

## Hon Susan Ryan AO Citation

The Honourable Susan Ryan AO, was born and educated in Sydney, attending Catholic girls schools and the University of Sydney where she graduated with a BA in English. Following marriage and the birth of her first child she moved to Canberra where her husband was posted, and in 1965 enrolled in an MA at the ANU. This degree was interrupted by periods living overseas, divorce, the difficulties of managing work, single parenthood and part time study, but eventually awarded in 1972. She began an academic career as a tutor at the ANU, but further progression required a PhD, which was not a possibility for her given what support was available to a single mother needing to work as well as study.

These early experiences of education, work and family life, and in particular the different experiences of men and women in all three, set her on a course of public activism as a leader of what is called the second wave of feminism in Australia. As she put it in her autobiography, *Catching the Waves*,

Our view was that women should have opportunities, should live and work without discrimination, unencumbered by stifling stereotypes. There should be no unfair obstacles put in the way of their achieving independence. Women and men should be judged on their merits, not on how far they reinforce some socially useful or commercially contrived norm.

She entered public life in Australia as one of the founding members of the Women's Electoral Lobby, or WEL, in 1972. Her work in WEL led naturally to seeking a role in politics, and after serving as a member of the Advisory Council of the ACT she nominated for the position of Senator for the ACT in 1975. She was elected later that year in the election that saw the end of the Whitlam Labor Government.

When Labor was returned to government following the 1983 election, Susan Ryan became Minister for Education, which position she held until 1987 and Minister Assisting the prime minister on the Status of Women, remaining in that role until her resignation from the Senate in 1988.

During her period as education minister, school retention rates doubled, universities and TAFE places grew significantly, and the R&D tax incentives and Cooperative Research Centres were introduced. Perhaps most importantly, during her period as Minister of Education, university education remained free, despite the Labor Party's increasing commitment to economic rationalism and the principle of user pays. Her stand against the idea that education is a private good for which the individual should pay, rather than a public good appropriately supported by the whole community, brought her into increasing conflict with the rest of the Cabinet. University student fees, in the form of HECS, were introduced by the next minister for education.

As Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, Susan Ryan pioneered extensive anti discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and policies for women, including the landmark Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunities in Employment) Act 1986. She also led the Government's work to have Australia enact the UN *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination*.

Following her departure from the Senate, Susan Ryan held a number of senior positions in industry organisations. She is presently the President of the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees and she chairs the trustee board of a major corporate superannuation fund. She has played a leading role in the move towards greater shareholder activism and corporate accountability.

Susan Ryan contributes regularly to print, radio and television coverage of finance, politics, education and women's employment and income, and is the Chair of the New Matilda Campaign for a Bill of Rights for Australia. Her leadership of this campaign has been characteristically energetic, as the Draft Bill has been presented to public forums around Australia, including late last year at the University of South Australia.

Among other contributions to the community Susan Ryan is a Pro Chancellor of the University of New South Wales.

She is an honorary Professorial Fellow of Macquarie University's Graduate School of Management, and holds honorary doctorates from Canberra and Macquarie Universities.

Susan Ryan was awarded the Order of Australia in 1990 for services to the Australian Parliament.

In 1999 she published her political autobiography *Catching the Waves* (HarperCollins), and in 2003 she co-edited and contributed to *The Hawke Government A Critical Retrospective* (Pluto Press).

Chancellor, I present the Honourable Susan Ryan AO for the award of Doctor of the University.