



# WEL-Informed

## The Newsletter of Women's Electoral Lobby NSW

### Inside this issue:

WEL Australia News	2
WELNSW Convenor's Report	4
Women and Home- lessness—new research	5
Income Management	6
Reproductive Rights for Women	7
Introducing the new WELA/WELNSW Coordinator	8

### GOWARD HALTS EXPERT ADVICE ON STATUS OF WOMEN

Minister for Women Pru Goward has revealed the Premier's Expert Advisory Council for Women has not met since the March election, Shadow Minister for the Status of Women Sophie Cotsis said.

"The Premier's Expert Advisory Council for Women is supposed to provide specialist advice to the NSW Government about issues affecting the status of women in NSW," Ms Cotsis said.

"Holding a Premier's Expert Advisory Council for Women meeting should be a priority for the new Minister who is meant to put issues affecting women at the heart of government.

"It is clear the Minister and Premier are putting women's issues at the back of the priority list with the decision to wait nearly 12 months until an expert advisory council meeting is held."

Ms Goward admitted to the Budget Estimates' Committee that:

- The Premier's Expert Advisory Council has not met since the election of the Coalition Government;
- Ms Goward did not intend to convene the Council until "early next year" – meaning almost 12 months without any meetings;
- Ms Goward has not publicly advertised new positions and will appoint council members "by invitation only";
- There is no timetable for the appointment of new members; and
- There is no formal opportunity for women interested in joining to express interest.

"The Minister for Women has frozen the Premier's Expert Advisory Council for

*(Continued on page 8)*

#### Next WEL meeting

Wednesday  
7th December

6.00 pm at

66 Albion Street  
Surry Hills

ALL WELCOME

RSVP 02 9212 4374

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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Deadline for contributions to the next edition: 13 January 2012 There is no newsletter in December. WEL-Informed is copyright. Material may be reproduced, acknowledgement required.

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WELNSW Communications Group, Anne Barber, Anna Logan

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## WEL AUSTRALIA NEWS FROM HELEN L'ORANGE

The WEL Australia Annual General Meeting was held on 30 Oct in Canberra. Over that weekend the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) held a Face to Face Meeting.

The NCC members are -

<b>ACT</b>	Elizabeth Kentwell and Sarah Brasch
<b>VIC</b>	Kerry Lovering and Kathy MacDermott
<b>SA</b>	Felicity Lord
<b>WA</b>	Cheryl Arnold and Ruth Greble
<b>NSW</b>	Melanie Fernandez and Helen L'Orange
<b>National</b>	Deb Poulton

The NCC Office Bearers for 2011-2012 are -

<b>Chair</b>	Helen L'Orange
<b>Secretary</b>	Elizabeth Kentwell
<b>Treasurer</b>	Deb Poulton

The four Committee Convenors are -

<b>Communications</b>	Laura McLean
<b>40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary</b>	Melanie Fernandez
<b>Finance</b>	Sarah Brasch
<b>Constitution</b>	Barbara Coddington

Our Coordinator, Melissa Brooks, attended the Canberra meetings and presented a very useful paper on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary planning. WEL's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary presents us with the opportunity to regenerate WEL's advocacy work. A series of state/territory events are being planned.

### Policy Issues

WELA had been involved with 22 submissions over the last 18 months, both WELA initiated submissions and comments and supported some prepared by other organisations. Details of these can be found in my 2010-2011 Chair's report on the WELA [website](#).

The NCC has identified several policy issues it will work in over the next year. WELA will also be proactive on emerging issues.

*(Continued on page 3)*

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The issues we will be working on include -

- The introduction of the Clean Energy package in July 2012
- Early childhood education including out of school hours care and early childhood development workforce
- Pay Equity including Fair Work Australia community services case outcome
- Aged Services
- Disabilities
- Tax reform
- Superannuation
- Housing
- Problem Gambling legislation
- Law Reform Anti Discrimination legislation
- Income Management

NCC will sign off on one page policy documents by 22 January NCC. These will be posted on our website. Media commentary will be based on agreed WEL Policy and authors of policy papers will be the media commentators

#### **Collaboration with Other Women's organisations -**

During the meeting we met with Kathy Richards of the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA). We talked with her about ERA work and where WELA priorities coincide.

ERA work includes Consolidation of Anti- Discrimination Laws, Housing, Budget process training, work emerging from the Women's Voices report especially in relation to out of school hours care, and the launch of ERA's young women's website.

The NCC flagged to Kathy that WELA may be able to take the lead in ERA on Equal Opportunity for Women Agency EOWA legislation when it is tabled in 2012.

WELA will continue to work closely with ERA, Economic Security For Women and Older Women's Network and WAVE. Where we agreed with them we are closely involved with the ERA /EcSec4Women /OWN/WAVE submissions. We attend consultations so that WEL's agenda is also supported by other women's organisations.

In 2012 the bi-monthly meetings will be held 11 am EST on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month, ie 22 January, 18 March, 20 May, 15 July, and 16 September.

The 2012 November Face to Face Meeting and 2011-2012 AGM will be held in Canberra on a date to be advised. The plan is to hold our meeting during the parliamentary sitting period and arrange meetings with Ministers and other parliamentarians.

Around November 2012 the international board of International Alliance of Women (IAW) will meet in Melbourne. WEL Vic will be organising this meeting in co-operation with the League of Women Voters.

## CONVENOR'S REPORT

On 25<sup>th</sup> September WEL NSW had our AGM. Looking back over the year brings out just how much we have done. Here are some of the highlights...

The last year saw a process of regeneration for WEL NSW. We welcomed a number of new additions to the Executive and now have an Executive that is comprised of 50% women under 30. We have created a space for inter-generational dialogue and skill sharing; strengthening the sustainability and reach of our organisation. Our priority issues this year were Reproductive Rights and Pay Equity. We lobbied on these issues in the context of a newly elected minority Federal government, with Australia's first female Prime Minister, and a State election. We held a number of planning days throughout the year to determine and review priorities and strategies.

In the lead up to the State election WEL developed a [Position Statement](#) which focuses on key areas in which women and girls are subject to disadvantage and identifies specific measures which we recommend the NSW Government adopt to create a fairer society for all NSW residents. We met with then Minister for Women, Jodi McKay, Shadow Minister for Women, Pru Goward, and Greens Spokesperson for Women, Cate Faehrmann to provide recommendations from our Position Statement. We hosted a State Election Forum involving a diverse coalition of women's groups.

In the lead up to the election WEL, together with the F Collective, canvassed candidates from 20 key marginal electorates for their views on abortion law reform; providing voters with information on their candidates' views in our efforts to build a campaign towards decriminalising abortion. Candidates' responses were recorded on an interactive map on our website.

The result of the State election was the election of the Coalition in a landslide. The under-representation of women in this new parliament is deeply concerning; with the number of women elected to the Lower House backsliding for the first time in decades.

After the election WEL sent welcomes to all members of the new parliament along with our 2011 Position Statement. WEL met with the newly appointed Shadow Minister Sophie Cotsis and Greens Spokesperson for Women, Cate Faehrmann, to further discuss our Position Statement and priority issues.

WEL participated in various events throughout the year. We took part in celebrations for the Centenary of IWD, Sydney SlutWalk, the annual Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) Face-to-Face Meeting in Canberra, and the Equality Law Conference; and we presented at Camp Betty: a Festival of Sex, Gender and Politics, and the NOWSA conference.

On our priority issue of Pay Equity, WEL Australia collaborated with Women's Equality Think Tank and National Pay Equity Coalition for the women's organisations' [final submission](#).

To progress our campaign for Reproductive Rights WEL recently met with Cate Faehrmann, F Collective and representatives from Women's Abortion Action Campaign to discuss coalition building around this issue. We will now look to gain support from other women's advocacy and community groups.

We have updated our website and ensured a variety of content and contributors. Our weekly e-update, which communicates feminist news and updates on WEL's work, has a rapidly growing subscriber list. The Newsletter continues to be produced bi-monthly. In the last year we have utilised these communicative tools along with facebook and [Twitter](#) to communicate with members, engage other activists and contributed our views on various issues.

In the year to come we hope to further engage members and have developed a plan for outreach activities in the coming months.

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 4)*

My thanks as Convenor go to the Executive for its amazing commitment, work and support during the last year.

For the full annual report go to <http://welnsw.org.au/publications/other-publications/>

**Melanie Fernandez**  
**Convenor**

## NEW REPORT ON WOMEN AND HOMELESSNESS

A report recently released by Swinburne University of Technology and the Salvation Army has highlighted the increasing number of older single women who are at risk of homelessness in their retirement.

Dr Andrea Sharam, the author of "No Home at the End of the Road", surveyed over 100 Victorian women over the age of 40. Dr Sharam found that 58% of the subjects will have inadequate savings to continue to remain in the rental market in their retirement.

The report argues that as baby boomers retire, the issue of single, homeless women will come to the fore in Australia. Dr Sharam demonstrates that the availability of oral contraceptives from the 1960s onwards, and the introduction of "no fault divorce" in 1974 has led to a larger number of single women approaching retirement age.

However, women are still - on average - poorer than men. The factors that lead to this include the persistent 17% gender pay gap in Australia, the ongoing burden of unpaid domestic work that women continue to shoulder and careers broken by childbirth and childrearing.

While there are increasing numbers of women living alone on low incomes, the price of housing has increased at an alarming rate; 'the average house price in the capital cities is now equivalent to over seven years of average earnings; up from three in the 1950s to the early 1980s' (Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia 2008). The cost of rental housing has risen at a similar rate, and housing availability continues to be low.

Dr Sharam argues that the age pension is inadequate to support a private rental arrangement. The age pension assumes that a retiree will own their home upon retirement. Dr Sharam states that renters who exist only on government assistance in retirement will live in "chronic poverty".

In order to address this impending crisis Dr Sharam is advocating for a community land trust based-shared equity model that would allow women to purchase housing cheaply without purchasing the land.

The Women's Electoral Lobby is a member of the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA). ERA is part of the Australians For Affordable Housing Alliance. This alliance is working with a coalition of housing, welfare and community organisations campaigning to put the issue of affordable housing on the national political agenda and advocate for Federal Government action to increase access to affordable housing.

For more information please see: <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/projects/advocating-housing-policy-addresses-needs-women>

Dr Sharam found that 58% of the subjects will have inadequate savings to continue to remain in the rental market in their retirement.

## THE LACK OF EVIDENCE FOR THE BENEFITS OF INCOME MANAGEMENT

**Eva Cox – Research Fellow Jumbunna**  
[Eva.cox@uts.edu.au](mailto:Eva.cox@uts.edu.au) October 2011

Why should feminists oppose income management? Because it will make the lives of many women (and men) much harder for no good reason.

The program has been on the ground in the NT for 4 years and another version in WA for two, yet there is no serious evidence it is benefiting those it has already been foisted on. As much of the official rhetoric implies and openly claims that women want it and that it is good for children and parents, it is important that we look carefully at the evidence and decide whether it is, in fact, good.

The stated intentions of the original income management program, as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, and the more recent reviewed version were to improve family functioning by controlling spending on food etc. A study by the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA), however, showed nearly all the 180 women in their survey were not happy to be on income management. This survey contradicts surveys and statistics quoted by the government to support the program and its various extensions.

Interestingly, the numbers on the government survey are smaller and the methodologies dubious, as they offer no statistically valid indicators of its benefits. This does not stop Minister Jenny Macklin and others claiming that women in the NT have told them they want to retain the program and it is good for them.

The ERA survey was undertaken by a Canberra-based alliance of women's groups, funded by the government, who ran a series of focus groups, interviews and collected questionnaires with women in Alice Springs and Darwin. Most women said the quarantining of their income had had little or no effect on what they bought, and said the Basics card added to the difficulties and costs of paying for goods and services. Very significantly, nearly three quarters of women said they do not feel safer because of the card.

As safety was one of the Government's stated aims, this is further evidence the program has failed. The costs of delivery for this program are substantial, estimated administrative costs are about \$80 per week per person. The last budget announced another five areas including Bankstown (NSW), Shepparton (Victoria) and Logan (Queensland) will have a version of income management from July next year.

One would expect some serious evidence of its benefits before more people were subjected to the difficulties it incurs. This extension defies the evidence and views in many reports including one from the Department of Finance describing it as an expensive program that lacks evidence of benefit and justification.

This is also the view of almost all major welfare agencies, most Aboriginal health and local community organisations as well as independent research groups. The near consensus is that genuinely voluntary Income Management should be made available and compulsion only used where there is evidence of substantial self-harm or families at serious risk of harm.

The Income Management program, in all its forms, is a classic Canberra devised project with little local input or influence. This model does not work as is shown in reports from the Productivity Commission which states top-down programs don't work in Indigenous and presumably other groups like low income women, as good policy needs fairness and local engagement to work.

## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

The birth of the world's seven billionth person in a hospital in Manila was a timely injection into a long-running debate in the Philippines about their national reproductive health policy, and its interaction with a desire to achieve a higher standard of living for its citizens.

In the Philippines, the poorest quintile of women have six children, two more than they report desiring – largely because they lack access to adequate information about reproductive health, and to affordable services that will support them in making the decisions that are best for them and their families. It is a strongly Catholic country that has begun to overcome significant religious and cultural resistance to recognise that equipping women to make and act on choices about family size is crucial to their economic development. And in the Philippines, there is a consensus that increased control over family size is something that women want.

The women's movement has for a long time fought to expand women's access to those reproductive health services, and while we continue to fight for that access and defend the gains we have won, increasingly vocal critics of global population growth give us cause to look back over our shoulders, and ensure that we effectively defend women-led programs of reproductive health that are about women's control of their bodies, and not allowing those health services to be an instrument of a state policy that views particular reproductive choices as more desirable than others – specifically, those that seek to impose any arbitrary idea of what is an acceptable number of children for any woman to have.

There is no way of achieving policies with goals of a strict restriction on population growth that can be sure to be successful without imposing on women's rights and freedoms in a way that we should be very uncomfortable with. There is ample evidence that shows that programs explicitly designed to target population growth are implemented in a fashion that is harmful to the wellbeing of women and their children. These debates largely happen in the developing world, where population growth is considered – rightly or wrongly – as a leading cause of persistent, systemic poverty.

We do not have these discussions in a vacuum. There are hundreds of years of colonialism and racism that colour western actions in developing countries, and attempts to influence debates about population are now met with justified outrage given the history of the West's attempts to control women's reproductive freedoms.

In the debate about universal provision of family planning in the Philippines Senate, conservative Catholic senators opposed to giving women access to those services were able to drum up support for their position based on an argument that this was simply a continuation of those policies of control using American aid money – and people found that argument convincing because it reflected the experience of their grandmothers in an occupied country. Women are largely silenced in these debates – and it's time we made our voices heard.

**Melissa Brooks**  
**Coordinator, WELA and WELNSW**

The women's movement has for a long time fought to expand women's access to those reproductive health services.....



Contact your local  
MP to voice your  
opinion on this issue

*(Continued from page 1)*

Women and is going to appoint new members by invitation only," Ms Cotsis said.

"All women who wish to take a leadership role in our community should be allowed to apply for a position on the council – not just a handpicked group that the Minister invites.

"Ms Goward should convene the Premier's Expert Advisory Council now – then open a transparent appointment process for any new members."

### **INTRODUCING MELISSA BROOKS, THE NEW CO-ORDINATOR FOR WEL AUSTRALIA AND WELNSW**

Melissa Brooks is the new coordinator for WEL NSW and WEL Australia. She studied arts, majoring in history at the University of Sydney with a focus on Australian social history. She has a background in online and social media campaigning as well as grassroots organising, and is interested in strengthening feminist communities around Australia in WEL's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year and beyond.

### **WOMEN WRITERS AND THE MILES FRANKLIN LITERARY PRIZE**

The following is an extract from a Big Ideas keynote speech by Sophie Cunningham\* delivered [in August] at the Melbourne Writers Festival ...

After the announcement of the 2011 Miles Franklin shortlist, Alison Croggon wrote on The Drum: "A world loaded in favour of one s-x accounts for the pyramidal structure of gender. At the wide bottom of the writing world -- the world of amateur writers on the internet, for instance -- women, if anything, dominate. The closer you get to the top, the fewer women there are. And at the very top, as in this year's Miles Franklin, the presence of women is an exception."

What to do about it? One thing is certain: passively assuming women are equal and will gradually work their way to equal status doesn't work. We need some different tools.

I agree with Croggon that the issues surrounding the economic and cultural rights of women are not being resolved by the free market. So, what are these different tools to be?

Well some of the new tools are old tools. There is more talk and there has been a real flourishing of more grassroots action going on in my town of Melbourne, for example. There are feminist salons being held in pubs in Collingwood and a regular event called Women of Letters held at town halls around the place. Recently, there was Slutwalk. A group of us have set up a committee to establish a prize to award women writers. These sound like small things but the number of "small" gestures are increasing at a rate that suggests a real momentum again is developing in the women's movement.

The prize that we're striving to establish -- we're calling ourselves The Stellas --

*(Continued on page 9)*



*(Continued from page 8)*

has received much support but there is no doubt that some people find the idea of affirmative action -- though we think of it more as celebration -- as patronising. I do understand this resistance. Being angry about the inequality that exists is distracting and demoralising. We all spend much of our lives trying not to dwell on such things. Also, we in the arts community like to think we're above all that. But putting our head in the sand isn't going to change things. Anne Summers again. "A lot of people are worried about quotas. Especially women. I hear many women say they want to 'get there on merit'. The trouble is, we do not have a merit-based system in this country. People are promoted for all sorts of reasons -- networks, connections (old school tie, golf buddies), competence, luck, nepotism and so on."

I find it interesting that people who would argue (correctly) that you can't deny climate change because we have a few cool days in a row, or it's been raining in Victoria this year -- that is, who argue you have to look at long-term trends -- are more than happy to say that it's just been a bad year for women's writing or women's theatre. You can argue the toss about any given year; you can't argue with decades of systematic exclusion.

We need to find new ways to advocate for women's voices, in the face of their ongoing marginalisation, both cultural and economic. We need to ignore the inevitable suggestions that to advocate in this way is tokenism, "s-xist", "unfair" or unnecessary. I want to return to Greer's quote "The sight of women talking together has always made men uneasy".

It's worth noting that in the corporate world the pressure is being put on companies to lift their game. All ASX (Australian Security Exchange) companies now have to report annually on the gender breakdown of their workforces, and specifically on senior management and board composition.

They are not having to do so to answer to any particular quota -- but they do need to make their decisions visible and even that seems to have a very positive effect on behaviours. We at the Stella hope that simply by having raised some of the issues we have regarding women and writing that literary editors, and publishers, and judges are pausing for thought.

But obviously simply talking isn't enough. I think that factors such as gender need to be consciously taken into account in judging, awarding grants, or interviewing for jobs. When I've worked as a peer of the literature board of the Australia Council, or been on judging panels, I do think about gender, ethnicity -- whether Tasmania is there, whether there are enough poets -- all these things. We have to. It's part of the job. And I don't mean by that you automatically give prizes or money to work you don't think is worthy -- but you do adjust for your blind spots. To be honest, my blind spot when it came to fiction I chose to publish at Meanjin, the literary journal I edited for three years, was men. I had to autocorrect to make sure that men were getting a fair go, given I tended to gravitate towards the work of women. And I didn't have a problem with doing that.

However, change is not as simple as introducing quotas and passing laws. You can make it illegal for women to be beaten. You can make it illegal for them to be raped. But legislation can't force men -- or indeed women -- to find the style in

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We need to find new ways to advocate for women's voices, in the face of their ongoing marginalisation, both cultural and economic.

(Continued from page 9)

which women write, or paint, or sing more gripping or important. It can't insist that women become more confident and assertive.

You could also argue, to quote Alison Croggon again, that quotas "provide a simple answer that evades the real work." ... [which is] changing the complex of ideologies that situates the white, abled, middle-class male subject as the normative consciousness, and that constitutes anyone else as other. She identifies that work as consciousness raising and ongoing conversation. Again, I would agree with her.

An incident last week involving 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones heckling Sydney Morning Herald journalist Jacqueline Maley at the Convoy of No Confidence rally is just the latest example of a culture in which women are bullied into invisibility.

Leaders in this country are actively cultivating a climate in which women are bullied into disappearing -- even further -- from our culture's public spaces. We need to become more visible and indeed women are beginning, again, to react in more public ways to their ongoing disconnection from culture, and from economic power. A new wave, a fourth wave, if you will, of feminism is needed and is soon to arrive.

\*Sophie Cunningham is an author, editor and co-founder of the Stella Awards

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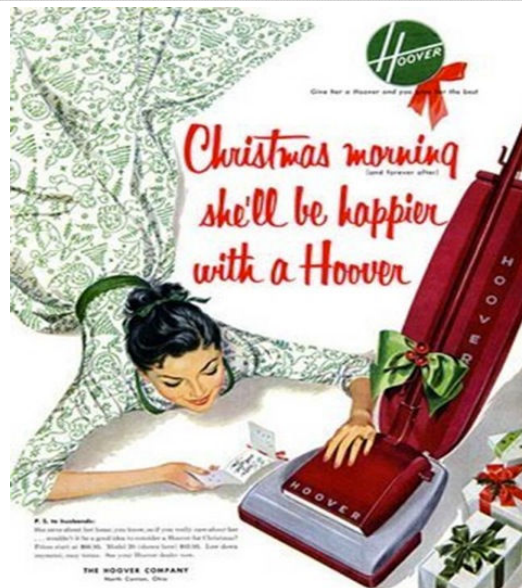
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## A GOOD READ

### Off My Shoulders

Vicki Potempa



Vicki Potempa is a member of WEL and has written her story. In her own words 'For years I have wanted to write about my life and family, to pass on to my grandchildren, but put it off until late 2004. I realized I was not getting any younger, and my brain would probably sink into that twilight of oblivion. I have always searched for stability, sometimes succeeding, often failing, thus the yo-yo of life dominated a large share of my existence—desperately sad days as well as happy ones, and finally the neutral zone.'

Angela Drury, Secretary of the Humanist Society of NSW says of Vicki's book 'I found inspiration as well as interest in this life story of an ordinary woman—migrant, battler, family member and social activist.'

Free copies available from the WELNSW office—phone or fax 02 9212 4374 or email [wel@welnsw.org.au](mailto:wel@welnsw.org.au)

Next WEL  
meeting

Wednesday

7th December

6.00pm  
66 Albion St  
Sydney

ALL WELCOME

### NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

A special welcome to new members, and many thanks to all members who renewed their membership in the past month, and especially to those who gave so generously to WEL.

**Renewal**—If a renewal form is enclosed with your newsletter or included with your email copy, then your membership is now due. We encourage you to renew your membership of WEL as your ongoing support is important to us.

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

### 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.'

**WEL NSW Executive**

Convenor: Melanie Fernandez  
Treasurer: Anne Barber  
Members: Josefa Green, Helen L'Orange, Jozefa Sobski, Charity Danquah, Laura Maclean, Gabe Kavanagh, Lorraine Slade

**National Co-ordination Committee Representative**

Helen L'Orange 0425 244 935

**WELA/WELNSW Coordinator**

Melissa Brooks

**WELNSW Office Co-ordinator**

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**Auditor** Anna Logan

**Public Officer** Cate Turner

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**General, Early Childhood Education and Care, Housing**  
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