

WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY INC. NSW

ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007

Activities prior to and following the NSW State Election took priority for the WEL Executive in the latter part of 2006 until April, 2007. Following that period, cooperative strategies with WEL Australia for the Federal Election were placed on the agenda of the organization and are the major focus until the Election is held.

The release and wide distribution to women's organizations, relevant Ministers and Parliamentary members of all political parties of WEL's **Policy Proposals for NSW in September 2006**, was the culmination of some weeks of development work. This work was undertaken by the Executive in cooperation with representatives from a range of women's organizations and women's services.

WEL identified a set of specific measures which, it recommended, that the NSW Government adopt to redress existing and persisting inequities. The recommendations aimed to expand opportunities for women and girls by changing policies and procedures and taking systemic initiatives to produce a fairer and more equal society.

The Policy Proposals were used as the basis for WEL's critique of the NSW Government's State Plan: **A New Direction for NSW**. The Plan ignored some of the key areas where women and men have differing needs and concerns. It failed to recognize that women and girls in NSW are still socially and economically disadvantaged. It included no gender disaggregated performance indicators relying on gross measures which disguise the misallocation of resources or the inadequacy of allocations to address women's specific needs. While there was a section on *Fairness and Opportunity* in the Plan, it lacked any substantial and relevant gender reference.

Our Policy Proposals and critique led to meetings with Ben Keneally and Susan Calvert of the Premier's Delivery Unit, the area responsible for the Plan's implementation across Government departments and agencies. The meeting highlighted WEL's concerns and subsequent meetings with Dr Liz Coombs and the Director of the Office for Women and her staff reinforced our criticism and raised again the importance of gender sensitive policies and targets. WEL stressed that monitoring and reporting on gender specific data and indicators was essential to the successful implementation of a whole range of strategies.

WEL met with Ministerial Advisers and the Premier's Women's Adviser regarding Departmental responses to our Policy proposals which had also been sent to all ALP members of Parliament to maintain the momentum. We followed up with meetings with key politicians and candidates.

Work on the **WEL Australia** website (www.org.au) continued throughout the year with WEL NSW Executive and Support Group member, Natasha Pollock, contributing to its design and population with relevant content. This work is still not complete and has become more urgent for the Federal Election.

The NSW website was regularly updated by Anne Barber. It provides an important medium for reaching a broader audience which is comfortable with web use as a political tool. Its upgrading is on the agenda for 2007 and UTS students through the Shopfront will be leading a design change as part of a student project.

The monthly newsletter is now uploaded to the website when published and a much greater proportion of the membership now receives its newsletter online. Our newsletter editor, Emma Nicholson, was forced to withdraw in February, 2007 due to work pressures and Lorraine Slade, our office administrator, undertook a course to use new software to maintain the newsletter's "look" and layout. She is assisted by Anne Barber. Members of the Executive, as well as the general membership, are contributors and information is trawled from a wide range of sources to ensure that content ranges from the local to the international.

Executive members were individually or severally involved with a number of other activities and attended meetings and other functions representing WEL, raising issues and distributing membership information, and our Policy Proposals. Among these were attendance at **NCOSS** State Conference, Shelter Conference, Government Reception for IWD, Immigrant Women's Speakout AGM, Rape Crisis Centre AGM, the AGM of Jessie Street National Women's Library, Women's Peak Organisations meetings, the Older Women's Network, the Sydney University Women's group, the NSW Charter group, African Women's Dinner/Dance, **New Matilda's** Policy Forums, and the national conference of Women in Adult and Vocational Education (**WAVE**). A presentation on WEL's history and activities was made to a Chinese delegation in Australia for a Civil Society Consultation. The group was most impressed that we received no funding from Government and the degree of our political independence.

The **UNIFEM** International Women's Day Breakfast presented WEL with an opportunity to promote its priorities for the State Election. The postcard developed for this purpose and addressed to the next Premier was included in the package of material provided to all attending the Breakfast and also handed out to marchers on IWD. The postcard listed Early Childhood Education and Care, Eliminating Violence against Women, Providing Affordable Housing as our three priorities with information on the full set of Proposals listed on the website.

Following the re-election of an ALP Government, WEL met with the new Minister for Women, Verity Firth and representatives attended a very promising first meeting with peak women's organizations convened to allow the Minister to consult this body on its future role and what it saw as priorities for NSW. The Office for Women has now been transferred to the Policy Branch of the newly amalgamated Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The **EDNA** Awards were again celebrated with standing room only and in the presence of the Hon Meredith Burgmann, retiring President of the Upper House. She was given a special mention. The energy and enthusiasm for this annual event has grown each year. This is now an iconic feminist event honouring the memory of Edna Ryan, long-time WEL member and according recognition to numerous women who have made and are making a feminist difference. Anne Barber's commitment and coordination of this celebratory evening has given it continuity and has helped it to grow in significance for the entire feminist network.

As well as, WEL's networking, lobbying and representational work, we have contributed to the National Trust capsule and the **GetUp** Federal Election advertisement campaign.

Planning for the Federal Election commenced in earnest from April. Campaign strategies, work on policy issues and the WEL Australia website has progressed with agreement on a campaign slogan, ***Women Count, Women Vote.***

WEL NSW has an Executive of able and committed members. It works as a collective although there are designated roles and responsibilities. We have attracted new members during the year and many long-standing members continue to renew their subscriptions to the organization and donate generously to support WEL's work. Our financial position, as a consequence, enables us to purchase services and to support the publication of the newsletter and promotional material.

This year on 26 February, we remembered the work of June Williams at a function at Sydney University Women's College hosted by Wendy McCarthy where the Sydney Women's Fund – June Williams Memorial account was launched under the auspices of the Sydney Community Foundation. June was a foundation member of WEL. WEL promoted the function and members donated to the fund.

WEL NSW is an active organization with a core of workers and supporters. It always welcomes new women to activism through work on the Executive.

Our thanks to: Joan Bielski for hosting our 2006 Christmas Party and keeping us focused on economic issues; to Eva Cox, our representative on the National Coordinating Committee, for always being at the end of the phone for media interviews and for pushing the boundaries of debate; to Anne Barber, our Treasurer, for her irrepressible creativity and meticulous administration and book-keeping; to Josefa Green for her balance, calm and rationality in facilitating planning meetings; to Helen L'Orange for her depth of experience and persistence; to Tabitha Ponnambalam for her passion and perspective; to Holly Rebeiro for giving us some time from a very busy life in the Nurses' Association; to Mary O'Sullivan for her intelligent interventions; to Jenny Forster for her caring and calm attitude to all. Our thanks to Anna Logan again, she is our able auditor. Our appreciation is extended particularly, to Lorraine Slade, who has staffed the office and compiled the newsletter. She is calmly efficient, productive and very generous and considerate in all her dealings. Her line dancing obviously helps to keep her balanced in the face of many demands on her time and patience.

WEL NSW is thriving in critical political times. It does so because of the efforts of many dedicated feminists. Our thanks to all of them.

Jozefa Sobski
Convenor
August, 2007