

Annual Report on Achievements and Activities of WEL NSW Inc. September, 2009 to September, 2010

It has been a politically dramatic year and a national historical milestone has been set with the installation and then election of Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. But, it is a milestone scarred by the removal of a first term Prime Minister by his party and a national parliament teetering in the balance with cross bench representatives holding a disproportionate amount of influence and power.

We left 2009 with Australia recovering comfortably from the Global Financial Crisis, but, without the implementation of any systemic policy to address climate change. Paid parental "leave" was on the horizon for implementation, but pay equity was continuing to elude us. A national Pay Equity day was declared to emphasise this continuing disparity in wages for women.

In NSW, the Labor State Government closed the year with a new Premier. We met with the new Minister for Women, Linda Burney on 12 November, 2009. She had no sooner warmed the seat than she was replaced with Jodi McKay following the removal of Nathan Rees and the installation of Kristina Kennealy on 3rd December. We met with Minister McKay on 15th April, 2010.

Operating in this broader political context of upheaval and uncertainty, but with women in top positions for some of that time, WEL NSW made a decision: to employ a Coordinator to work on the Federal and State elections and to enhance WEL's effectiveness as a lobby group. Our hoped for outcomes were achieving stronger visibility and influence with decision-makers and the wider community and to build WEL's capacity through: increasing membership numbers, identifying and introducing tools for effective lobbying and passing on knowledge and contacts gained to WEL NSW.

Kathleen Swinbourne was appointed to the position from a strong field of applicants. She is under contract to WEL NSW from May, 2010 to February, 2011. Kathleen was a former active member of WEL NSW and is founder and President of the Sole Parent's Union.

Her first task was an organizational review conducted in consultation with the Executive. This review identified the strengths and weaknesses of WEL NSW and what we could improve.

There were two other administrative areas where the WEL NSW Executive embarked on a review prompted by change. One area was financial management and the second was the organization of the **Edna Awards** evening.

In relation to finances, WEL NSW received a generous bequest from the estate of Pamela Casey which meant we had to review the way we managed our funds. Accordingly, a discussion paper was prepared by Anne Barber, assisting the Treasurer, Tabitha Ponnambalam, about the management of the bequest. It outlined suggested approaches to maximizing earning capacity; discussed some guidelines for expenditure of funds and made some recommendations on signatures and internet banking. Certain recommendations were endorsed and the Treasurer will report on these separately.

After many years of outstanding work, Anne Barber stepped down from the organization of the **Edna Awards** evening. The transfer of responsibility to Ardyce Harris led to a review of processes. On 5 July, the Executive resolved to establish an **Edna Awards Committee** to be chaired by a nominee of the Executive. The Committee will have responsibility for initiating the process each year and the organization and administration of the Awards. The Committee will work closely with the Independent Review Panel whose membership for 2010-2011 was endorsed and will include Bobbie Burke, Jenny Forster, Rhianna Keen and Annie Bickford.

The Executive expresses its deep appreciation to panel members and to Ardyce Harris and Anne Barber, assisting Ardyce, for their efforts in organizing the 2010 evening. There is a need, however, for more members to step forward to assist with the organization. There is a manual of procedures. The event has a high profile among activist women and merits more support. It is also a highlight of the WEL calendar and great fun!

Members of the executive, as in previous years, worked on national and state issues. Anne Barber continued her representation at Peak Women's Meetings convened by the NSW Office for Women's Policy and attended by the Minister for Women. She played a pivotal role in the organization of International Women's Day. WEL members were present at the march and rally distributing membership forms and **Edna Awards** flyers.

The Newsletter was produced monthly by Lorraine Slade from material submitted by a range of members. With the employment of a Coordinator and the introduction of an **e-Update**, the Executive determined to issue the Newsletter bi-monthly from June, 2010. This decision is being kept under review.

WEL contributed its views on various issues including: state Abortion Law Reform, a Charter of Human Rights, the impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Women, the implementation of the Paid Parental Leave scheme, the changes to federal legislation with respect to Income Management among others.

Various members of the Executive supported other activities including the production of **Skirting Sydney**: a walking tour map traversing Sydney women's history and the **Helen Leonard Remembered** function. Both of these were initiated by the Jessie Street National Women's Library.

A highlight of this year was the **f-Conference** held at the NSW Teachers' Federation on 10th to 11th April. Eva Cox, Melanie Fernandez and Gabe Kavanagh from WEL NSW were on the organizing collective. Their contributions were substantial and we owe them and all others on the Collective a tremendous debt of gratitude. The Conference was given full coverage in Issue 402, April 2010 of **WEL informed**. There were over three hundred participants across generations. A publication was produced simply entitled **F** and Eva Cox contributed an article entitled: *The Feminist Project for Change*. WEL Executive approved an information sheet which was included in the Conference folder. We are still hopeful that the **f-Conference** has injected a new impetus to feminist activism.

The Executive made a range of decisions as a result of an overview of WEL NSW presented by the Coordinator following a SWOT analysis. These included; consistent branding and style of materials and

publications and livery with logo and letterhead. We signed up with AAP wire service and commenced a process for rebuilding the WELA website and upgrading and updating the WEL NSW website. We created a **Facebook** page and opened communication by “twitter”. We are increasing our following on “twitter” daily as well as our Facebook supporters. Our following includes influential politicians and journalists as well as people who want to keep abreast of women’s issues. The **e-Update** was introduced and an election “hotspot” page was added to the WEL Australia website. It was an ambitious program of work and it is still progressing.

We employed a project officer, Scarlet Wilcock to make the detailed technical changes to websites. She has done an outstanding job and produced a technical manual for those members who wish to be involved in website management and updates. The WELA website has been entirely rebuilt and was used to excellent effect during the federal election campaign. It is the portal through which the outside world usually enters WEL It is imperative that it be regularly updated and upgraded when new software becomes available. We have joined PAYPAL to make it possible for potential members to join and pay online. A comprehensive e-List has been compiled for daily communication with members and supporters.

WEL NSW held an Election Planning Day on 19th June to refine the Federal election strategy; agree on aspects of the strategy which could be applied to the state election; discuss a Feminist Policy Framework and agree on some key messages and themes for the election. All the relevant national issues and processes, once determined, would be referred for endorsement by the National Coordinating Committee chaired by Eva Cox, who is also the NSW representative on the committee.

There was a detailed Federal Election strategy endorsed by Executive and progress was reported upon at each executive meeting. *Fairness* was the underpinning value for analyzing policies and promises. Fact Sheets were produced on a range of issues and uploaded onto the WELA website assessing party policies. During the Federal election campaign conducted in cooperation with existing WEL branches throughout Australia we managed to draw media and political attention on arrange of issues. The policy scorecard on the WELA website was well received. A leaflet, including the scorecard, was produced and distributed in Martin Plaza.

At the State level, we reviewed the NSW Government’s revised State Plan for our meeting with the new Minister for Women, Jodi McKay and noted that there were a set of gender measures to evaluate targets for each strategy under the key areas of: Better Transport and Livable Cities, Supporting Business and Jobs, Clever state, Healthy Communities, Green State, Stronger Communities and Keeping People Safe. The Plan, after many criticisms from WEL NSW and other women’s organizations contained a section: Delivering Opportunities for Women. It also foreshadowed a new Women’s Plan.

WEL NSW is at a crossroads. It makes a large contribution to the social and economic policy agenda. This contribution rests with a few members, some of whom have been active for many years. It needs renewal. Renewal comes from committed and dedicated members prepared to share responsibility and tasks. These are many and varied: policy analysis and review, preparing submissions to government inquiries, monitoring the media and the political landscape, being available for media interviews, issuing

media releases, communicating clearly achievements with members, managing scarce and hard-won resources, celebrating and honouring the work of women, administering the office, publishing newsletters and updates, lobbying government, building and maintaining relationships with other feminist organizations, working nationally with other WEL state branches and so on. All the work must be collaborative. We are all volunteers as are the many people in organizations with which we work.

The Executive is confident that renewal can be achieved in an environment of good will, mutual respect and trust. Each person has something different to contribute and all the work matters.

Kathleen Swinbourne extends her thanks to the Executive for its support of her work during a time of high pressure and quick turnaround required for the election campaign.

My thanks as Convenor go to the Executive for its support during a challenging and demanding political period. I hope the process of transformation and modernization will continue.

JOZEFA SOBSKI. Convenor