Albion St  
Surry Hills

ALL WELCOME

## SILENT VIGIL FOR PEACE IN GAZA

Initiated by representatives of Women in Black—Sydney  
[www.wibsydney.org](http://www.wibsydney.org)

Thursday nights from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m at the Sydney Town Hall — Women in Black are planning on maintaining the women's vigil every Thursday evening while the attacks on Gaza continue.

We invite all women to join a silent vigil of mourning.

We condemn the ongoing military attacks on Gaza.

We stand with thousands in Israel and around the world who seek peace with justice for Palestinians.

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### You're invited ... to celebrate IWD

International Women's Day march and rally on Saturday March 7, assembling at the Town Hall from 11.15pm and marching to Hyde Park. Bring a group of friends or come as an individual and enjoy the atmosphere. Great speakers, fantastic stalls. For those with lots of energy, the Mardi Gras parade will take place in the evening.

More information on how to participate in IWD on the IWD website: <http://iwdsydney.wordpress.com> or contact Anne on [annebarber@bigair.com.au](mailto:annebarber@bigair.com.au)

### NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

WELcome to new members who joined in November and December and thanks to all members who renewed their membership in November and December, and to those who included a donation. Your ongoing support is invaluable.

### Consider a Bequest to WEL NSW

A bequest enables you to perpetuate your ideas and make a difference far into the future. Please remember WEL in your will.

The following wording is recommended:

I bequeath the sum of (amount written in words and figures) free of all debts, duties and taxes, to the Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW) Inc (ABN 50 242 525 012) for its general purposes, and I declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of the Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW) Inc shall be complete discharge to my executors for this gift, and that my executor shall not be bound to see to the application of it.

If 'RENEWAL' is stamped in your newsletter and/or a renewal form is enclosed or attached to your email copy, your membership renewal is now due. Please renew your membership of WEL NSW

**Don't forget to let WEL know if you change address.**

**WEL NSW Executive**

Convenor: Jozefa Sobski  
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Tabitha Ponnambalam, Eva Cox

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**WEL NSW**

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website : <http://welnsw.org.au>

**To join WEL NSW**

Download a membership form from  
<http://welnsw.org.au> or phone (02 9212  
4374) for a membership package

IF NOT CLAIMED WITHIN 7 DAYS PLEASE RETURN TO:

**WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY (NSW) Inc**  
**66 ALBION STREET**  
**SURRY HILLS NSW 2010**  
**AUSTRALIA**