

Annual Report on Achievements and Activities for WEL, NSW Inc. October, 2008 to August, 2009.

The last quarter of 2008 saw the world economy collapse into the global financial crisis. The major financial corporations and huge manufacturers in Australia and elsewhere immediately sought public money to bail them out. Action on environmental measures to address climate change was imperiled, as were reforms such as: Paid Parental Leave, Higher Education and Early Childhood Education and Care. The overhauls promised by the Rudd Labor government to reduce social and economic inequalities and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians seemed less urgent than saving the economy. Fiscal stimulus packages grabbed the headlines. WEL was not diverted.

The NSW Executive continued its work on a range of issues, organized events, prepared submissions, collaborated with other women's organizations on campaigns, represented WEL at peak meetings, as well as in groups working on a Charter of Rights and abortion law reform. It worked at the state and national level to preserve a progressive and alternative voice on policy for all women.

WEL NSW Executive noted the changes at the national level from women's secretariats to Alliances given the task of advocating for women, identifying emerging issues, reflecting the diversity of Australian women and engaging in the social inclusion agenda. These were Minister Plibersek's reforms and they were designed to mobilize women as part of "a new women's movement". Over \$1.2 million was allocated in July, 2009 to increase women's representation and advocacy; a very small sum for a very big task!

Eva Cox continued her role with WEL Australia as convenor of the National Coordinating Committee, Women for Wik and on the group involved with organizing the Feminist Conference, 2009 to be held in Sydney in November. With Melanie Fernandez, she prepared the submission to the Henry Review on Taxation in April and appeared with Melanie before the committee to argue the case for taxation reform. Her deep understanding of policy and knowledge across a broad range of areas enables the organization to retain a respected and high profile.

National submissions were made to the Pay Equity Inquiry, the Retirement Income Inquiry and the Senate Inquiry into Child Care.

Anne Barber represented WEL at the peak women's organizations meetings with Minister Firth. She also worked to maintain the high standard of organization for the **Edna Awards** evening. She prepared WEL's submission to the National Human Rights consultation. She remained Treasurer and maintained and updated the WEL NSW website. Her contribution was extensive. Her time was given generously and she worked on initiatives with a focus on outcomes.

Josefa Green developed a planning framework and ideas for extending WEL membership and attracting women to join the Executive. She was a valued contributor to WEL policy and strategic discussions and her writing and editorial skills improved the substance of WEL's work.

Helen L'Orange took over as WEL convenor during the absence of Jozefa Sobski. She stepped graciously into this role while retaining her involvement with NSW government reforms on domestic and family violence. She prepared WEL's comment on the discussion paper in this area focusing on: prevention and early intervention, benchmarking and mapping service provision, integrating and coordinating responses to domestic violence and related accommodation issues for women.

Lorraine Slade staffed the office with the assistance for a period of Saskia Maia. She attended to all incoming and outgoing email correspondence and compiled the monthly newsletter. The production of a regular newsletter is a commitment we make to all members. This is a time-consuming and demanding task and Lorraine performs it with a calm uncomplaining professionalism.

Tabitha Ponnambalam brought her considerable legal and other skills to bear on issues such as surrogacy and housing policy and the overall political context in which we are working. She brings a fresh and welcome perspective to the Executive with her international knowledge and experience. Alex Heron joined us for too short a period after returning from the UK. She had workforce as an issue and we were sorry that family responsibilities took her away too soon.

The contribution of all six Executive members is constrained by work and family commitments. Without the knowledge and experience of longstanding members on Executive, the organization could not function effectively. There is room, however, for greater involvement by more women, new members as well as seasoned campaigners. The workload is considerable and it is borne by too few women. Much more could be done if there were more activists prepared to attend meetings regularly and accept responsibility for some key tasks.

On 24 October, 2008, WEL NSW in conjunction with Jessie Street National Women's Library at Ultimo hosted a celebration marking the release of Dr Marian Sawyer's detailed history of WEL: ***Making Women Count***. Former active and founding members and supporters gathered to pay tribute to WEL's achievements and Dr Sawyer's contribution to recording WEL history. Old battles and victories were relived.

In March, 2009 we again celebrated International Women's Day on the streets of Sydney festooned with 180 banners acknowledging this important day. Anne Barber's work with OWN and other women's groups has been outstanding in achieving such prominence for this event.

The twelfth year of *The Ednas* was held on 8 May at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and seven women were recipients with Rhonda Wilson being awarded the **2009 Grand Stirrer**. Anne Barber again built the organization to ensure that this evening, celebrating and honouring women's achievements in a variety of fields was enjoyable and revelatory for all who attended.

WEL NSW collaborated with national women's organizations to lobby the Rudd Government on paid parental leave when it seemed at most risk of being delayed. The coordinated campaign by women's organizations led to a successful outcome with the announcement in the Federal Budget of a scheme's introduction. It committed the government to 18 weeks leave at the Federal minimum wage. Though the scheme was not universal, it cut out at the relatively high income level of \$150,000 a year. WELA welcomed this introduction as it acknowledged that caring for babies was a workplace issue for both women and men.

The Executive also reviewed its operations to determine future priorities and identify ways in which Executive meetings could be improved. Decisions were made about priority issues, Executive member responsibility for issues, the formation of ad hoc working groups to work on issues and working on specific issues with or through other advocacy organizations. Alternate executive meetings were to be devoted to a priority issue advertised in the Newsletter.

Several broad areas were agreed as priorities divided into state and national. At the state level: domestic violence, Office for Women on performance Indicators and Feminist Conference, 2009; at the national level, budget, child care, human rights legislation, economic outcomes, working conditions, TAFE, vocational and tertiary education, health-preventative and housing. WEL had policies in some areas and not others.

These decisions have been subjected to further review with emerging issues added and some areas decreasing in importance or urgency due to policy and program changes.

The NSW State Plan is being reviewed. WEL wrote to the Premier reiterating its concerns about the deficiencies of the Plan. It stressed the need for key policy and program omissions to be addressed as they related to the specific needs, concerns and priorities of women. It urged that these be identified and incorporated into any revised plan and targets. The development of state-based performance indicators which integrate gender specific measures were stressed as being central for inclusion in any new plan.

In the next year, WEL NSW will be facing decisions about new office accommodation. We have been advised that the NSW government is planning to sell the Albion Street premises which we share with NCOSS and other

organizations. Our needs are modest: two workstations, storage, IT and telephone communication, access to a kitchen, toilet facilities and a meeting room in business and after hours. These are minimum requirements. If members have knowledge of available premises at reasonable rates, we would welcome suggestions.

The Executive has worked energetically for the WEL membership in a challenging time. Its work is acknowledged for this year as contributing to better lives for the women of NSW.

Our thanks go to all Executive members and to all WEL members who gave generously in donations enabling WEL NSW to continue its work.

Jozefa Sobski, Convenor, August, 2009