



The Liberal Party of Australia

Federal Women's Committee

History & Achievements

1945 – 2003

The Federal Women's Committee of the Liberal Party of Australia

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Women are unquestionably destined to exercise more and more influence upon practical politics in Australia...In the educating of the electorate in liberal ideas they have for many years been an effective force. Now we have an organisation in which all distinctions have gone, and with men and women working equally for the one body ...”

Robert Menzies, Albury Conference, 1944.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Women's Committee (FWC) was established at the inaugural meeting of the Liberal Party Federal Council in August 1945. The FWC was incorporated in the constitution as an official component of the Party in October 1946, and has had representation on the Party's Federal Executive since that time.

The Federal Liberal Party and some of the State Divisions have reserved organisational positions expressly for women, the federal constitution providing that there shall be a Woman Vice-President of the Party and a Federal Women's Committee, the President of which shall sit on the Party's Federal Executive.

The voting membership of the FWC comprises the Chairman of each State and ACT women's section, the Woman Federal Vice-President of the Party, and the President and Immediate Past President of the FWC. Observer members include the Party's Federal President, Immediate Past-President, Federal Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women and the Chairman of the Liberal Women's Forum.

Each State and Territory Division of the Liberal Party has a women's section, with constituted powers and representation at senior Party levels. The sections have been powerful lobby groups over the years and have been instrumental in the development of many of the Party's major initiatives for women at state and territory and federal level.

As the peak body representing women in the Liberal Party, the FWC has been active in promoting women for elected office, advocating policy, advising on a wide range of issues, assisting in election campaigns and performing a vital role in a successful Party. Much of its effort is unsung but has been crucial to the development of a truly representative national party organisation.

The brief history that follows outlines the aims and achievements of the Federal Women's Committee and acknowledges the contribution of those many Liberal Party members – men and women – who have supported the FWC since its inception.

CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

From the beginning, the role of women in the Liberal Party was strongly supported by the Party's first leader, Sir Robert Menzies. The Party has a strong record of encouraging women to take an active part in the political process, and women have always played a major role in the Party. It was the first political party in the country to make provision for equal numbers of men and women in some of its senior party positions, particularly in the Victorian Division, which has long had a formal provision for equal representation at vice-presidential level.

A powerful influence in the formation of the Liberal Party of Australia was the Australian Women's National League, and women continue to participate as part of the Party organisation and as contributors to policy formation.

From its early days the FWC was committed to becoming an integral part of the Party, by seeking the right to have Committee proxies to Executive (June 1947), to make the Woman Federal Vice-President an ex-officio member of the Committee (March 1948), and to submit Committee resolutions direct to government ministers rather than through intermediaries (February 1956).

In 1948 the State delegates to the FWC were elected by the Federal Council from among its own members, or from among the members of a State Division where that Division had no woman delegate on the Federal Council. (A full list of Chairmen/Presidents of the FWC is listed at Appendix A.)

The Woman Federal Vice-President was also only an ex-officio member of the FWC at that time, and the meeting times and venues were determined by the Federal Executive. Also, in the 1948 constitution, the FWC had *two* representatives on the Federal Executive (as the Young Liberals do today) who were selected annually from the various States in rotation.

Considerable alterations have been made to the constitution since 1948 in all areas of the Party's organisational operations, and the provisions mentioned above have been progressively amended, confirming the chairman of the women's section of each Division (the ACT was included from 1977) as a member of the FWC; the President of the FWC (the title was changed from 'chairman' in 1993) or her nominee as the sole representative on Federal Executive; and the Woman Federal Vice-President as a full member of the FWC. The FWC sets its own meeting dates and times, with the proviso that the AGM and election of office bearers be held in the first quarter of each calendar year.

The most recent amendments to the federal constitution affecting the FWC were made by Federal Council in 1998, on recommendations made by the FWC following an extensive internal review of the FWC's role and structure undertaken in 1997. These included a provision to remove the casting vote for the President of the FWC in the case of ballots for President and other FWC office bearers (although she still retains a deliberative vote). The Standing Orders of the FWC were also drafted and adopted at this time to provide a framework for the conduct of meetings and elections.

ROLE AND OBJECTIVES

The Federal Women's Committee continues to play a vital role within the Liberal Party as a voice for women in matters of policy consideration and party organisational matters. Its key aims are to promote and encourage women to enter political life, to effectively contribute to the formulation of policy and to assist the Party in implementing its decisions through effective community contact.

In addition, the FWC advises on policy matters, acts as a coordinating body of women's work and activity within the divisional women's sections, receiving and distributing information from the women in the Divisions, and reports to the Federal Executive through the President of the Committee.

The Objectives of the Committee are set out in s80 of the Federal Constitution as follows:

- 80 a to actively encourage and promote participation by women in both the Parliamentary Party and Organisation;*
- 80 b to advise on policy matters;*
- 80 c to act as the coordinating body of women's work and activity in the Divisions;*
- 80 d to receive and distribute information on the work and activities of women in the respective Divisions;*
- 80 e to report to each meeting of the Federal Executive.*

The Committee meets face-to-face three or four times a year, most often in Canberra but occasionally in other centres, and usually over two days. Telephone conferences are utilised when the need to discuss urgent policy or administrative matters arises. Policy is the main focus of the formal meetings and a wide range of issues are discussed. Where possible the relevant minister (or shadow minister) is invited to attend.

As well as attending the meetings of Federal Executive, the President of the Committee is also a member of the Advisory Committee on Federal Policy. Most importantly, she also has access to the Prime Minister on a one-to-one basis when required.

The access enjoyed by FWC members to the members of the parliamentary parties, in particular the Prime Minister and other federal ministers, provides a unique opportunity for Liberal women to have an input into policy formulation decision making, and to express their views on issues of particular concern to them, their families and the community.

STATE AND TERRITORY WOMEN'S SECTIONS

While the FWC is a federal peak body, it could not exist or function without the membership and contribution of the women's sections of the State and Territory Divisions.

Each State Division of the Liberal Party, and the ACT, has a women's section, with constituted powers and representation at senior party levels. (The Northern Territory's Country Liberal Party women's representative is an official observer of the FWC, but in practice very rarely attends).

The women's sections are a strong voice within the Party and their memberships continue to gain in strength. They have been in existence for many years - in some cases they pre-date the formation of the Liberal Party, as in South Australia, where the first non-Labor women's council was launched in 1911 as the Liberal Women's Educational Association. There would be few Liberal women MPs or senior party office bearers who have not been members of, and supported by, their relevant women's section.

The women's sections have been powerful lobby groups and they have been instrumental in the development of many of the Party's major initiatives for women at state and federal level. They are an important forum for women in the Liberal Party which encourages open and frank discussion on a wide range of issues.

Women are able to hone their skills in public speaking and committee work, build networks among other Liberal women and gain some of the expertise and experience - and confidence - that will equip them to go on to more senior executive roles in the organisation or to stand for parliament and local government. In addition, members of the women's sections have long held dear the opportunity to be able to express their views openly on some of the more sensitive and contentious issues that may be shied away from or ignored in other party forums.

(Individual histories for the State and Territory women's sections can be found at Appendix B.)

ACHIEVEMENTS

"Women played a very important role from the very beginning in the formation and the development of the Liberal Party of Australia. And I'm immensely proud of the fact that we have chalked up so many firsts."

**Prime Minister John Howard, National Liberal Women's Conference, Brisbane
1998**

The Liberal Women's Forum:

The issue of encouraging and supporting women who wish to stand for parliament was considered so important that, in 1993, the Federal Council of the Liberal Party gave overwhelming support for the establishment of a network of supporters dedicated to assisting women candidates, known as the Liberal Women's Forum. The initiative to establish the Forum was driven by the then President of the FWC, Joan Hall with the support of then Federal Leader John Hewson. Since its inception, the Forum has been chaired by Dame Margaret Guilfoyle. It aims to encourage women to join and be active in the Liberal Party and to seek positions of responsibility and decision making within the Party.

The Forum operates through the women's sections in all the States and the ACT to raise the profile of women candidates, and potential candidates, and assist them in campaigns for preselection for, and election to, winnable seats. It has drawn much inspiration from its energetic Chairman, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle – the first woman to become a federal cabinet minister - and others who have pioneered the way into parliament.

State and Territory Divisions have organised, and continue to organise specific conferences and workshops on a regular basis where the advice and experience of others – successful and unsuccessful – is shared with prospective candidates for parliamentary and party organisational positions.

The success of the Forum's influence and the Liberal Party's enduring policy of selection on merit, not quota, can be demonstrated by the record numbers of women from the Coalition elected to the Federal, State and Territory Parliaments and senior organisational party positions over the past ten years. Many of these women acknowledge the role that the encouragement and support they received from the Forum and other women's groups within the Party structures have played in helping them to achieve their goals.

In March 1996, shortly after the Coalition's historic win in 1996 when 15 additional women were elected to the Federal Parliament, the then Federal Director, Andrew Robb, in a speech to the National Press Club said:

“The presence now of 25 women in the Liberal Party Room, and 26 in the Joint Party Room, will change forever the nature of the Coalition Parliamentary Party...the Liberal success was in no small part achieved through the efforts of the Liberal Women's Forum established in 1994 to actively promote the election of Liberal women to parliament without the need to resort to quotas.”

Women in elected positions:

Being involved in the Party organisations, particularly the FWC and the Divisional women's sections, has provided many women with the early experience and confidence to go on to elected positions at all levels of government.

The Liberal Party and its predecessors can claim a proud record of 'firsts': Edith Cowan, elected in 1921 for the Nationalists in Western Australia, was the first woman elected to any parliament in Australia. The first women elected in all other States also represented the non-Labor parties. The first woman member of the House of Representatives was Dame Enid Lyons, elected in 1943 for the United Australia Party.

The first woman Government Whip in a Westminster-style parliament was Dame Annabel Rankin in the early 1950's, and she was later made Minister for Housing. The first woman member of a state cabinet was Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver, who administered the portfolio of Health, Supply and Shipping in the West Australian Liberal Government in 1947.

As previously noted, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle was the first woman federal cabinet minister. More recently, The Hon Margaret Reid was the first – and so far only – woman elected as President of the Senate.

As indicated earlier, record numbers of Liberal women have been elected to parliaments and senior organisational positions over the past ten years. Four of them, Kate Carnell (ACT), Joan Sheldon (QLD), Sue Napier (TAS) and Kerry Chikarovski (NSW) became Parliamentary Leaders – and Kate Carnell was ACT Chief Minister for five years from 1996 – 2000.

At the time of writing, there are 25 Coalition women MPs in the Federal Parliament (23 Liberals and 2 National Party), and 36 in the State and Territory Parliaments (28 Liberals, 6 Nationals and 2 Country Liberal Party in the Northern Territory).

While we have yet to see a woman Liberal Party Federal President, a number of women have headed up the State and ACT Divisions. Mrs Joy Mein OBE was the first to break into the senior male organisational ranks when she became President of the Victorian Division in 1976 and the first woman State President of any major political party. (Joy was also the longest-serving Woman Federal Vice-President for 19 years from 1979 – 1990.)

Since then, Joy Howley has held the Victorian Presidency (1997-2000) and Helen Kroger was elected to that position in 2003. Gwen Wilcox was ACT President in 1992 -94, Bronwyn Bishop was the first NSW woman President (1985-87) and Chris McDiven is currently in her third term as NSW President.

In South Australia, there have been two women Presidents – Vicki Chapman (now an opposition front-bench MP in the SA Parliament) was elected in 1992-95, and Rosemary Craddock completed a three year term in August 2003. Also in August 2003, WA elected Danielle Blain as its first woman President, and Tasmania elected Carol Humphries as its first woman President.

August 2003 saw, for a brief period, a record five State Divisions headed by women – Chris McDiven in NSW, Helen Kroger in Victoria, Rosemary Craddock in South Australia, Carol Humphries in Tasmania and Danielle Blain in WA.

Interestingly, by contrast to the elected party positions, women have not featured strongly among the Party's paid State/Territory Director positions. So far only Gwen Wilcox and Dawn Crosby, both in the ACT, have taken up the challenge.

Of previous State and Territory FWC members and presidents, a good number have gone on to elected office. Dame Mabel Miller (Chairman 1960-61 and in 1965), went on to become an Alderman and then an MHA in the Tasmanian Parliament, as did Millie Best MBE (Chairman 1950 and 1956).

Eileen Furley OBE (Chairman 1959) was elected to the NSW Legislative Council in 1962. She was also Woman Federal Vice-President from 1950-51. Elizabeth Grant AM, was elected as the first woman member of the ACT Legislative Assembly in 1979 (until 1982), and was Chairman of the FWC (1980-85). Elizabeth continues to make a valuable contribution to the ACT Women's Forum.

In Queensland, Yvonne McComb (FWC Chairman 1973-74) was elected as that state's first woman Divisional President in 1976, and went on to become Woman Federal Vice-President. Cassie Solomon, who served on the FWC for an exceptional and distinguished 19 years (1981-2000), including being FWC Chairman from 1985-86, was also Woman Federal Vice-President of the Party from 1990-93.

Three FWC members from Victoria were subsequently elected to the Senate – Dame Ivy Wedgwood, Dame Marie Breen and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, and Marie Breen was FWC Chairman in 1952. Before becoming an FWC member, Gracia Baylor was elected in 1979 as one of the first two women members of the Victorian Legislative Council.

South Australian Trish Worth, Chairman 1986-88, is now the Federal Member for Adelaide (elected 1993) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Joan Hall, FWC President 1990-94, is a member of the SA Parliament and was a minister in the former Liberal Government. After long involvement with the SA Women's Council, Susan Jeanes was elected to the Federal House of Representatives (1996-98) before becoming the South Australian representative to the FWC (2000-03).

Chris McDiven (1991-96) is in her third year as NSW Division President. Also from NSW, FWC members Judy Hopwood, (1996-2000), and Robyn Parker (2000-2003) have recently been elected to the lower and upper houses respectively of the NSW Parliament.

Deirdre Flint is the first woman Mayor of the Central Highland Council in Tasmania as well as being in her fifth year as FWC President. In addition to Deirdre, a number of other former members of the FWC have gone on to play a role in local government. Di Wilkins (SA) is currently a member of the Burnside Council in Adelaide. In Tasmania, Pat Thompson is a Councillor on the Dorset Council and Lyn Laycock is a Councillor for Devonport.

These achievements extend to numerous other women in the Liberal Party who have been active members of their respective women's sections in their local Divisions, or have made significant contributions to the Party and federal, state and territory Liberal

governments in other ways. The experience of participation, organisation, public speaking, campaigning, fund raising, community interaction, policy formulation and other party activities have provided a valuable training ground for women to enable them to make a wider community contribution.

Policy contribution:

From its beginnings, the Liberal Party, at both Federal and State levels, has had a commitment to women and has sought to raise the status of women and meet the varied needs of women in the community.

The achievements for women by Liberal Governments in Australia have been many. The Menzies Government delivered child endowment, national divorce laws, the medical benefits scheme and a national health scheme, and tax concessions for pensioners.

In the Holt, Gorton and McMahon era, the Liberal Party delivered assistance to deserted wives, lifted the Commonwealth Public Service marriage ban, introduced equal pay legislation and the first Child Care Act in 1972. The Fraser Government introduced the new family allowance system which involves payments made directly to carers, generally to mothers. It also established the Office of Child Care, the National Women's Advisory Council and the Institute of Family Studies.

In 1979 pension health benefits were extended to single parents and dependents and, before losing office in 1983, the Fraser Government developed the family income supplement scheme to help lower income families. It was the Fraser Government that signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which later led to the establishment of the sex discrimination office under the Hawke Government in 1984. In 1979, the Fraser Government established the first Women's Advisory Committee, with Dame Beryl Beaurepaire (FWC Chairman 1974-76) as Chairman.

The current Howard Government has built on these achievements and implemented a whole range of policies that have delivered more choices and support for women, in and out of the workforce, and greater support for families, than any previous government has done. These choices reflect the changes that have overtaken the role of women from being primarily home and family focussed for the majority of women, to one embracing much broader aspirations of careers in the paid workforce and a much greater say in decision-making at all levels.

Opportunities and participation for women in the workforce have continued to increase under the Howard Government, which has introduced a range of initiatives to make the process easier for families with dependent children. Introduction of the first child tax refund – the Baby Bonus – has helped to make it easier for women to take time off work to have a child. A vast increase in child care funding, more flexibility in services offered and legislative changes to ensure family-friendly workplaces and flexible working hours have all assisted mothers to return to the workplace.

For those women on lower incomes or who encounter family breakdown, there are increased family payments, establishment of the new Federal Magistrates Service to

ease pressure on the Family Court, greater access to superannuation assets in the event of divorce, increased funding for community counselling and mediation services, increased funding for the campaign against domestic violence, and more opportunities for vocational education and training.

Health too, has been an important focus for the Howard government – greatly expanded children's immunisation programs, increased support for national breast and cervical screening programs, introduction of a 'fly in, fly out' Rural Women's GP Program, and the \$562 million Rural Health Strategy.

The Federal Women's Committee has always played a key role in suggesting, reviewing and developing policy initiatives, particularly in the opposition years when the vast resources of government have not been available for MPs to draw upon.

Any resolutions passed by the FWC are passed directly to the relevant minister/shadow minister and on occasion the minister will offer to come and discuss the issue with the FWC directly. From time to time, the FWC is requested to undertake some specific policy work by a minister or shadow ministers to assist them.

Ministers have been generous in making time to meet with the FWC and have welcomed the exchange of views and the opportunity to discuss issues with a body that reports back to such a large section of the Liberal community. In recent years, the FWC has met with the Treasurer, the Ministers for Immigration, Workplace Relations, Health and Ageing, Regional and Rural Services, and the Attorney-General, to discuss a range of issues within their portfolio areas. The Ministers Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women (Senators Amanda Vanstone and Jocelyn Newman) and the former Minister for the Status of Women the Hon Judi Moylan, all made it a point to meet regularly with the FWC and maintained a valuable exchange of information and ideas.

FWC Presidents have also approached the Prime Minister or other Ministers directly when concerns have arisen that demanded immediate or personal attention. For example, following an FWC meeting in late 2002, the President, Deirdre Flint, and a delegation of carers from the ACT met with the Federal Minister for Ageing in early 2003 to discuss serious concerns about policy with regard to carers.

Within the Party organisation itself, the FWC had input into the 1983 Valder Report to ensure the interests of women were properly represented. More recently, the FWC participated in the review and rewrite of the Liberal Party Federal Platform.

The FWC has also sought to expand its influence to the wider stage by having representation where possible at the conferences and seminars of other political organisations both nationally and internationally. For example, Elizabeth Grant (Chairman 1980-85) was a delegate to the 1980 CEDAW conference in Copenhagen. In 1995, Penny Reader Harris, then representing South Australia on the FWC, represented the FWC as an Official Observer at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. As President of the FWC in 1998, Penny, together with Immediate Past President Chris McDiven, also represented the FWC at the Women's Constitutional Convention in Canberra.

Also on the international scene, Joy Mein OBE, who was elected as the first woman State President (Victoria in 1976), represented the Liberal Party as the inaugural President of the International Women's Democratic Union (IWDU) from 1990-2002. The IWDU is part of the International Democratic Union (IDU) which was formed in London in 1983 as an international alliance of centre right parties. Joy's role was to bring a woman's viewpoint to international issues, and it is in this role that she reports back to the FWC as a regular *ex-officio* attendee of FWC meetings.

As President of the IWDU, Joy went on to form the Pacific Women's Democratic Union (PWDU) and played an important role in the exchange of political ideas and concerns with women all over the world, attending international conferences and meeting leaders from many different countries. Joy is currently President of the Asia Pacific region of the IWDU.

Much of the FWC's policy work is conducted 'behind the scenes' and not visible to the wider party organisation, let alone to media and the public at large, and its contribution has not always been fully appreciated. Yet there have been times when the FWC could have justly claimed to have had a significant influence on policy outcomes, such as the introduction of national divorce laws in the 1959 Matrimonial Causes Act; housing initiatives put forward in the 1963 election campaign; and the improvement of pension entitlements for widows with dependent children in 1979. The FWC had a large input into the sex discrimination legislation and a significant contribution was made to the development of the Coalition's domestic violence policy in the lead-up to the successful 1996 federal election.

From time to time the FWC has taken an in-depth look at major policy issues and produced position papers to put the views of the Committee to a wider audience. The most recent of these (in late 2002) was a discussion paper, titled *Options for Families, Governments and Employers*, that started out as an examination of the declining birth rate in Australia. Following consultation with the Treasurer, the paper developed into a proposal for various policy options designed to contribute to the debate on balancing work and family. An earlier paper (1998) looked at the question of domestic violence policy options.

The FWC has also contributed to policy debate within the Party through the policy motions it puts to the Federal Council meetings. Some of these have been controversial – for example, the motion at the 2003 Council on the sex-slave trade – but have an enviable record of being successfully carried. In addition to sex slave trafficking, issues raised at Federal Council by the FWC in recent years include superannuation for women, pap smears, parental leave tax arrangements and paid maternity leave.

A very effective and important platform for policy debate has been the initiative of the Federal Women's Committee to hold a national conference to precede the meetings of the Party's Federal Council.

National Liberal Women's Conferences:

These conferences are now held annually in conjunction with the Party's Federal Council (and as part of the National Convention in the years that they are held) to provide an opportunity for policy discussion and exchange of ideas in a public forum.

The first national conference was held in Adelaide in July 1986, under the chairmanship of the then FWC Chairman Trish Worth. The conference focussed on *The Changing Lifestyle of Australian Women*, looking at women and the economy, law, politics, and the rural community.

After 1986, the conferences became regular events held as follows:

- April 1988: Melbourne *Women and Politics, Violence and the Economy*
Chairman: Nia Stavropoulos Tilley
- June 1989 Sydney *Women in the Economy*
Chairman: Nia Stavropoulos Tilley
- October 1990 Brisbane *The Challenges for Women in Australia 2000*
Chairman: Nia Stavropoulos Tilley
- August 1993 Canberra *Domestic Violence .it has to stop!*
President: Joan Hall
- October 1994 Albury *Women Working for Australia's Future*
President: Joan Hall
- October 1995 Brisbane Liberal Women's Forum Seminar *Women Who Win*. President: Chris McDiven
- October 1996 Hobart *Women's Economic Independence*
President: Chris McDiven
- March 1998 Brisbane *Politics Participation Prosperity*
President: Penny Reader Harris
- July 1999 Canberra *Women and Leadership – Making the Difference*
President: Deirdre Flint
- April 2000 Melbourne *Life in Balance*
President: Deirdre Flint
- March 2001 Sydney Liberal Women's Forum Seminar *Women 2000 and Beyond*. President: Deirdre Flint
- April 2002 Canberra *Challenges for Women in the 21st Century*
President: Deirdre Flint
- June 2003 Adelaide *Reaching Our Potential*
President: Deirdre Flint

These conferences have been very successful and have been strongly supported by Parliamentary Leaders, including Prime Minister Howard who has addressed every conference since becoming Federal Leader in 1995, and other ministers who have been enthusiastic participants covering a broad range of policy issues.

The National Liberal Women's conferences could not have been staged without the critical organisational assistance of the local Divisional women's sections and the Party's Federal Secretariat.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Liberal Party has nurtured and supported its women members and ensured that appropriate forums exist within the party structure to enable women members to have a credible voice to express their points of view. In government, the Liberal Party, in coalition with the National Party, has acknowledged that the goals and aspirations of women have changed enormously over the past thirty or forty years and policy development has evolved to reflect those changes.

The Federal Women's Committee has long enjoyed the support of the Federal Party and Parliamentary Leadership, and since winning Government in 1996, Prime Minister John Howard has supported women in the Party and in the wider community. He has been a regular participant in the FWC's national conferences, as has the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, Senator Amanda Vanstone and her predecessors, The Hon Jocelyn Newman and The Hon Judi Moylan. The current Federal President, Shane Stone, also has been proactive in his support for the work of the Committee and gone out of his way to ensure its continuing viability.

Despite this support from the majority of senior officers, there is still a low level of representation of women within the senior positions of the Party organisation – although it is improving. Unfortunately, there continue to be grumblings of dissent from some men and women who oppose the existence of the women's sections and the FWC, because they do not believe that women should be given what they view as a special position within the Party.

Those that express this view are missing the point. The imperatives that led the first Federal Council to establish the Federal Women's Committee in 1945, while perhaps less pressing in 2003, are nevertheless still strong enough to require the retention of the FWC and the State and Territory Divisions' women's sections for the foreseeable future. This need is supported by the large numbers of women members of the Party who continue to participate in the women's branches and forums.

We must never forget that women are some 52 percent of the Australian community and their representation in parliament and in other decision-making forums should reflect that. Although female representation is improving, there is still a long way to go before equal representation is achieved in the Liberal Party or, indeed, in any of the major political parties in Australia, or most other western nations. The women's organisations of the Liberal Party, working together with the wider party membership, will continue to make a valuable contribution towards the attainment of this universal goal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The authors thank all those who contributed. Much of the historical material was drawn from earlier works composed by former FWC Presidents Nia Stavropoulos Tilley, who wrote a brief history of the FWC in 1989, and Chris McDiven, who tracked the constitutional evolution and development of the FWC for a background paper in 1997.

Our appreciation goes also to the Liberal Party Federal Secretariat, especially to Rebecca Gardner and all her predecessors, without whose assistance the FWC could not function, and Bruce Edwards who provided valuable editorial advice.

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APPENDIX A

Federal Women's Committee – Chairmen/Presidents 1945 – 2003

Miss Margaret Battye	WA	1945-46	Mrs (later Dame) Mabel Miller	TAS	1965
Miss Roberta Gallagher	NSW	1947	Mrs V Blogg MBE		1966-67
Mrs W S Lettice	QLD	1948	Mrs Noelene Wheeler	QLD	1967-70
Mrs M Hodgson	VIC	1949	Mrs Margaret Daniel	SA	1970-71
Miss Millie Best MBE	TAS	1950	Mrs Eileen Parr	TAS	1971-72
Mrs (later Lady) Kathleen Sandover OBE JP WA		1951	Mrs Audrey McKenna	WA	1972-73
Mrs (later Dame) Maureen Breen	VIC	1952	Mrs Yvonne McComb	QLD	1973-74
Mrs (later Lady) Kathleen Sandover OBE JP WA		1953	Mrs (later Dame) Beryl Beaurepaire	VIC	1974-76
Hon Eileen Furley OBE	NSW	1954	Mrs Althea McTaggart	WA	1976-77
Mrs (later Lady) Elizabeth Wilson CBE SA		1955	Mrs Maureen Giddings	NSW	1977-80
Miss Millie Best MBE	TAS	1956	Mrs Elizabeth Grant AM	ACT	1980-85
Mrs (later Dame) Audrey Reader	VIC	1957	Mrs Cassie Solomon	QLD	1985-86
Mrs M Gordon OBE	QLD	1958	Ms (later Hon) Trish Worth (MHR)	SA	1986-88
Mrs (later Hon) Eileen Furley OBE	NSW	1959	Ms Nia Stavropoulos Tilley	ACT	1988-90
Mrs (later Dame) Mabel Miller	TAS	1960	Mrs (later Hon) Joan Hall (MHA)	SA	1990-94
Mrs (later Lady) Elizabeth Wilson CBE	SA	1961	Mrs Chris McDiven	NSW	1994-97
Miss Iris Hyde	NSW	1963-64	Ms Penny Reader Harris	SA	1997-99
			Mrs Deirdre Flint	TAS	1999-

State and Territory Women's Sections

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The ACT Division of the Liberal Party was formed in 1975 - the ACT previously being a branch of the New South Wales Division. The first ACT Divisional President was Margaret Reid, who, in 1982, became the Senator for the ACT and later the first female President of the Senate (1997 – 2002). A Forum member, Margaret has always been a staunch and active advocate of more women entering political life.

In 1976 a women's interest group of the ACT Policy Committee was convened by Helen Steele. Together with Elizabeth Grant and Danielle Hyndes, she pressed for a change to the ACT Constitution and in 1977 this interest group became the Women's Section. Then known as "Liberal Action" the first President was Elizabeth Grant, followed by Caryl Haslem, Kerryn McGhie, Louise Littlewood (MLA 1995 –98), Nia Stavropolous Tilley, Trish Favretto, Danielle Hyndes, Kathy Cornford, Kate Gunn, Winnifred Rosser, Gayle Richards, Yvonne Simington and currently the President is Danielle Hyndes.

Elizabeth Grant was the first Liberal woman member of the ACT House of Assembly (1979 - 82) and was later elected the President of the FWC Federal Women's Committee (1980 - 86). Nia Stavropolous Tilley also served as President of the Federal Women's Committee (1988 –1990).

The name "Liberal Action" was changed to "Forum for Liberal Women" in 1984, and the group is known now as "Forum". Since its inception, Forum has sought to inform women in the ACT of the current political issues and to provide them with opportunities to participate in the political process, either in the Organisation or the Parliamentary Party.

Forum has also focused on the formulating and monitoring implementation of policies, locally and federally, that affect the status of women. Most notably, the ACT was the originator of the Federal Women's Council Domestic Violence policy, the precursor of the current Liberal Party policy and has been active in raising awareness for the need for legislative change in the area of sexual servitude.

Forum currently holds a discussion group, 'Fireside Chats' covering topics of concern, runs 'A Caring for Canberra' series with notable speakers who have contributed /or are contributing to community life in the ACT as well as participating in fundraising activities. Although the ACT is only a small Division, Forum has been fortunate to be included in the training programs of NSW Division and mans polling booths for female candidates in time of NSW State elections.

Kate Carnell, another member of Forum, was a very successful Chief Minister of the Territory for 5 years from 1996 to 2000, and currently the ACT Legislative Council has two female MLA's, Jacqui

Burke and Vicki Dunne, out of five members. The Current Management Committee has only 3 female representatives out of 13 members.

Gwen Wilcox (1992– 94) and Dawn Crosby (1994 –96) both Forum Members have served as Divisional Directors, and have been the only two female State/Territory Directors, with Gwen Wilcox also being elected Divisional President (1994 – 1996)

Members of Forum are well represented in the Meritorious Service Awards with Danielle Hyndes (1995), Gwen Wilcox (1996), Elizabeth Grant (1997), Valerie Howse (2000) and the Hon Margaret Reid was awarded the highest honour of the Distinguished Service Award in 2003.

Danielle Hyndes, President ACT Forum

NEW SOUTH WALES

Women in the New South Wales Division have made an invaluable contribution to the Party since its formation in early 1945. The New south Wales organisation came together after the amalgamation of the Liberal Democratic Party, the UAP and the Commonwealth Party. Sir John Cramer played a prominent role in the early consolidation of the Liberal Party along with many stalwarts like Ernest White, John Carrick, John Atwill and Bill Spooner. The Party was further encouraged by people like Vern Treatt, the State Parliamentary Leader for the late 1940s to the mid-1950s.

At the senior organisational level of the Party, women have had effective representation through the Women's Council and Branches. There is a provision in the New South Wales Constitution for a female State Vice-President and a minimum number of women delegates to Executive. Since 1995 selection panels for the Legislative Council and Senate have had two delegates from each State and Federal electorate respectively, one being female and one being male.

The first President of the New South Wales Women's Council was Mrs Shortland, with the early meetings of the NSWWC in the mid 1940s being held in Sydney. Early members of the NSWWC also included Joy Faunce, Roberta Gallagher (who represented the Federal Women's Committee at Federal Executive in 1947 and 1948) and Phyllis Little. The second President was the Hon Eileen Furley MLC. In November 1962, Mrs Furley (who was also chairman of the Federal Women's Committee in 1954 and 1959) was the first woman in the post-war years to be elected to the Legislative Council. She had been a prominent member of the NSW Division since its formation.

NSWWC has had a number of highly motivated State Presidents. They have included Phil Jackson, Thelma Bates, Pam Mitchell, Maureen Giddings (who also chaired the Federal Women's Committee from 1977-80), Betty Combe, Betty Grant, Marie Wood, Chris McDiven, who is the current NSW Division State President and also chaired the Federal Women's Committee from 1994-97, and Judy Hopwood, who is now a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly. The current President of NSWWC is Robyn Parker, who was elected to the NSW Legislative Council at the March 2003 election. Prior to taking up the position of Women's Council President Robyn was a State Country Vice President from 1997 – 2000

The NSW Division has had two women State Presidents, Bronwyn Bishop (1985-91), and Chris McDiven (2001 – present). The NSW Young Liberal Movement has had three female Presidents – Marise Payne – now Senator Payne – Catherine Cusack.- now a member of the NSW Legislative

Council and Gladys Berjiklian – now the Member for Willoughby. Marise Payne was also Federal President of the Young Liberal Movement from 1985-87.

One of the highest ranking women in State Parliament in the 1980s was Rosemary Foot, Member for Vaucluse 1978-86, who held several Shadow Ministry portfolios and was Deputy leader of the Opposition from 1983 to 1986. Kerry Chikarovski was one of a growing number of women elected to the NSW Parliament in the 1990s and became Australia's first Minister for Industrial Relations in 1993, Deputy Opposition Leader in 1994, and later Leader of the Opposition until 2002. Bronwyn Bishop was the first NSW Liberal woman to be elected to the Senate in 1987 and then became the first woman elected to both Houses when she was elected to the House of Representatives in 1994.

In April 1993 Liberal women supported the formation of the NSW Liberal Women's Forum, a political network for more women in Parliament. Since then, the number of women in senior positions in the Party, the number contesting selections and the number of women candidates have all steadily increased. A register of women interested in seeking selection is maintained by Women's Council, which organises forums, training seminars, workshops and mock selections on a regular basis.

The Women's Council has published "*Take Your Seats*", to serve as a guide for women seeking selection. It provides practical information regarding nomination, speech writing, public speaking and selection interviews.

Women's council arranges social and fundraising events for its members, including the annual luncheon at Parliament House. Membership of the Council is comprised of any financial member of the Division who either registers annually at least three meetings (other than the AGM) or is an elected delegate from their branch.

Hon Robyn Parker MLC, President NSW Women's Council

QUEENSLAND

The non-Labor organisation in Queensland was called the Queensland People's Party. This Party had contested all Federal and State elections under this name. It was not until the 1949 Federal election that the Liberal Party emerged and contested that year's Federal election under the new name.

Women in Queensland have played a leading role from the very early days. Lady Jessie Groom had been very involved with the Queensland Electoral League. The QEL, after the formation of the Queensland Liberal Party, became the central core of the Queensland Women's Council. Many notable women including Dame Annabelle Rankin became involved in the Queensland Women's Council. Dame Annabelle Rankin was elected as the first Queensland woman to Federal Parliament as a Senator in 1946 and became the first woman Government Whip in 1951. She subsequently became the Minister for Housing and upon retiring, the High Commissioner to New Zealand.

In 1976, Queensland elected its first woman Divisional Party President, Yvonne McColm, who also went on to become Federal Vice President of the Liberal Party. Mrs McColm had also represented the Queensland Women's Council on Federal Women's Committee.

The Queensland Women's State Council is an autonomous body. The most important senior positions within the Queensland Women's State Council are: the President; the Senior Vice-President; the Junior Vice-President; the Country Vice-President; the Secretary and the Treasurer. These members, together with the area chairmen, form the Women's Executive of the Queensland

Women's Council. Each Federal Electorate has a Women's Committee. The Women's State Council meets monthly and produces a quarterly newspaper to inform members of current activities.

Cassie Solomon served as Chairman of Women's State Council from 1981 to 2000 and also served as Chairman of Federal Women's Committee from 1986 to 1987 and as Federal Vice President of the Liberal Party from 1991 to 1993. The current President of Queensland Women's State Council is Rae Watkins.

Currently, there are three Queensland women in the House of Representatives: Kay Elson, Teresa Gambaro and Margaret May. There is one member of the Queensland State Parliament, Joan Sheldon MLA who previously served as Leader of the Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Coalition.

The President of Women's State Council is also a member of the Management Committee, the State Policy Committee, the State Council and Central Campaign Committees. Women in Queensland play a very active role in the formulation of policy.

Rae Watkins, President Queensland Women's State Council

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The South Australian Women's Council dates back to 1911, when the Liberal Women's Educational Association was formed.

Women's Council actively encourages women to stand for preselection and supports them in their election campaigns. The constitution of Women's Council provides for membership throughout the State, ensuring the Council has a broad-based cross section of people and views within its ranks. All women members of the SA Division can become members simply by registering every calendar year.

The Women's Council meets once a month. Policies are debated and developed which cater for the specific need of women, as well as more general areas that affect families and the wider community. Areas of interest and concern have included employment opportunities, financial independence for women, child care, family law reform, taxation reform, superannuation, domestic violence, rape legislation, women's shelters, women's health centres, part-time work, retraining schemes, sexual harassment, development of natural resources, education, and general family health and welfare.

Liberal are justifiably proud of the achievements of women within the Party in South Australia. Many notable women have contributed to the encouragement and development of the Liberal Party.

The first woman preselected as a Parliamentary candidate in South Australia was Agnes Goode in 1927 – some 33 years after South Australian women were the first to win the right to vote and stand for Parliament in 1894. In 1955 Nancy Buttfeld became the first South Australian woman Senator elected to Federal Parliament. In 1959 Jessie Cooper was the first woman elected to the South Australian Legislative Council and Joyce Steele became the first woman elected to the South Australian House of Assembly. The first South Australian woman elected to the Federal House of Representatives was Kay Brownbill in 1966.

The first woman to achieve Cabinet status in the South Australian Parliament was Joyce Steele, who was Minister of Education in the Hall Government in 1968-70 and was then followed by Jennifer

Adamson (now Cashmore) in 1979-82. In the Brown and Olsen Governments of 1993-2001, Diana Laidlaw, Dorothy Kotz and Joan Hall achieved Ministerial status.

Federally, Senator Amanda Vanstone is Minister for Family & Community Services, and shortly to be Minister for Immigration, in the Howard Government, having first been appointed to Cabinet in 1996. Trish Worth, a former Chairman of Federal Women's Committee, and Chris Gallus are both Parliamentary Secretaries in the Federal Government.

The President of the South Australian Women's Council, currently Lyn Petrie, is a member of the Division's State Executive, a delegate to Federal Council, and a member of the Federal Women's Committee, and women have representation on the Party's policy, rural and campaign committees.

TASMANIA

The Hobart Group is the oldest women's group founded by Sir Robert Menzies in 1944. The first women's organiser was Joy Piessi. The first State Council was formed in 1944 and the first President was Mrs Nell Solomon. Miss Millie Best MBE served on the Federal Women's Committee throughout the 1940s and 50s and was chairman twice, in 1950 and 1956.

Two highly active women in the past five decades have been Iris Cameron OBE and Eunice Jacobson. In more recent times, Joan Fenton, Carol Cains, Michelle Merry and Deirdre Flint were State Presidents of the State Women's Committee, and the current President is Pat Thompson. Deirdre Flint is currently one of the longest-serving Presidents of the Federal Women's Committee, having been first elected in 1999.

The State Women's Committee represents the Liberal Women's groups. Such groups are able to be formed by 15 or more women who are financial members of the Party organisation and who are enrolled as electors within the Division. This can only be done with the permission of the State Executive. Each group then elects delegates to the State Women's Committee. The State President of the Women's Group is a member of the Federal Women's Committee.

The functions of the State Women's Group are to promote the objectives, policy and platform of the Liberal Party; to exercise such powers and functions as may be conferred on it by State Executive; to receive and distribute information on the work and activities of women in the Division; to advise on policy matters especially affecting women; and to investigate and stimulate new ideas. The Group also acts as the coordinating body of women's activities in the Division, and reports to State Executive through the President of the State Women's Committee.

Comparatively few women party members have contested State and Federal elections in the post-war period. The following women have been successful in representing Tasmania in the Federal Parliament: Dame Enid Lyons, and Shirley Williams and Jocelyn Newman in the Senate. Millie Best, Mabel Miller (another Chairman of the Federal Women's Committee in 1960 and again in 1965), Carol Cains, Sue Napier (a former Leader), and Denise Swan (a former Deputy Leader) in the State Parliament.

Tasmania has recently (August 2003) elected its first woman State President, Carol Humphries.

VICTORIA

Women have played a prominent role in the Victorian Division since the inception of the Party in 1944.

The first Chairman of the Central Council of the Women's Sections was elected in 1946 and twenty other women have followed in her footsteps.

Women's Sections are spread throughout the State and have always played a major role in running campaign rooms and fund-raising. Women's Sections have also had input into policy development through Delegates debating motions at Central Council and at State Council.

Three former Chairmen of the Central Council have been elected Senators for Victoria – Dame Ivy Wedgwood, Dame Marie Breen and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle.

Dorothy Goble, an active member of the Women's Sections, became the first Victorian Liberal woman to enter State Parliament when she won the Lower House seat of Mitcham in 1967. Gracia Baylor, prior to becoming Chairman of the Central Council, was one of the first two women members of the Legislative Council in 1979. The Hon. Rosemary Varty was an Executive Member of the Central Council prior to becoming the Member for Nunawading Province in 1985.

Dame Valerie Austin, Dame Beryl Beaurepaire and Mrs Flo Parnaby BEM are women of distinction who served as Chairmen of the Central Council. Many other former Chairmen and Members of the Women's Sections have also been honoured for their work in the wider Community.

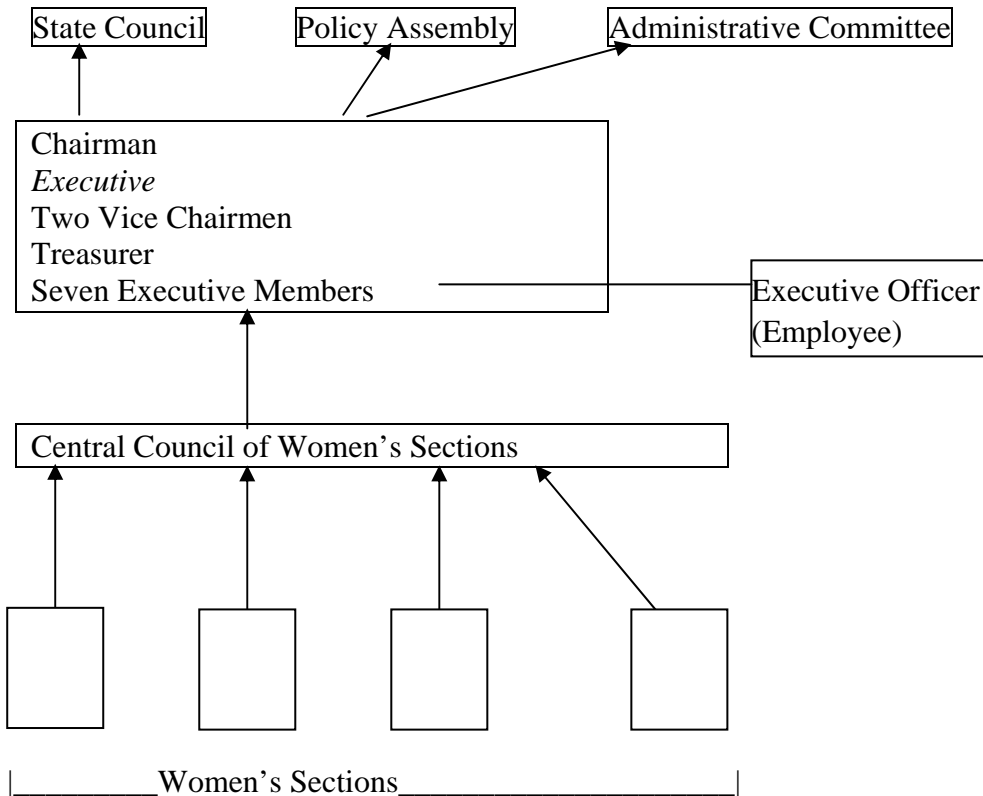
Senator Judith Troeth, a former Chairman of the Portland Women's Section and also State Country Vice President, was elected to the Senate in 1990. Sharman Stone who was elected to the Federal seat of Murray in 1996 was Chairman of the Burwood Women's Section. Fran Bailey from the Maroondah Women's Section was elected as the Federal Member for McEwen in 1989, lost the seat in 1992, then regained that same seat in 1996. Lorraine Elliott, inaugural Chairman of the Canterbury Evening Discussion Group and also State Metropolitan Vice President was elected as the State Member for the seat of Mooroolbark in 1992. Helen Shardey, also a Chairman of the Canterbury Evening Discussion Group and Metropolitan State Vice President won the State seat for Caulfield. Andrea McCall, an Executive Committee Member of the Central Council of Women's Sections was elected as the Member for the State seat of Frankston in 1996. Karen Synon, Chairman of City Women was elected as Senator for Victoria.

To actively maintain a presence in the Community, members of the Executive Committee convene high profile subcommittees, including Business and Professional Women's Functions, Policy Development, Women's Training Forums, Rural Forums, Evening City Forums, Multicultural Functions, Fundraising and a Local Council Training Programme. They also liaise with many established organisations such as the National Council of Women, Australia Day Council, Travellers Aid and the British Commonwealth Day Society.

A book detailing the history of women in the Liberal Party, "Women of Influence", was officially launched in 1996 by the then Premier, the Hon. Jeff Kennett. "Women of Influence" was written by Dr Diane Sydenham and details the seminal role that women have played in conservative political circles during the last fifty years.

The Executive Committee of the Women's Sections have organised Women's Training Forums since 1995. These forums have trained candidates in the skills and attributes necessary to succeed in the political arena. Topics covered include handling the media, chairing meetings, public speaking, campaigning and the pre-selection process facilitated by distinguished guest lecturers and trainers.

Central Council of Women's Sections, Victorian Division



*each has a Chair, two Vice Chairs, Secretary, Committee members
(three Delegates represent their Section at Central Council & must be Liberal Party Members)*

Theana Thompson, Chairman Central Council of Victorian Women's Sections

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Women in the Western Australian Liberal Party have played a very important role since the inception of the Division. In 1949, at the first General conference of the Liberal and country League of WA, a motion was carried that ensured the constitutional legitimacy of the State Women's Council (SWC).

The early two-tiered centralised organisation was extremely active and the SWC President for many years, Lady Sandover, became an extremely powerful member of the Party. SWC performed many important functions in its first ten years. It ensured Liberal representation on all metropolitan organisations which had as their aim the betterment of life in the community as a whole. By 1953, women of the SWC held executive positions in every organisation.

In the mid-1960s, the current tri-partite Division came into existence. This was organised along Federal Electoral boundary lines. The women's Sections are the equivalent of State Branches. The Women's Divisions form the administrative and coordinating tier from which delegates are elected to attend State Women's Council. This arrangement is quite unique to Western Australia.

State Women's Council has been a productive body of women who have initiated a great deal of policy research. In recent years, State Women's Council has anticipated public issues and has

conducted seminars on topics of importance such as the family, law and order, the environment, water resources and pensions.

In the early post-war period, the WA Division had included Australia's first woman Cabinet Minister, Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver, who retired from State Parliament in 1856. In 1949, Agnes Robertson won a Senate seat after a Party preselection committee had decided that a woman candidate was essential for a balanced team.

Western Australian Senator Sue Knowles became Deputy Whip in the Senate in 1987 and after 18 years in Federal Parliament has now given notice that she will not be standing at the next Federal election. In April 2003 Judith Adams, a former Senior Vice President of SWC and President of Hasluck Division, was selected on the Senate ticket to replace Sue Knowles.

Currently in the WA State Parliament are Barbara Scott MLC, Robin McSweeney MLA, Sue Walker MLA, Katie Hodson-Thomas MLA, and Cheryl Edwardes, who was WA's first Woman Attorney-General.

The latest WA woman MP to take up a ministry in the Federal Parliament is Julie Bishop MHR, who has just been sworn in as Minister for Ageing.

State Women's Council draws delegates from each Women's Division, which are based on the Federal electoral boundaries and each Women's Section.

The formation of SWC has changed and we no longer have any Sections. To attend SWC, two delegates from each branch are appointed to the women's Divisional Committee. At the AGM, five delegates are voted in and, along with the women's Divisional President, attend SWC each month.

Past Presidents of SWC have been Miss Margaret Battye, 1946 (also the first Chairman of Federal Women's Committee in 1945-46); Kathleen Sandover, 1952-56 and 1961-65 (Chairman of FWC 1951 and 1953); Edna Mattinson, 1956-57; Bertha Beecroft, 1957-58; Elizabeth Lefroy, 1958-61; Nitza O'May, 1965-69; Audrey McKenna, 1969-73 (FWC Chairman 1972-73); Althea McTaggart, 1973-77 (FWC Chairman 1976-77); Bridgit Faye, 1977-81; Anne Griffith, 1981-85; Vi Kershaw, 1985-88; Dianne Airey, 1988-89; Marie Louise Wordsworth, 1989-93; Margie Bass, 1993-96; Ann Ritson, 1996-2001 (currently State Vice President Liberal party of WA); and the current President is Daphne Bogue.

Daphne Bogue, President WA State Women's Council