



The Liberal Party of Australia

Federal Women's Committee

History & Achievements

1945 – 2009

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/President of each State and ACT women's council, the Woman Federal Vice-President, the President and Immediate Past President of the FWC. Observer members include the Party's Federal President, Immediate Past-President, Federal Minister or Shadow Minister with responsibility for Women's Interests and the Chairman of the Liberal Women's Forum.

Each State and Territory Division of the Liberal Party has a women's council, with constituted powers and representation at senior Party levels. The councils 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, 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 Liberal 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 Liberal 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 or shadow 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 council 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 councils, 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 or Leader of the Opposition on a one-to-one basis when required.

The access enjoyed by FWC members to the members of the Liberal parliamentary parties, in particular the Prime Minister/Leader of the Opposition and other Federal Ministers or Shadow 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 COUNCILS

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

Each State Division of the Liberal Party, and the ACT, has a women's council, 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.) The women's councils 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 council.

The women's councils 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 councils 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 councils 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. From inception, the Forum was chaired by Dame Margaret Guilfoyle. It aimed 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 has operated through the women’s councils in all the States and the ACT to raise the profile of women candidates, and potential candidates, and assist them in campaigns for pre selections for, and election to, winnable seats. It drew 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 numbers of women from the Coalition elected to the Federal, State and Territory Parliaments and senior organisational party positions over the past 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 councils, 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 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 23 Coalition women MPs in the Federal Parliament (21 Liberals and 2 National Party), In the State and Territory Parliaments there are also numbers of women (see Annexure B for State/Territory details)

Chris McDiven is still the only woman to hold the position of Liberal Party Federal President, however 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 Mein is also to date the longest-serving Woman Federal Vice-President for 11 years from 1979 – 1990.)

Since then, Joy Howley has held the Victorian Presidency (1997-2000) as has Helen Kroger 2003-2006. Gwen Wilcox was ACT President in 1992 -94, Bronwyn Bishop was the first NSW woman President (1985-87) and Chris McDiven was also a NSW President for a number of years.

In South Australia, there have been two women Presidents - Vicki Chapman (now an opposition front-bench MP in the SA Parliament) 1992-95, and Rosemary Craddock completed a three year term in 2003. Also in 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. Danielle Blain is currently a Federal Vice President of the Liberal Party elected in March 2009. Helen Kroger is also a former Federal Vice President.

Interestingly, by contrast to the elected party positions, women have not featured strongly among the Liberal 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).

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 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.

In South Australia Trish Worth, Chairman 1986-88, is a former Federal Member for Adelaide (elected 1993). Joan Hall, FWC President 1990-94, was 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).

As mentioned previously Chris McDiven FWC President (1991-96) has also held the positions of NSW State President and Federal President. Also from NSW, FWC members Judy Hopwood, (1996-2000), and Robyn Parker (2000-2003) have 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 a FWC President for five years. In addition to Deirdre, a number of other former members of the FWC have gone on to play a role in local government including Di Wilkins (SA) a member of the Burnside Council in Adelaide. In Tasmania, Pat Thompson was a Councillor on the Dorset Council and Lyn Laycock was 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 Bearepaire (FWC Chairman 1974-76) as Chairman.

The Howard Government 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 continued to increase under the Howard Government, which 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 – helped to make it easier for women to take time off work to have a child. An 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 were increased family payments, the establishment of the 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, had 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 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/shadow 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 and Shadow Ministers are 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.

FWC Presidents have also approached the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition or other Ministers or Shadow Ministers directly when concerns have arisen that demanded immediate attention.

Within the Party organisation itself, the FWC had input into the 1983 Valder Report to ensure the interests of women were properly represented. The FWC also 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. 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. Chris McDiven is now the current President of 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 also 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. In 2002 FWC produced 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. Issues raised at Federal Council by the FWC in recent years include superannuation for women, pap smears, parental leave, tax arrangements, childcare, paid maternity leave and nuclear energy.

National Liberal Women's Conferences:

Until recently the FWC conferences were held in conjunction with the Liberal 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
- June 2005 Canberra *Liberal Women Caring for Families*: Theana Thompson
- June 2007 Sydney *Liberal Women Politics and Beyond*: Theana Thompson
- June 2009 Melbourne *Women and Politics*: Robyn Nolan

These conferences have been very successful and have been strongly supported by Parliamentary Leaders. John Howard addressed every conference after becoming Federal Leader in 1995, and other ministers and shadow Ministers 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 State and Territory Divisional Women's Councils and the Liberal 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.

The Federal Women's Committee has long enjoyed the support of the Federal Liberal Party and Parliamentary Leadership, and when in Government in 1996-2007 Prime Minister John Howard supported women in the Party and in the wider community. Federal Presidents have also been proactive in their support for the work of the Federal Women's Committee and gone out of their 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 councils and the FWC.

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 2009, are nevertheless still strong enough to require the retention of the FWC and the State and Territory Divisions' women's councils for the future. This need is supported by the large numbers of women members of the Liberal Party who continue to participate in the women's councils across Australia.



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. Female representation may be improving, however 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 Liberal Party membership, will continue to make a valuable contribution towards the attainment of this universal goal.

Robyn Nolan
Federal Women's Committee President

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.

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In 2009 the document was updated by FWC President Robyn Nolan and Liberal Women's Council Presidents:

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APPENDIX A

Federal Women's Committee – Chairmen/Presidents 1945 – 2009

Miss Margaret Battye WA 1945-46
Miss Roberta Gallagher NSW 1947
Mrs W S Lettice QLD 1948
Mrs M Hodgson VIC 1949
Miss Millie Best MBE TAS 1950
Mrs (later Lady) Kathleen Sandover OBE JP WA 1951
Mrs (later Dame) Maureen Breen VIC 1952
Mrs (later Lady) Kathleen Sandover OBE JP WA 1953
Hon Eileen Furley OBE NSW 1954
Mrs (later Lady) Elizabeth Wilson CBE SA 1955
Miss Millie Best MBE TAS 1956
Mrs (later Dame) Audrey Reader VIC 1957
Mrs M Gordon OBE QLD 1958
Mrs (later Hon) Eileen Furley OBE NSW 1959
Mrs (later Dame) Mabel Miller TAS 1960
Mrs (later Lady) Elizabeth Wilson CBE SA 1961
Miss Iris Hyde NSW 1963-64
Mrs (later Dame) Mabel Miller TAS 1965
Mrs V Blogg MBE 1966-67
Mrs Noelene Wheeler QLD 1967-70
Mrs Margaret Daniel SA 1970-71
Mrs Eileen Parr TAS 1971-72
Mrs Audrey McKenna WA 1972-73
Mrs Yvonne McComb QLD 1973-74
Mrs (later Dame) Beryl Beaurepaire VIC 1974-76
Mrs Althea McTaggart WA 1976-77
Mrs Maureen Giddings NSW 1977-80
Mrs Elizabeth Grant AM ACT 1980-85
Mrs Cassie Solomon QLD 1985-86
Ms (later Hon) Trish Worth (MHR) SA 1986-88
Ms Nia Stavropoulos Tilley ACT 1988-90
Mrs (later Hon) Joan Hall (MHA) SA 1990-94
Mrs Chris McDiven NSW 1994-97
Ms Penny Reader Harris SA 1997-99
Mrs Deirdre Flint TAS 1999- 2004
Mrs Theana Thompson VIC 2004-2008
Mrs Robyn Nolan WA 2008 -

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The ACT Division of the Liberal Party was formed in 1975 (The ACT was previously a branch of the New South Wales Division).

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" – Presidents have included:

- Elizabeth Grant,
- Caryl Haslem,
- Kerryn McGhie,
- Louise Littlewood (MLA 1997-1998),
- Nia Stavropoulas Tilley,
- Trish Favretto,
- Kathy Cornford,
- Kate Gunn,
- Winnifred Rosser, OAM
- Gayle Richards,
- Yvonne Simmington,
- Danielle Hyndes, OAM (President 2004),
- Donella Kinnish (President 2005) (elected Councillor Sep 2008 – Richmond Valley Council),
- Lorraine Finlay (President 2006, 2007), and
- Natalie Colbert (President 2008)

The name "Liberal Action" was changed to "Forum for Liberal Women" in 1984, and the then to Liberal Women's Council (ACT) in 2006. Since its inception, Women's Council has sought to inform women in the ACT of current political issues and to provide them with opportunities to participate in the political process, either in the organisational or parliamentary wings of the Liberal Party.

The Women's Council has also focussed in both formulating and monitoring the implementation of policies, both locally and federally, that affect the status of women. Most notably, the Women's Council was the originator of the Federal Women's Committee domestic violence policy (the precursor of the current Liberal party policy in this area) and has been active in raising awareness of the need for additional funding and legislative change in the areas of sexual servitude, tax-deductible childcare and paid parental leave.

The Women's Council also organises and participates in a wide range of political and community activities. Members of the Women's Council play an active role in Liberal Party campaigns, provide fundraising support for female candidates, hear from a range of notable speakers at Women's Council meetings, and attend regular social functions (including the annual Reflections dinner) and have the opportunity to organise and participate in a targeted candidate development program.

Women have played an active role in the ACT Division of the Liberal Party, both in the parliamentary and organisational spheres. Notable women in the ACT include:

- Elizabeth Grant. The first Liberal Women member of the ACT House of Assembly (1979-1982), Liberal candidate for Fraser (1983), President of the FWC (1980-1985). Awarded a Centenary Medal “For service to the Centenary of Federation celebrations in the ACT”
- The Honourable Margaret Reid, AO. The first ACT Divisional President who, in 1982 became the Senator for the ACT, and later the first female President of the Senate (1997-2002). Awarded an Office of the Order of Australia (AO) “For service to the Australian Parliament, to support for parliamentary institutions in developing nations, and to the community through a wide range of volunteer and charitable organisations”
- Nia Stavropolous Tilley – President of the Federal Women’s Committee (1988-1990)
- Kate Carnell – Elected as a Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly in 1992, Leader of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Liberal Party from 1993 to 2000, ACT Chief Minister from 1995 to 2000, and received the Liberal Party’s Distinguished Service Award in 2002. Kate was the first woman to be elected as a Liberal State Premier or Territory Chief Minister in Australian political history.
- Gwen Wilcox served as ACT Divisional Director (1992-1994), and was elected as Divisional President (1994-1996)
- Dawn Crosby served as ACT Divisional Director (1994-1996)
- Penny Reader Harris – President of the FWC (1997-1999 – Representing SA)
- Vicki Dunne, MLA. Elected as member of the Act Legislative Assembly (2001 – Re-elected 2008).
- Jacqui Burke. Elected as member of the Act Legislative Assembly (via casual vacancy Jan 2001). She was defeated in October 2001, Re-elected via casual vacancy 2002 and served until October 2008.
- Winnifred Rosser, OAM was elected as Divisional President (Aug 07 - ongoing). Awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for “service to the heritage of the Australian Capital Territory, particularly through the Friends of the National Museum of Australia”

The contributions made by members of the Women’s Council have been recognised by the Liberal Party with Meritorious Service Awards being presented to Gwen Wilcox (1996), Elizabeth Grant (1997), Valerie Howse (2000), and Danielle Hyndes (2005). The Meritorious Youth Service Award was presented to Lorraine Finlay (2003). The Distinguished Service Award has been awarded to both Kate Carnell (2002) and Margaret Reid (2003).

Originally written by Danielle Hyndes in 2003, updated by Lorraine Finlay in 2007, and Natalie Colbert (2008)

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:

Mrs. Shortland	1947
Hon. Eileen Furley	
Phil Jackson	1963-1967
Thelma Bates	
Pam Mitchell	1971-1974
Maureen Giddings	1974-1979
Betty Combe	1979-1983
Betty Grant	1983-1988
Marie Wood	1988-1991
Chris McDiven	1991-1996
Judy Hopwood MLA	1996-2000
Hon. Robyn Parker MLC	2000-2003
Mary O'Dea	2003-2005
Helen Wayland	2005-

Maureen Giddings also chaired the Federal Women's Committee from 1977-80 and Chris McDiven, chaired the Federal Women's Committee from 1994-97. The current President of the Liberal Women's Council (NSW) is Helen Wayland, who was elected in March 2005 and re-elected in March 2006 and September 2008. With new amendments to the NSW Constitution passed by State Council in August 2008, Helen Wayland became the inaugural Female Vice President of NSW/President of Liberal Women's Council (NSW)

The NSW Division has had two women State Presidents, Bronwyn Bishop (1985-91), and Chris McDiven (2001 – 2005). Chris was elected Federal President of the Party in 2005 and did not seek re-election in 2008. The NSW Young Liberal Movement has had four female Presidents – Marise Payne – now Senator Payne – Catherine Cusack.- now a member of the NSW Legislative Council, Gladys Berjiklian – now the Member for Willoughby and Natasha Maclaren-Jones – now an Urban Vice-President of New South Wales. 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. The Liberal Women's Forum is currently under the leadership of the President Helen Wayland and the Urban Vice President of NSW, Natasha Maclaren Jones. 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.

Eleven new sub-committees to the Women's Council were formed in February 2009 adding to those already established. This idea was to enable all members of the Executive and Committee an opportunity to chair various sub-committees with invitations to all delegates wishing to give the Council the benefit of their knowledge. All sub-committees report their progress to the President on a monthly basis. Evening sessions including The Women of Influence Series has proved a success with prominent women from all walks of life addressing the audience. A newsletter titled "The Liberal Link" is published three times a year and is distributed to all delegates of Women's Council and State Council. Women's council arranges social and fundraising events for its members, including the annual luncheons. Membership of the Council is comprised of any financial member of the Division though voting rights are only given to an elected delegate from each branch.

Originally written by Hon Robyn Parker MLC, updated by Helen Wayland (2009)

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 division of the 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 female 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 female Divisional Party President of the Liberal Party, Yvonne McColm, who also went on to become Federal Vice President of the Liberal Party. Yvonne had also represented the Queensland Women's Council on the Federal Women's Committee.

The Queensland Women's Council was an autonomous body. It was made up of an Executive and Federal Electorate Women's Committees. The Executive included: the President; Senior Vice President; the Junior Vice President; the Country Vice President; the Secretary; Treasurer and the area Chairmen.

The Women's State Council met monthly, produced a quarterly newsletter to inform members, and held functions that promoted women's political participation.

The President of the Women's State Council was a member of the Management Committee, the State Policy Committee, the State Council and Central Campaign Committee.

On the 26th of July 2008, the Queensland Division of the Liberal Party merged with the Queensland National Party. The new organisation is called the LNP (Liberal National Party). The Party is a division of the Liberal Party and is affiliated with the National Party. The LNP Women is a Party unit of the LNP. The primary objective of LNP Women is to support women's political participation.

An Executive, ten Regions and Branches make up the structure of the Women's division. The Executive consists of a President, Vice President, Policy Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and ten Regional Chairman.

The President of the LNP Women sits on the Federal Councils of the Liberal and National Parties and the Federal Women's Committees of both parties. She also is a member of the State Executive and the State Council of the LNP.

Formerly President of the LWC (Qld) Melina Morgan was elected the inaugural President of the LNP Women in 2008.

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 pre selection 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.

Liberals 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 1979-1982. In the Brown and Olsen Governments of 1993-2001, Diana Laidlaw, Dorothy Kotz and Joan Hall achieved Ministerial status.

In 2009 SA has 5 women in State Parliament. Vicki Chapman MP, who is the member for Bragg and is Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Minister for Health, for Housing, for Mental Health and Substance abuse and for Population and the Shadow Minister for the City of Adelaide. Isobel Redmond MP who is the member for Heysen is the Shadow Attorney-General, Shadow Minister for Justice, for the Arts and the Aging.

Hon Michelle Lensink MLC is deputy leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council and holds the position of Shadow Minister for Gambling, for Government Enterprise, for Consumer Affairs and is Shadow Minister for Status of Women. Liz Penfold MP is the member for Flinders and the Hon Caroline Schaefer MLC is a member of the Legislative Council.

Federally, Senator Amanda Vanstone was Minister for Family & Community Services, and later became Minister for Immigration, in the Howard Government, having first been appointed to Cabinet in 1996. In 2006 she became Australia's

longest serving female Cabinet Minister. Trish Worth, a former Chairman of Federal Women's Committee, and Chris Gallus were both Parliamentary Secretaries in the Howard Government.

In 2009 SA has one woman in the Federal Parliament Senator Mary Jo Fisher.

The Acting President of the South Australian Women's Council, currently Sue Gow, 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 Liberal Party's policy, rural and campaign committees.

TASMANIA

Structure

The Hobart Women's Group is the oldest women's group in the Liberal Party founded by Sir Robert Menzies in 1944. The organiser of the group was Joy Piessi, and in 1944 the State Council was formed with Mrs Nell Soloman elected as President.

In the past five decades women members have committed many hours of their time to promote the ethos and beliefs of the Liberal Party in Tasmania to communities. These include Miss Millie Best OBE, Mrs Iris Cameron OBE and life member Eunice Jacobson. A rose has been planted in the Rose Garden, in memory of Mrs Cameron, at Parliament House, Canberra.

The group was known by the name State Women's Committee and presidents included Ms Joan Fenton, Mrs Carol Caines, Ms Michele Merry and Mrs Deirdre Flint. Deirdre is currently Mayor of Central Midlands Council in Tasmania and is one of the longest serving Presidents of the Federal Women's Committee, 1999 – 2004.

The name 'State Women's Council' was changed to Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania and Mrs Pat Thompson is the current president.

Membership of the Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania includes two delegates plus two substitute delegates elected from each branch including each women's group. The president and secretary are elected by the members of the council at the AGM each year. Substitute delegates only have a vote when carrying out the position of a delegate in the absence of that delegate. A financial member of the Tasmanian Division may attend a meeting of the Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania but shall not be entitled to vote unless they are a listed registered delegate of the council.

Role of council

The role of the Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania is to promote the objectives, policy and platform of the Liberal Party of Australia; to exercise such powers and functions as may be conferred on it by the Tasmanian 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 council also acts as the co-ordinating body for women's activities in the division, and reports to the State Executive through the president of the Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania.

The Liberal Women's Council of Tasmania meet on the first Friday of alternate months of the year (February, April, June, August, & October) with a Christmas dinner in November. Council produces a business plan and an expanded annual meeting report to inform members of activities both federal & state. The patron is The Hon Jocelyn Newman AO.

Profiles

Miss Amelia Best (known as Millie) was one of the *first two women* elected to the Tasmanian House of Assembly. Throughout her life she was a dedicated community and

voluntary worker including being a commandant in the Voluntary Aid Detachment Canteen Services during World War II. On 2 January 1956 Amelia Best was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for services to social welfare.

Besides being the Member of the Tasmanian House of Assembly for Wilmot from 1955-1956 and 1958-1959, Millie was active within the Liberal Party as well as being a community worker. Millie was a member of the Federal Women's Committee throughout the 1940's and 50's and chairman in 1950 and 1956.

She was a foundation member of the Women Show Judges Association and foundation president of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Launceston. A member of the Board of Governors for the Launceston Girl's Home, Millie also was treasurer to the Auxiliary Cosgrove Park Home and an executive member of the United Nations Association. Other memberships included the Red Cross Meals on Wheels, the Good Neighbour Council and the National Council of Women. Millie died in Launceston in November 1979. (Ref. Australian Women Biographical Entry)

Dame Mabel Miller – (1906-1978), politician, was born on 30 November 1906 at Broken Hill, New South Wales, second child of South Australian-born parents Joseph Christian Goodhart, draper, and his wife Alice Mary, née Humphries. Brought to Adelaide as a child, Mabel was educated at Girton House Girls' Grammar School. She attended a finishing school in Paris before entering the University of Adelaide (LL.B., 1927). Admitted to the South Australian Bar on 17 December 1927, she pursued her profession in London and Sydney before settling in Tasmania. At St George's Anglican Church, Hobart, on 24 July 1930 she married Alan John Richmond Miller (d.1965), a 31-year-old chemist.

In a larger political arena Miller had attracted the attention of the Liberal Party. Although she unsuccessfully contested the division of Queenborough for the Legislative Council in 1953, she headed the poll for Franklin in February 1955 and thereby became the first woman to be elected to the House of Assembly. Surprisingly defeated at the polls in May 1964, Miller never re-entered State politics. She maintained her association with community bodies, among them the United Ex-Service Women's Homes Association and the Tasmanian division of the Right to Life Association. An effective fund-raiser, she helped to establish (1955) the Women's and Children's Memorial Rest Centre, Hobart. She also sat on the interim council of the Australian National Gallery (from 1968) and on the Metric Conversion Board (from 1970).

In 1967 Miller was appointed D.B.E. Early that year she represented her country on the United Nations' Status of Women Commission. As a rapporteur of the 21st session, she helped to draft and push through declarations on the elimination of discrimination against women. Later in the year she was an Australian delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Survived by her daughter, she died on 30 December 1978 in a nursing home at New Town. (Ref. Australian Dictionary Biography online).

Women representatives

Comparatively few women party members have contested state and federal elections in the post war period. In Tasmania the following women have been successful in representing Tasmania.

Federal Parliament - Dame Enid Lyons, Ms Shirley Williams, The Hon Jocelyn Newman, The Hon Shirley Walters and Ms Millie Best OBE.

State Parliament - Ms Mable Miller (chairman of Federal Women's Committee 1960 and 1965), Mrs Carol Cains, The Hon Sue Napier (former State Liberal Party Leader) and Mrs Denise Swan (former Deputy Leader State Liberal Party).

Liberal Party Tasmanian Division - Mrs Carol Humphries was elected the first women President for the Tasmanian Liberal Party in August 2003.

Young Liberals – Ms Rachel Fry is a former state president of Young Liberals in Tasmania and is president of the Young Liberal Movement of Australia only the second woman to hold the position.

PAST PRESIDENTS

Highlights

- In 2007 Mrs. Edith Langham Goodwin, past president of the Hobart Women's Group, received an OAM for community service.

Name	State date	Federal date
Mrs Nell Soloman	1945	
Miss Amelia (Millie) Best MHA OBE	Not known	
Mrs Joyce Heathorn	Not known	
Miss Edith Goodie	Not known	
Mrs Nan Cameron	Not known	
Dame Mabel Miller MHA	Not known	
Mrs Eileen Parr	Not known	Not known
Mrs Gwenna Oakley	1974-1976	
Mrs Jeni de Cani	1976-1978	
Mrs Iris Cameron OBE	1978-1981	
Mrs Joy McKay	1982-1983	
Mrs Joan Fenton	1983-1987	
Mrs Eunice Jacobson (Acting)	1985	
Mrs Carol Caines	1987-1989	
Mrs Michelle Merry	1989-1983	
Mrs Dorothy Calvert	1993-1995	
Mrs Michele Merry	1995-2002	
Mrs Deirdre Flint	1996-2002	1999-2004
Mrs Pat Thompson	2002- current	

- In 2008 Ms Mary Rudge, Hobart City Branch of the Liberal Party, received an OAM and included in the honour role of Significant Tasmanian Women (an initiative of the State Labor Party).
- Mrs Berta Von Bibra received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in January 2008.

- Mrs. Deirdre Flint is the first woman to be mayor for the Central Highlands Council in Tasmania. She also served 5 years as Federal Women's Committee President.
- Local Government – members serving on local government include Mayor Lyn Laycock of Devonport Council serving her second term; past councillors CMWR Julia Gulson West Tamar Council; Mrs Dorothy Calvert from Waratah Wynyard Council.

These achievements represent, and extend, to other women who have been active within the Liberal Party in Australia and have made significant contributions at both federal, state and territory levels of Liberal Governments in other ways, and also in other community, state and national bodies. The foundation of the Liberal Women's Council is supported by many women who give freely of their time and energy to support and promote the Liberal ethos.

The experiences of participation, organisation, public speaking, campaigning, fund raising and community activities have provided a valuable training ground for women to enable them to make a wider community contribution.

Pat Thompson
President

VICTORIA

The Women's Section, now known as the Liberal Women's Council, was founded in 1944.

Elizabeth Couchman, the long time President of The Australian Women's National League (AWNL), was a friend of Robert Menzies. When Menzies was casting around for support to establish a new political party, his eye fell on the AWNL, their large membership and branch structure.

Elizabeth Couchman was instrumental in the formation of the Liberal Party. In return for the support of their membership, the AWNL obtained two key undertakings from Robert Menzies: there was to be equal gender representation throughout the Liberal party, and that the AWNL continued within the new party's structure, as the Women's Section.

However, the Liberal party was formed with the explicit agreement that office bearers of the groups drawn together to form the new Liberal Party would have no right to any position in the new party. Elizabeth was elected to the first State Executive of the Victorian Division of the Liberal Party and became Female Metropolitan Vice-President in 1949, a position she held until 1955. She was then 79 years old.

The first Chairman of the Central Council of the Women's Sections was Mrs. E. Haynes. She was elected in 1944 and twenty-three other women have followed in her footsteps.

They are:-

1944 – 1946	Mrs. E. Haynes
1946 – 1948	Cr. N. G. Ibbott MBE
1948 – 1950	Dame Ivy Wedgwood DBE (Victorian Senator 1950-1971)
1950 – 1952	Miss Jessie Sutherland OBE
1952 – 1955	Dame Marie Breen DBE OBE JP (Victorian Senator 1962 – 1968)
1955 – 1958	Dame Valerie Austin DBE OBE JP
1961 – 1964	Mrs. J. M. Bayley MBE JP
1964 – 1967	Mrs. S. Blogg MBE
1967 – 1970	Dame Margaret Guilfoyle DBE (Victorian Senator 1971-1987)
1970 – 1973	Mrs. R. M. (Flo) Parnaby BEM
1974 – 1976	Dame Beryl Beaurepaire AC DBE OBE
1976 – 1979	Mrs. Alethea Russell
1979 – 1982	Mrs. W. R. Vale
1982 – 1985	Mrs. Noele R. Cook
1985 – 1986	Mrs. Gracia Baylor AM
1986 – 1988	Mrs. Betty Nolan-Kersley JP
1988 – 1991	Mrs. Lyn Jewell
1991 – 1994	Mrs. R. de Fegely OAM

1994 – 1997	Mrs. Trish Wilkie
1997 – 2000	Mrs. Lynn Bowden
2000 – 2001	Mrs. Sheila Hargrave
2001 – 2004	Mrs. Theanna Thompson
2004 – 2007	Mrs. Karen Synon (Victorian Senator 1997-1999)
2007-	Mrs. Norma E. Wells

The Liberal Women's Council members have always played a major role both the Parliamentary and Political wings of the Party.

The following members have been elected to Parliament since 1944:-

Federal Parliament:

House of Representatives:

1990 – 1993	Fran Bailey Members for McEwen
1996 – Present	Maroondah Women's Section
1996 - Present	Sharman Stone Member for Murray Former Chairman of Burwood Women's Section

Senators for Victoria:

1950 – 1971	Dame Ivy Wedgwood Former Chairman Central Council
1962 – 1968	Dame Marie Breen Former Chairman Central Council
1971 – 1987	Dame Margaret Guilfoyle Former Chairman Central Council
1987 – 2008	Dr Kay Patterson Canterbury Evening Discussion Group
1993 – Present	Judith Troeth Former Chairman Portland Women's Section Former State Country Female Vice President
1997 – 1999	Karen Synon Former Chairman City Women Former Chairman Liberal Women's Council

Victorian State Parliament:

Legislative Assembly:

1967 – 1976	Dorothy Goble Member for Mitcham Berwick Women’s Section First Liberal woman to enter the Victorian parliament
1992 – 1999	Lorraine Elliott Member for Mooroolbark Inaugural Chairman Canterbury Evening Discussion group Former State Metropolitan Female Vice- President
1996 – 2002	Andrea McCall Member for Frankston Former Executive member Liberal Women’s Council
1996 – Present	Helen Shardey Member for Caulfield Former Chairman Canterbury Evening Discussion group. Former State Metropolitan female Vice-President

Legislative Council:

1979 – 1985	Gracia Baylor Boronia Province One of only two women in the Legislative Assembly Former Chairman Liberal Women’s Council
1985 – 1992	Rosemary Varty Nunawading Province Former Executive member Liberal Women’s Council
1999 – 2006 2006 – Present	Andrea Coote Monash Province Southern Metropolitan Member Canterbury Evening Discussion group

Liberal Women’s Council Sections are spread throughout the State and have always played a major role during campaigns and are also recognised for their fund-raising efforts.

Women’s Sections have also had input into policy development. Delegates debate motions at general meetings, and then follow through to State Council.

There are currently 33 Liberal Women’s Council Sections spread across Victoria

Past activities of the Liberal Women’s Council include Women’s Training Forums, Rural Forums, Evening City Forums, Multicultural Functions and Fundraising.

Recognising the need for Liberal women to be involved in Leadership roles at all levels in their local Community, a round table forum was convened titled “Become a Woman of Influence in Your Community”.

The Liberal Women's Council is affiliated with the following organisations: the National Council of Women, Australia Day Council, Travellers Aid and the British Commonwealth Day Society. Nominated delegates attend the regular monthly meetings of these organisations in Victoria

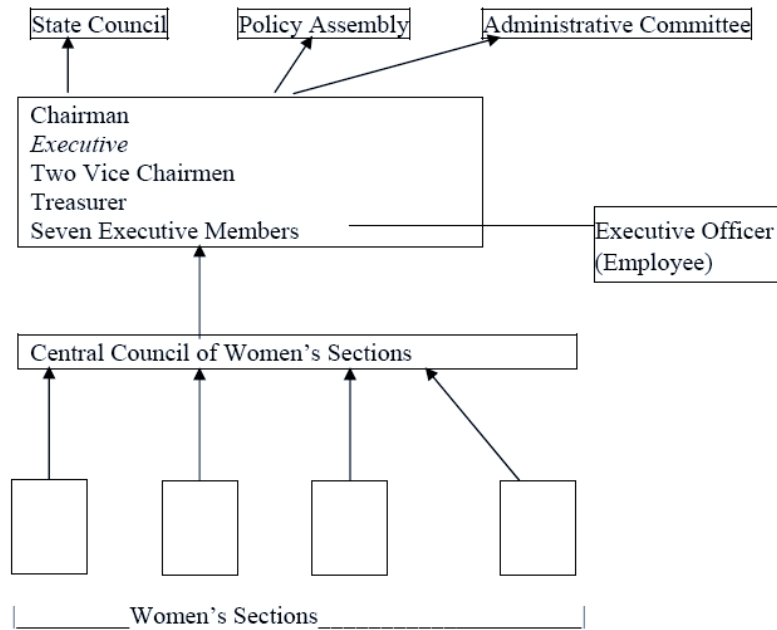
In 2008 the Dame Elizabeth Couchman Scholarship was established, to provide a programme for educating and developing future women leaders in the Victorian Division of the Liberal Party. Planning for the scholarship began in 2004 under the leadership of Karen Synon. The Liberal Women's Council established a fund to be managed by the Centennial Liberal Women's Committee, which was named to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the establishment of the AWNL. The committee is responsible for investing the funds raised and managing the Dame Elizabeth Couchman Scholarship.

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

Reference for information found in this article is
"Liberal Women" Federation to 1949
Margaret Fitzherbert 2004
Printed by Federation Press

An earlier book detailing the history of women in the Liberal Party, "Women of Influence", written by Dr Diane Sydenham, details the seminal role that women have played in conservative political circles during the last fifty years.

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)*

Norma Wells
Chairman

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 name remained until a constitutional change was passed unanimously at the 2008 Liberal Party State Conference. The new name is now Liberal Women's Council (WA), a name which better reflects the constituent body of women members.

The early two-tiered centralised organisation was extremely active and the SWC President, Lady Sandover, became an extremely powerful member of the Liberal Party. SWC performed many important functions in its first 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 the Federal Electoral boundary lines. The Women's sections were equivalent to state branches. The Divisional Women's Committee form the administrative and coordinating tier from which delegates are elected to attend Liberal Women's Council (WA). This arrangement is quite unique to Western Australia.

The formation of LWC (WA) has changed slightly over the years and unfortunately only one women's section (Applecross) remains. To attend LWC (WA) meetings as a delegate two delegates are elected from each branch to the Divisional Women's Committee. From there five elected delegates from each Divisional Women's Committee and the Divisional Women's Committee President are elected to become delegates to LWC (WA).

The President of each Women's Committee (15 in total) the LWC(WA) President and the IP LWC(WA) President are all members of State Council and the President of LWC(WA) is a member of State Executive. Each Women's Committee President is a member of their Division Executive.

Objectives of Liberal Women's Council (WA):

- will canvass all topics of interest to Liberals
- actively seek to promote the Liberal cause in every possible way
- recognise that the Women's Divisions possess a unique opportunity to communicate with every sector of the community
- seek a higher profile within the community
- interact with other women's organisations to promote a better understanding of the philosophy and policies of the Liberal Party
- actively campaign on behalf of both Liberal Parliamentary members and candidates on a continuous basis to secure and hold electorates for the Liberal Party
- Liaise with Federal and State Liberal Parliamentarians to provide a two-way vehicle for the flow of information and the formation of policy.

Women in the Liberal Party in Western Australia currently hold positions on the State Executive including Division Presidents and the Chair of three Liberal Party Committees. Women also hold positions on a number of the committees and hold some delegate positions from their Divisions to State Council.

LWC (WA) raises significant funds for the Liberal Party in Western Australia through fundraising functions and remains a link for Liberal women to a number of other women's organisations. Delegates represent LWC (WA) officially at a number of external organisations including NGALA, NCW, Consumers Association and the Australian Asia Association. A number of LWC (WA) delegates are members in their own right.

SWC and more recently LWC (WA) has been a productive body of women who have initiated a great deal of policy research. In recent years LWC (WA) anticipated a number of public issues and has conducted seminars on topics of importance such as the family, law and order, the environment, water resources, seniors and child care.

In the early post war period, the WA Division included Australia's first woman Cabinet Minister Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver who was a member of the WA Parliament. She retired from the WA State Parliament in 1956. In 1949 Agnes Robertson won a Senate seat. Western Australian Senator Sue Knowles became Deputy Whip in the Senate in 1987. Sue did not contest the 2004 election and retired in 2005. Judith Adams a former Senior Vice President of SWC and President of O'Connor Division was elected to the Senate in 2004 and became a Senator in 2005. The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Member for Curtin, a former Minister for Ageing and Minister for Education, is currently Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. The Hon Judi Moylan, elected in 1993, is the current Member for Pearce. Nola Marino MP was elected as the Member for Forrest at the 2007 Federal election. Senator Michaelia Cash was elected to the Senate in November 2007 and recently took her place in the Senate on 1 July 2008.

In 1989 the Hon Muriel Patterson was elected to the Legislative Council from the South West Region. Muriel retired in 2001.

In 2009 the Legislative Council has five Liberal women: Hon Robyn McSweeney MLC, elected 2001 (and currently a Minister in the Barnett Government) Hon Helen Morton MLC, (currently a Parliamentary Secretary in the Barnett Government) Hon Donna Faragher MLC, (currently a Minister in the Barnett Government) both elected 2005. Hon Liz Behjat MLC and Alyssa Hayden MLC were elected in 2008 and were sworn in as Members of the Legislative Council in May 2009. Both Liz Behjat (former Vice President LWC) and Alyssa Hayden (President Pearce Women's Committee) were active members of LWC (WA). A former member of the Legislative Council the Hon Barbara Scott MLC was elected in 1993 and did not seek re election at the 2008 State election. Likewise Katie Hodson-Thomas MLA was elected in 1996 (Member for Carine) and did not seek re election at the 2008 State election.

The Hon Cheryl Edwardes who was WA's first woman Attorney General and first elected to the then new seat of Kingsley in 1989 did not contest the 2005 election. At the September 2008 election Andrea Mitchell was elected to the WA Legislative Assembly Member for Kingsley and Liza Harvey was elected as the Member for Scarborough.

The Western Australian Division elected its first woman President in 2003-2008 Danielle Blain who was recently elected as a Federal Vice-President. In 2009 the WA Division has a male President and two women Vice –Presidents, Donna Lynch and Heather Gilmour both delegates from their Women's Committees to LWC (WA). A former LWC (WA) President Anne Ritson also held the position of State Vice President some years ago.

Julie Brown now Deputy Mayor of Gosnells is a former Vice President of LWC (WA).

LWC (WA) Presidents have held the position of President Federal Women's Committee (FWC) on five occasions including the inaugural President Margaret Battye 1945-1946, Kathleen Sandover 1951 and 1953, Audrey McKenna 1972-1973, Althea McTaggart 1976-1977. In 2008 Robyn Nolan (LWC (WA) President) was elected President FWC. Robyn was re-elected in 2009.

Former Presidents of LWC (WA) who may only serve a maximum period of four years with an annual election (Liberal Party WA Constitution) include Margaret Battye, Kathleen Sandover, Edna Mattinson, Bertha Beecroft, Elizabeth Lefroy, Nitza O'May, Audrey McKenna, Althea McTaggart, Bridgit Faye, Anne Griffith, Vi Kershaw, Dianne Airey, Marie Louise Wordsworth, Margie Bass, Ann Ritson and Daphne Bogue. Robyn Nolan is the current President LWC (WA) and was first elected in 2005.

Robyn Nolan
President LWC (WA)