



Annual Report on Achievements and Activities of WEL NSW Inc. September, 2010 to September, 2011

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.

On 3rd March WEL hosted a State Election Forum involving a diverse coalition of women's groups. Jodi McKay, Pru Goward and Cate Faehrmann attended to answer questions on a range of women's policy issues. Discussion ranged from policy to address disadvantage experience by women with a disability, to discrimination against women for wearing the burqa, to protecting the rights of sex workers. WEL's priority issue of reproductive rights was a central issue of the night. All the speakers confirmed that if a conscience vote to decriminalise abortion was called they would support such a bill. Cate Faehrmann took this one step further, committing to introducing a private members bill to remove abortion from the Crimes Act. WEL, and all participants, were happy to see this commitment from Cate Faehrmann and the Greens.

WEL's other priority issue, pay equity, was also a big point of discussion. This discussion was much less inspiring than that on the decriminalisation of abortion. It was disappointing to see both major parties shying away from committing to support, or fund the outcome of, the Australian Services Union Equal Pay Case that is currently before Fair Work Australia.



The night was a productive evening not just for the discussion with the politicians; but also for networking and developing strategies for women's groups to work together to progress a common feminist agenda.

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.

We surveyed 57 candidates; 20 ALP; 20 Liberals/Nationals; 11 Greens; 5 Independents and 1 CDP.

- 100% of Greens candidates responded in support of removing abortion from the Crimes Act
- 85% of Liberals/Nationals candidates did not respond to our survey
- 55% of Labour candidates did not respond to our survey
- 1 candidate responded against

21 candidates responded in support; 1 responded against; 1 was unwilling to disclose; 6 gave us an alternative answer (Other) and 28 candidates did not respond. Of the candidates that responded in support 52% are Greens, 33% are ALP, 10% are Independent and 5% are Liberals/Nationals.

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. The representation of women is particularly poor within the Liberals and Nationals and of the 22 newly appointed Ministers, only 5 are women. This will mean a difficult next term of parliament for progressing a feminist policy agenda.

After the election WEL sent welcomes to all members of the new parliament along with our 2011 Position Statement. WEL received numerous and very positive responses from members of the new Parliament. These responses acknowledged WEL's strong advocacy work and indicated a wish to develop future relationships. Many politicians indicated that the Position Statement would be utilised in their advocacy in Parliament on behalf of the women and girls of NSW. The responses included examples such as the following:



Hon. Jan Barham MLC

'I support the great work that your organisation does and I was a member of WEL some years ago. I am interested in renewing my membership and would like to receive a membership form...'

Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Hon. Brad Hazzard MP postscript

'Thank you particularly for such a comprehensive document. The issues around affordable housing and provisions of housing for women and children arising out of the Women's Refuge movement were well highlighted!'

WEL met with the newly appointed Shadow Minister Sophie Cotsis to further discuss our Position Statement and priority issues. Discussion focused around the Australian Services Union Equal Pay case and upcoming deadlines for further submission to Fair Work Australia. WEL also highlighted the importance for cross-party coalition building on women's issues. WEL also met with Greens Spokesperson for Women, Cate Faehrmann, to discuss our campaign on Reproductive Rights.

Along side our State election lobbying WEL also participated in various celebrations for the Centenary of IWD during the week of 8th March. WEL Executive members were involved in the organisation of the IWD march demanding equal pay for women. The march was attended by approximately 3, 000 people. Executive member Anne Barber also contributed to the Centenary IWD Exhibition at Parliament House.

In June WEL participated in the Sydney SlutWalk. SlutWalk began in Toronto where a police officer addressing female students on sexual assault prevention told them they were less likely to be victimised if they avoided dressing like sluts. Those students organised the first SlutWalk in protest to this victim-blaming attitude. It then spread to become a global phenomenon. The Sydney march saw about 1000 people taking to the streets of Sydney. WEL Executive member Eva Cox was among the speakers on the day. SlutWalk received an inordinate amount of press. Much of the Sydney media coverage focused on discussions of reclaiming the word slut and what women wear during these marches; rather than the central and vital issue of sexual assault and a pervasive culture of victim-blaming. WEL attempted to ensure this link in public discourse through Anne Barber and Melanie Fernandez' interviews with [The Sydney Morning Herald](#) and Melanie Fernandez' guest appearance on [The Drum](#).



WEL has since turned our focus to lobbying to change community attitudes and court culture. We have met with Rape Crisis Centre to discuss ways to improve the justice system in relation to sexual assault cases. WEL has written to the NSW Judicial Commission raising concerns that victims are still questioned about their dress during cross-examination in sexual assault cases.

Camp Betty, a Festival of Sex, Gender and Politics was held in Sydney in June. WEL was among a range of diverse individuals and organisations present at the conference. Melanie Fernandez spoke on a panel on Sex, Gender and Electoral Politics, with a focus on our Reproductive Rights campaign.

Gabe Kavanagh, Charity Danquah, Eva Cox and Jozefa Sobski participated in the NOWSA conference, organised by young feminists to engage and activate women. This included presenting a workshop on political lobbying.

In June Sarah Brasch (WEL ACT) and Melanie Fernandez represented WEL at the annual Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) Face-to-Face Meeting in Canberra. WEL NSW Executive member Gabe Kavanagh was also present as a member of the ERA Young Women's Advisory Group. About 30 women from ERA's 54 members attended from all over Australia, including several from regional and rural areas.

The meeting included strategic planning for the year to come and updates on the three ERA priority issues. The priority issues are: affordable housing, which is a particular concern for older women many of whom will not own their own homes by the time they retire; consolidation of the federal anti-discrimination acts; and Income Management, as the government intends to extend Income Management to five pilot communities throughout Australia (Bankstown NSW, Logan and Rockhampton QLD, Shepparton VIC and Playford SA). We then, in delegations of 3, lobbied members of Federal Parliament on these issues in about 30 meetings with politicians from all parties and both Houses.

ERA has been conducting research to document women's experience of Income Management in the Northern Territory. ERA recently launch its [report](#), providing gender analysis of Income Management.



As part of our work around the ERA priority issues Anna Dawson attended the Equality Law Conference which focused on the consolidation of the four anti-discrimination acts. The conference was run by the Human Rights Legal Resource Centre and held in Melbourne.

Final submission for the social and community service workers Equal Pay case were due to Fair Work Australia in July and hearings took place during August and September. 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 communicate feminist news and updates on WEL's work, has a rapidly growing subscriber list. The Newsletter continues to be produced bi-monthly by the editorial committee, Lorraine Slade, Josefa Green, Jozefa Sobski and Anne Barber. In the last year we have utilise 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.

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

Melanie Fernandez,
Convenor
WEL NSW