

WEL Women—then and now

A Progress Report on the WEL History Project. ¹

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This afternoon I want to give you an idea of the work we have been doing at the Australian National University, researching the history of the Women's Electoral Lobby. This research has been supported by a grant from the Australian Research Council, which Professor Marian Sawer obtained a few years ago. The grant has enabled us to employ part-time research assistants to assist with the work.

I will show you some of the results of our photographic research, talk about the analysis of WEL's coverage in the media and give you some findings from the WEL History Survey. However, I must emphasise that these are not our final results; my talk will be essentially about work-in-progress.

The Display

I hope that you have all had a chance to look at our display called *Women's Electoral Lobby—The First Year*, which is set out on the walls of the tearoom. This display covers WEL's first year, from the first meeting in Melbourne, in February 1972, to the First National Conference in Canberra, in January 1973. In the display I have used newspaper clippings that were collected as part of our analysis of WEL's coverage in the media. I will discuss this analysis this afternoon.

I have also put up a display of T-shirts in the tearoom. They are from the seventies and the eighties and were collected by members of the project team.

¹ This is a report on work-in-progress and must not be cited without the explicit permission of the author gail.radford@anu.edu.au

Searching for Submissions

I have been making lists of submissions prepared by WEL over the years. They are in a folder beside the display in the tearoom, one list for WEL Australia and separate lists for each state group. I hope that you have glanced at these too and will tell me about any that you know that I have left off the lists. When the lists are as complete as I can make them, I intend to analyse them, as we have for the WEL media coverage.

I have been searching through WEL newsletters and WEL archives, looking for submissions, or references to submissions, but I must acknowledge the work done by others before me. In the 1990s, Helen Leonard, as National Co-ordinator, found many WEL submissions and sorted them out in chronological order. WEL Victoria must win the prize for the most careful state group. They have a splendid collection of submissions in their archives in the Melbourne University Archives. Kerry Lovering and a team of WEL members have drawn up a comprehensive list of these submissions. Both Pat Burnett, in her history of WEL Western Australia², and Betty Fisher, in her history of WEL South Australia³, included lists of submissions. I have drawn upon their lists when preparing my lists of WEL submissions for these states. Finally, Edna Ryan was responsible for the preparation of the only list of WEL NSW submissions that I could find. Hilary Roberts and I have been searching through the WEL NSW archives in the Mitchell library to add to this list.

Unfortunately, I do not have many from Tasmania, Queensland and the Northern Territory. I would be grateful if anyone could give me any information about their submissions or those prepared by regional and rural groups.

Photographic Research

I have also been searching for photos of WEL activities over the years. We have been placing suitable photos on the WEL History ANU website and hope to publish some in the book we will write at the end of the Project.

I have found a lot of photos of WEL members sitting around drinking and relaxing, often the only time they had to take photos. But I do not want

² Burnett, *History of WEL Western Australia 1973–1984*

³ Fisher, *A Brief History of the Women's Electoral Lobby (SA) Inc*

photos of women relaxing or portraits of individual members. What I am looking for are photos that will illustrate what WEL actually did.

This afternoon I will show you some of the photos we have collected and use them as illustrations of the joys and setbacks of photographic research.

Photo 1. WEL Victoria in 1972



Here are members of WEL in Melbourne at a planning meeting in 1972. Some of you will recognise Mary Owen sitting smiling in the centre of the photo. She was to do much industrial work for WEL.

This is a photo from *The Age* newspaper of 20 November 1972. It was published with WEL Victoria's "Form Guide" to the December 1972 Federal elections.

Unfortunately, it is very expensive to collect photos from newspapers. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are both Fairfax newspapers. Does anyone know how much Fairfax papers charge you to use one of their photos for research purposes only? Fairfax now charges in excess of \$300 for one photo to be placed on a website for six months!

We are looking for as many photographs as possible that have been taken by WEL members. Not only to avoid the cost of newspaper photos but so we can display the work of WEL's own photographers.

Photo 2. WEL Tasmania in 1974



Here is a photo of members of WEL Tasmania in 1974, attending WEL Tasmania's first state-wide meeting. Kim Boyer, a founding member of WEL Tasmania, took the photo.

Photo 3. WEL NSW in 1975



This is a photo of WEL Sydney on International Women's Day in 1975. It is from the "WEL Treasures Collection" in the WEL NSW office. If other WEL offices have similar collections of photos, I would be very interested to see them. I would scan them and return them to you. Or, if

you are able to scan them yourselves, you could email them to me or send them on a CD.

WEL History Survey

I am sure that you all know by now that we carried out a survey of past and present WEL members in the summer of 2002/ 2003. I would like to thank all of you who are here today who replied to our questionnaire.

The survey had three parts, the first two sections collected statistical data and the last section gave you room to tell us your stories and memories of WEL. Erica Fisher, from WEL ACT, has been doing the statistical analysis of the survey. I am going to tell you about some of her findings this afternoon.

We tried to contact as many past and present members of WEL as possible, to ask them if they would fill in the questionnaire. We sent the questionnaire to present members, advertised it on various email lists and put it on the ANU WEL History website. We tried to trace as many former members as possible, starting with addresses in old newsletters. This proved to be more difficult than we had anticipated and we had no hope of tracing them all. Sometimes we would follow a long trail of addresses, only to arrive at the last address and be told that the member had died!

In the end, we received 550 replies to the survey. Despite all our efforts the responses were not quite representative of the geographic spread of WEL membership, but we did not do too badly. Most respondents to the survey were city dwellers, in fact at the time of joining WEL 81 per cent lived in a capital city.

Table 1. Members who replied to the survey: geographical distribution when joined WEL

State or Territory	Percentage
NSW	32
Victoria	19
Queensland	6
Western Australia	10
South Australia	8
Tasmania	4
ACT	19
NT	2

Rather than telling you more about the overall results, we will give you highlights of the results by Federal Governments. We have looked at four cohorts: the Founder cohort, which includes ten months of the

McMahon Government as well as the Whitlam Government, the Fraser cohort, the Hawke/ Keating cohort and the Howard cohort up to the time of the survey, 2002–03.⁴

I am not about to give you all our results of this analysis but have picked out ones from each cohort that are of interest in themselves, or of interest because they change over time.

Survey Analysis for Founder cohort

We have just been looking at photos of members of the Founder cohort. But who were they? What were their backgrounds? Why did they join WEL? What did they want to change?

Overwhelmingly they were Australian or British-born, well educated, married and with children. Almost three-quarters of them were in paid employment and, interestingly, a relatively high proportion of their mothers (45 per cent) had also been in employment when they were growing up. The majority of Founder members had been educated at State schools and, perhaps more important than whether the school was fee-paying or not, a majority had attended single-sex schools. Just over half had obtained a bachelor degree or higher by the time they had joined WEL. This percentage was to rise considerably in later cohorts of WEL members as access to higher education widened.

Table 2. Education of members of the Founder cohort

Education	<i>Percentage</i>
Type of Secondary Schooling	
Government/state schools	58
Fee paying	
Catholic schools	11
Other schools	18
Other (secular)	7
Single-sex school (State or fee-paying)	56
Post School qualification	
Bachelor degree or higher	52

⁴ As the questionnaire only asked what year a member had joined WEL, we cannot give exact results by Government, from date of election of the Government to the date of its defeat. Instead, years were allocated to each cohort, according to the Government that was in power for the longest period during each year. The Founder cohort includes those respondents who joined in the years 1972–1975, the Fraser cohort includes those who joined in the years 1976–1982, the Hawke/ Keating cohort includes the years 1983–1995 and the Howard cohort includes 1996 until the survey was held in 2002–2003. Six of the 550 respondents to the survey did not tell us when they joined WEL, so the cohort analysis could only be done on 544 replies.

Table 3. Age of members of the Founder cohort at time of joining WEL

Age span in years	Percentage of cohort members
18–29	29
30–39	42
40–49	21
50 and above ⁵	7

Table 4. Marital and parental status of members of the Founder cohort

Marital and parental status	Percentage of cohort members
Marital status	
Married	76
Never married	13
Divorced/ separated	10
Widowed	0
Relationship status	
Long term relationship, other than marriage ⁶	9
Parental status	
Had children when joined WEL	72

Table 5. Employment status of members of the Founder cohort

Employment status	Percentage of cohort members
Not in paid employment	36
In part-time employment	21
In full-time employment	43

While young women from Women’s Liberation did play a major role in the formation of WEL, most of the Founder cohort did not come from this background. Indeed, 36 per cent told us that they had not been actively involved in any community organisations, or did not answer the question. The remainder listed organisations in which they had been active and we coded up to three for each response. The most popular were school-based groups or other groups associated with their children, these were listed by 29 per cent of the cohort. This is not surprising when you consider that most of the Founder cohort were parents. We appear to have found that Parents and Citizens organisations were a cradle of feminist activity.⁷

Now why did women join WEL? Some respondents gave us more than one reason, but we only coded the first two reasons. Most frequently members of the Founder cohort said that they had joined because they wanted to be actively involved in women’s issues. Next they said they

⁵ At the time of the Survey, the older joiners in the 1970s were more likely to have been deceased than joiners in younger age groups. Therefore, it is likely that we have an under representation of the 50 years and above age group in the Founder cohort.

⁶ The question on long-term relationship was separate from that on marital status and does not exclude a respondent replying to any of the above categories, except marriage.

⁷ Erica Fisher is responsible for this happy observation.

wanted to promote women's issues in a political context. These continued to be the most frequently mentioned reasons for joining WEL in the later cohorts.

Smaller numbers of the Founder cohort said that they had joined because they had wanted to work on equity issues, as they had had personal experience of discrimination. Others said that they had wanted to work with like-minded women, or they liked the sound of WEL or that they had a general interest in women's issues.

We also asked about the particular issues that concerned them at the time they joined. Here we coded their first three answers. The issue cited most often was family planning and abortion, which was given by 29 per cent of the cohort. The proportion of the cohort listing this issue was higher than in any of the other cohorts; doubtless a reflection of the many problems for young women in these areas in the early seventies. Other concerns, of almost equal importance, were childcare, general discrimination in society, discrimination in the workplace and equal pay.

Media Analysis

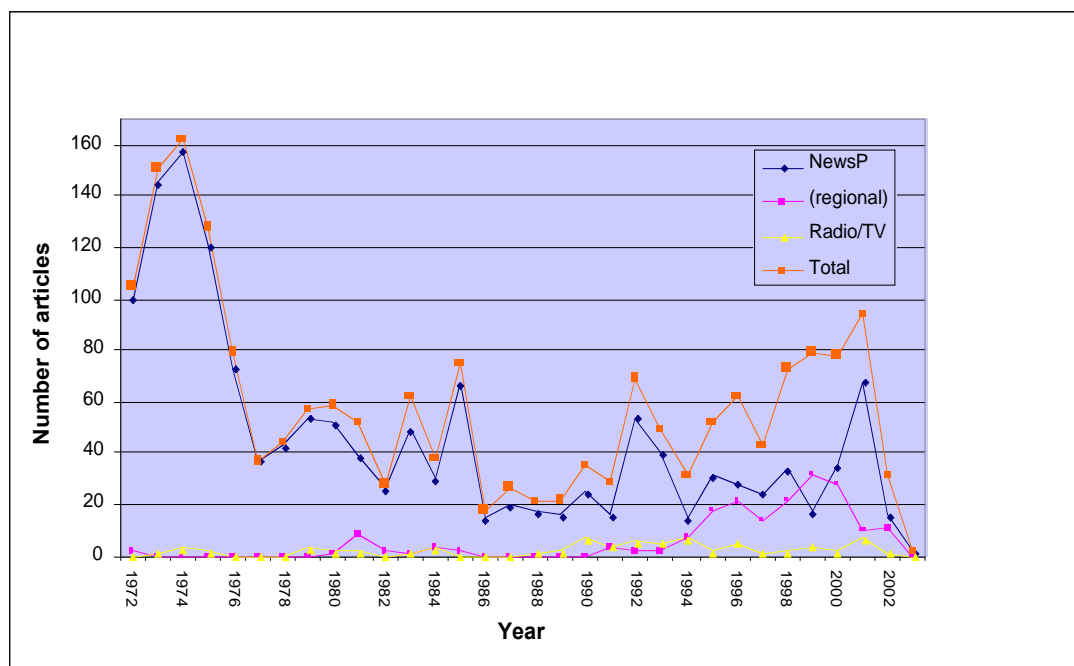
Now let us turn to the media analysis. Dr Sarah Gardiner, who worked for the Project as a part-time Research Assistant, did this analysis.

The first graph shows the number of articles about WEL from early 1972 until mid 2003. It is not that WEL stopped receiving press coverage sometime in 2003, but this was when Sarah's contract finished.

In all, we have some 2000 newspaper clippings, radio and television reports which mention WEL or are about WEL. Sarah, who searched diligently through collections of press clippings and media reports for mentions of WEL, obtained them from the Parliamentary Library and the National Library in Canberra. Individual members also sent us press clippings.

You can see that the yellow line bouncing along the bottom of this graph is radio and television. This is obviously an underestimate of WEL's use of these media over the years. It is very difficult to track WEL appearances on the radio and on television. Unless we could find a written transcript or a recording, these appearances were lost to us.

Graph 1. WEL in the Media 1972–2002



As you can see from the graph, the large majority of the newspaper articles that we obtained are from non-regional papers. That is, they are from the major papers that are published in the capital cities. It is very difficult to get articles about WEL’s regional and rural groups from local newspapers, or articles about electorate groups in the cities from suburban newspapers. The big media monitoring services do not usually clip these papers.

We would be very pleased if anyone has a collection of WEL clippings, particularly from country or regional centres, which we could look at and include in the analysis.

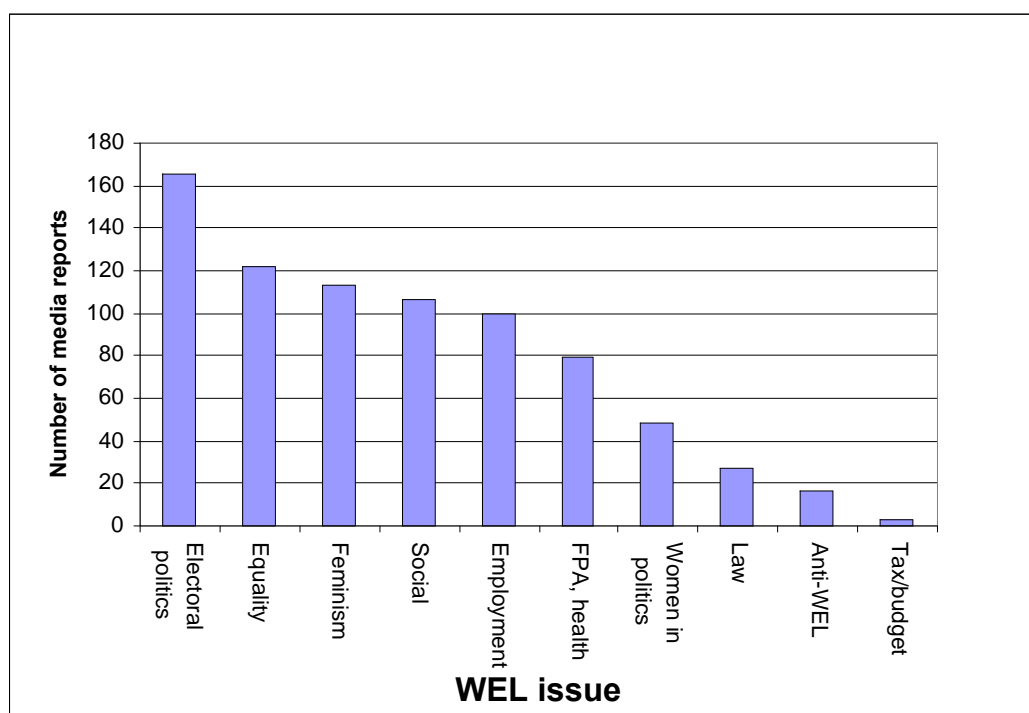
What is very obvious from this graph is that WEL’s appearances in the media peaked in the early 70s, and then declined to a low in the years 1986 to 1990, to be followed by a gradual rise.

Now what were these articles about? What issues were WEL women talking and writing about?

Issues in the Media

This bar chart shows the number of media reports about WEL by issue in the period from the beginning of WEL in 1972 until the end of the Whitlam Government. Although it is headed McMahon/ Whitlam Governments it only includes the last 10 months of the McMahon Government.

Graph 2. WEL Media – McMahon/ Whitlam Governments 1972–1975



The issues have been divided into 10 categories, electoral politics, equality, feminism, social, employment (which includes education), family planning and health, women in politics (which includes women in Government positions), law, anti-WEL and, finally, tax and Budget.

So what were the WEL women doing in this period that generated this publicity? Electoral politics had the highest number of reports; obviously this was the 1972 questionnaire and also publicity about the Double Dissolution in 1974 as well as the 1975 Federal election. WEL was also active in state and local elections.

Equality is also high. A lot of this was publicity from WEL's National and State conferences. You will have seen some of the good publicity from the First National Conference, which is in the Display in the tearoom.

The reports on feminism are also high. There was much discussion of feminism in those days, particularly about the differences between WEL and Women's Liberation.

The social category includes reports on childcare, WEL was very active in this area and I will discuss one of their campaigns in a moment.

The employment category contains articles on WEL's support for equal pay, the minimum wage and retraining schemes for women and its opposition to discrimination in the workplace. In the papers for this Conference, Lyndall Ryan has written about Edna Ryan's presentation of the WEL submission to the National Wage Case in 1974, which was so influential in obtaining the minimum wage for women.

The family planning and health category includes the publicity from WEL's first ever submission. WEL Victoria presented this submission, which was prepared by WEL ACT, to the Tariff Board in July 1972. It asked that the customs duty on contraceptives be lowered, however, it was also used as a vehicle by WEL to draw attention to all its demands about contraceptives and family planning. The submission received very good publicity and you can see some of these articles in the display in the tearoom. The submission also had a successful outcome as the Whitlam Government met all WEL's demands when they came to office.

Also in this category are articles about WEL's support for the Medical Practice Clarification Bill 1973. This was an unsuccessful attempt by two Members of the House of Representatives, David McKenzie and Tony Lamb, to decriminalise abortion in the ACT.

Much of the publicity in the Women in Politics and Government category was from 1975, when the International Women's Year Secretariat held the Women in Politics Conference in Canberra; WEL members were very much to the fore at the Conference. Elizabeth Reid resigned as the Prime Minister's adviser on women. As a result, WEL launched a campaign for the establishment of a women's unit in the public service. This was to be the beginning of offices for the status of women in the bureaucracy. Gail Wilenski, the Convenor of WEL ACT, was appointed to the Public Service Board in Canberra to start the first Equal Employment Opportunity program in Australia. The International Women's Year Conference, Elizabeth Reid's resignation and Gail Wilenski's appointment generated a surprising amount of negative publicity. It appeared that the media were weary of women's issues and, in fact, were becoming increasingly critical of the Whitlam Government which had met so many of WEL's demands.

The law category includes publicity about WEL's support for the Family Law Bill and the beginning of its campaign on death duties. The purpose of this campaign, which began in 1974, was to remove death duties where an estate passed to a surviving spouse. The campaign, under the guidance of Di Graham from WEL NSW, received a surprising amount of publicity. Eventually death duties were abolished entirely.

The anti –WEL category is quite small, which is surprising really when you consider how active WEL was in those years.

The tax and Budget category is lowest of all. The publicity here was about WEL’s first submissions on taxation, which were prepared by Jane North and Elizabeth Goldring from WEL ACT and Di Graham from WEL NSW, for the Asprey Taxation Review Committee in 1973.

Photo 4. Childcare Demonstration, ACT—1974



Chris Ronalds took this photograph of a childcare demonstration in August 1974. She was a member of WEL ACT at the time but many of you will now know her today as a successful anti-discrimination barrister in Sydney. The demonstration was held in front of the old Parliament House in Canberra. It took the form of a children’s party. The children were given rides on a merry-go-round and a fire engine drove them around Parliament House. Balloons and toffee apples were handed out. On the far left of the photo you can see Elizabeth Bilney talking to Meredith Edwards and her daughter Karina. Meredith is carrying her two-year-old son, Geoff, on her hip. Elizabeth and Meredith were both from WEL ACT.

Other WEL groups around Australia held similar demonstrations. WEL Sydney, on behalf of WEL Australia, placed this advertisement in the Australian Financial Review, on Thursday 1 August 1974, which explained the purpose of the demonstrations.

**MR WHITLAM
AND MEMBERS OF YOUR GOVERNMENT**

**KEEP YOUR PROMISES
LET'S START ON CHILDCARE NOW**

**CAN THE THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN IN NEED NOW
WAIT A YEAR AT THE TREASURY'S PLEASURE**

**IT'S TWENTY MONTHS AND VERY LITTLE HAS HAPPENED FOR THOSE
MOST IN NEED**

WE NEED

1. A child care body to be established with an appropriate Act so that it can start to implement a co-ordinated program with full-time commissioners, and staff to make this effective.
2. Priority to be given to those programs that cater for single parents and families where both parents work.
3. After-school care to be included as an urgent priority as it is EXCLUDED under the present Child Care Act.

WEL Australia

So it is clear that this is a photo of a WEL Australia demonstration. Eva Cox came up from Sydney to lobby politicians and talk to the press. I have a photo of her at the demonstration but, unfortunately, I cannot show it to you, as I have not yet had it scanned.

This was a concerted and well-planned campaign, specifically designed to attract the media. The party provided excellent 'visuals' for the TV cameras and press photographers and all the WEL spokespersons and lobbyists were well briefed. It was very effective at attracting media attention and persuading the Whitlam Government to return some of the funds to a \$130 million integrated community-based children's services program, which had been promised by the Government in May 1974 but cut back to \$34 million by the Treasurer after the 1974 elections. In September the program was allocated \$75 million and an Interim Committee for a Children's Services Commission was set up to deliver it.

WEL Groups and Membership

Now, how many WEL members were responsible for all this activity and publicity in the early seventies? My research into this topic suggests that published figures were pretty rubbery. The most accurate are probably those in the articles in *Labor To Power* where Helen Glezer and Jan Mercer give a table of membership in all States and Territories and state

that by the end of December 1972 total membership was just under 2,000⁸. Helen and Jan were both from Melbourne. WEL Victoria produced the *WEL Broadsheet* for the whole of Australia in 1972 and was co-ordinating the questionnaire for the candidates for the Federal Elections in December, which is why I think that they probably had the best idea of total membership in 1972.

At the First National Conference in late January 1973, it was agreed that Victoria would no longer publish a national *WEL Broadsheet*, as membership had risen to over 2,000 by then and production had become a heavy burden on Melbourne. Every state was to produce its own newsletter. Similarly each state was to keep its own membership records.

With the Federal Elections over, WEL Victoria ceased to have an overall role as co-ordinator of WEL activities. While the National Conference in 1973 decided that a Communications Network should be set up and gave WEL ACT the role of Central Clearing House for collection, retrieval and dissemination of material for WEL groups around Australia, Canberra did not collect membership data. So this is where the figures become pretty rubbery. However, those that I have found suggest that WEL's total membership rose to 6,000 by 1974.

By the end of 1972 there were WEL Groups in each capital city, except Perth. However, members of Women's Liberation and the Harvest Guild in Perth interviewed the candidates for the Federal Elections, using the WEL questionnaire. The inaugural meeting of WEL Perth was not until in March 1973.

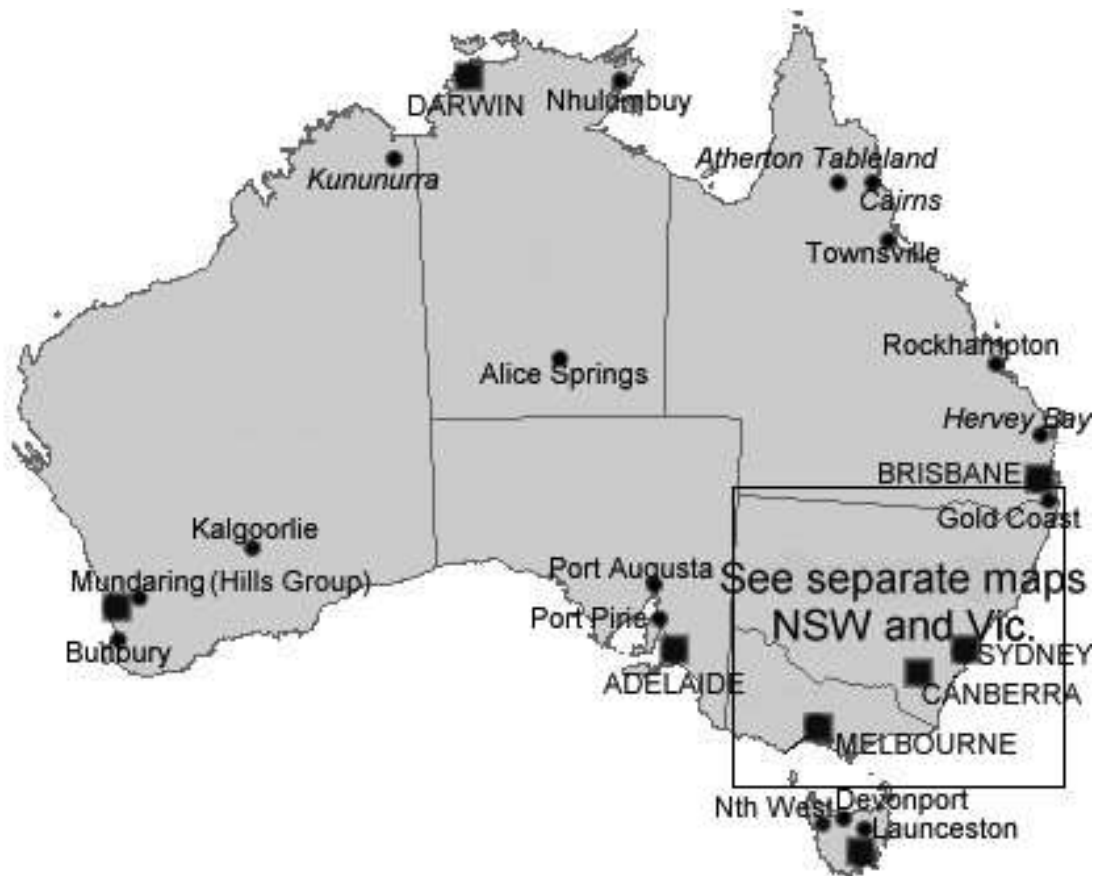
In the capital cities, as membership numbers rose, separate groups were formed in specific electorates or suburbs. Action groups were formed to work on particular issues; sometimes an electorate or suburban group would be allocated, or choose, an issue to concentrate on.

WEL Groups formed rapidly in regional and rural centres. By the end of 1972 there were at least 16 of these groups. By 1974 their numbers had more than doubled and more were to start in the next few years.

This is the first of three maps that show the distribution of WEL groups around Australia in 1974. Those with their names in italics were started later than 1974.

Map 1. WEL Groups—1974

⁸ Glezer, Helen and Mercer, Jan "Blueprint for a lobby: the birth of WEL as a social movement"



* Groups with names in italics started after 1974

In Western Australia there were groups in Perth, Bunbury and Mundaring in 1974. Bunbury and Mundaring, also known as the Hills Group – Darling Range, were active for a number of years. Kununurra started in 1977, it was concerned about women’s health, the need for a women’s refuge and the education of Aboriginal girls, but it lapsed after a year or so.

In Queensland there were groups in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Rockhampton and Townsville in 1974. Cairns and Hervey Bay both started in 1975 and Atherton Tableland formed in 1983, subsequently joining with WEL Cairns. Hervey Bay was an active group and, as many of you will know, WEL Cairns is still going strong today, with Joan Trewern publishing a regular newsletter.

In South Australia Adelaide, Port Augusta and Port Pirie were all in existence by 1974. In Tasmania WEL Groups were active in Hobart, Devonport, Launceston and the North West Coast.

In the Northern Territory there were groups in Darwin and Alice Springs. I think, but cannot be certain at this stage, that the group at Nhulumbuy had started by 1974. I have a copy of a very interesting submission written by this group, with the assistance of WEL Sydney, asking for a

Women's Centre. It sets out all the problems of women living in a company town in an isolated area,

Photo 5. WEL Darwin Members—1974



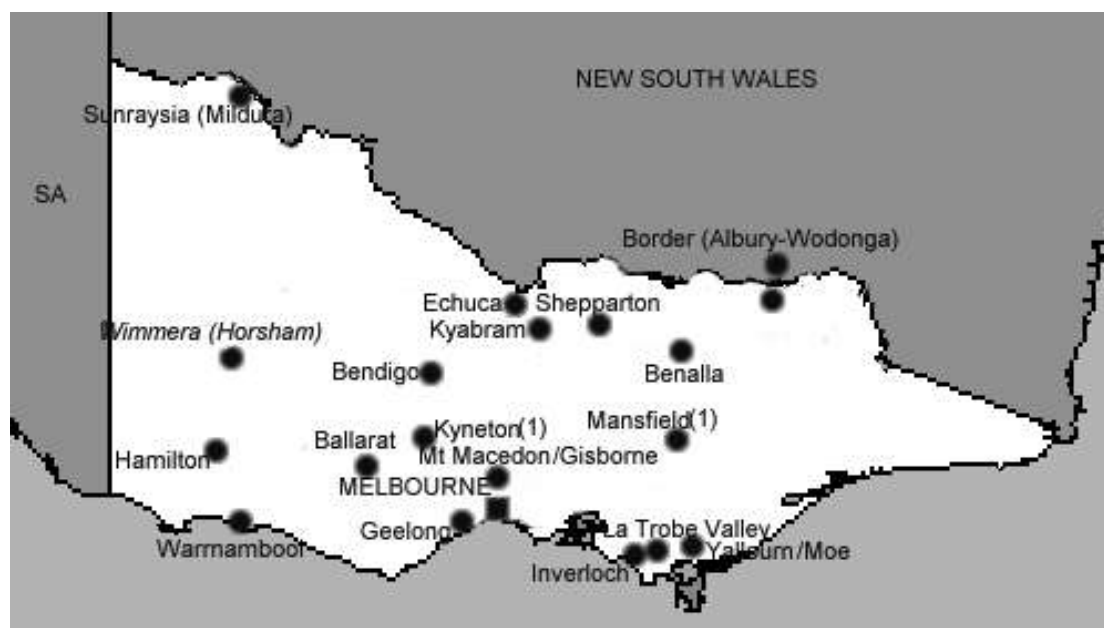
Here is a photo of four members of WEL Darwin in 1974. From left to right are Lucille Kidney, Leith Cameron, Lenore Coltheart and Maureen McDonald (Cleary).

Lenore sent us this photo when she completed the WEL History questionnaire. She now works at the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and has just published an edited autobiography of Jessie Street. However, she could not remember the name of the fourth woman in the photo and it took me ten months to discover that it was Maureen McDonald. She is now Maureen Cleary and lives in Melbourne.

The Darwin women are modelling new WEL T-Shirts. You will recognise the T-Shirts, as there is one of the same batch in the Display in the tearoom.

Map 2 shows WEL groups that were in existence in Victoria in 1974, they were Melbourne, Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Echuca, Geelong, Inverloch, Kyabram, Moe/ Yallourn, Mt Macedon/ Gisborne, Mildura, Shepparton, Warragul, Warrnambool and Wodonga. Wodonga was part of a WEL group called Border WEL, members came from the Victorian town of Wodonga and the New South Wales town of Albury. As a result both state WEL groups claimed Border WEL as one of their groups.

Map 2. WEL Groups In Victoria—1974



(1) Not clear if these groups were still in existence in 1974

There are three groups, which newspaper reports say were started in 1972, but it is not clear if they were still in existence in 1974, these are Hamilton, Kyneton and Mansfield. They were started by the indomitable pair, Chris Hollis and Margery Webster, who travelled more than a thousand miles around country Victoria interviewing candidates for the 1972 elections, getting good publicity for WEL in country papers and starting local WEL groups. You can see some of their publicity in the Display in the tearoom.

Most of the information I have obtained about WEL groups outside the capital cities has come from WEL State and National newsletters. Generally, I have found that it is easier to discover when a group began, this is usually heralded with pride, then when it disbanded, they just fade away without mention.

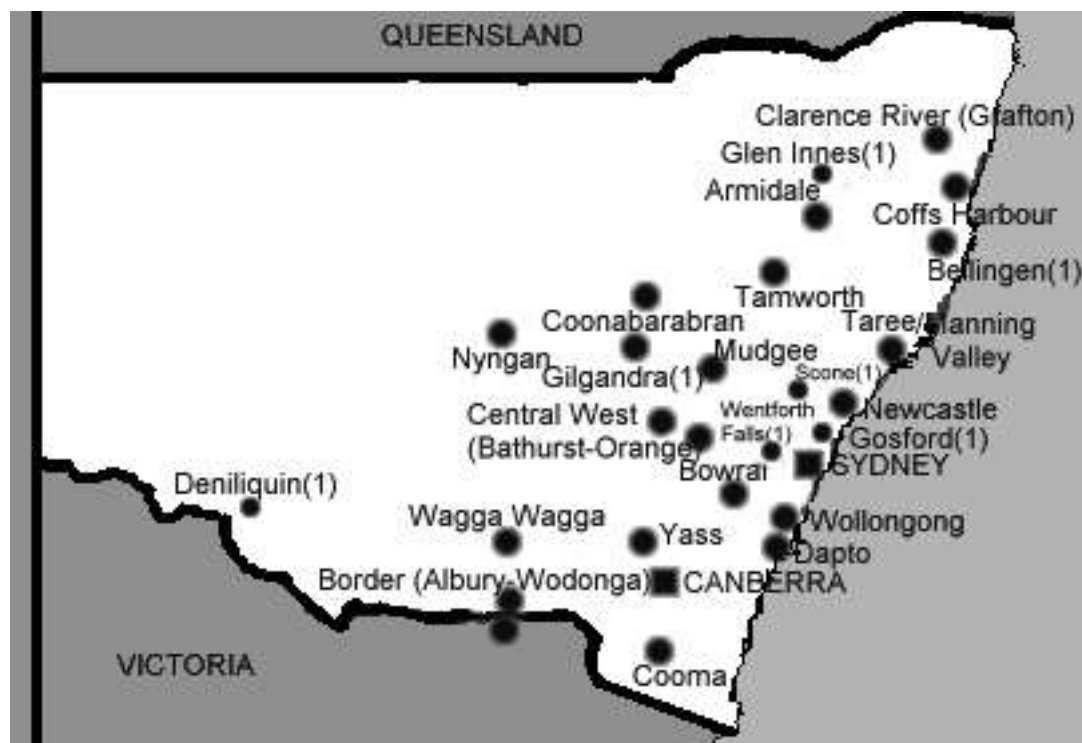
While a lot has been written about WEL in the capital cities, I can only find one paper about WEL in rural areas. Heather Gunn, who had travelled around Victoria interviewing women who used to be members of WEL, presented this to an oral history conference in 1999⁹. I am hoping to include more information about these country groups in the book on WEL's history.

Map 3 is of WEL groups in New South Wales in 1974. Robin Tennant-Wood, a member of WEL ACT, prepared these three maps. Robin calls this one her nightmare map. Mainly because there are so many groups to

⁹ Gunn, *Women's political mobilisation in rural Victoria: the 1970s remembered*.

fit on the map, but also because we were not sure if a number of them were groups or only individuals who acted as Electorate Contacts.

Map 3. WEL Groups in NSW—1974



(1) Towns with Electorate Contacts rather than WEL Groups.

Unlike WEL New Zealand there were not hard and fast rules about what constituted a WEL group. WEL in Australia grew out of Women's Liberation; WEL was not into making a lot of rules, it was more concerned with getting on with the job in hand. WEL in New Zealand did not start until 1975; it was not affiliated with WEL Australia and was always a more formal organisation. To form a WEL group in New Zealand you had to have at least 10 members, pay \$5 a head to WEL in Wellington and agree not to work against National WEL policy. It appears that, if your numbers fell below 10 you could no longer be considered a WEL group. There were no such rules in Australia.

Incidentally, WEL New Zealand disbanded this year. They said that they would do this a few years ago, after their history was written. Elspeth Preddey published her history of the Women's Electoral Lobby in New Zealand in 2003¹⁰, and, true to their word, WEL New Zealand ceased operations this year. I am pleased to see that WEL Australia is, to use a WEL NSW slogan, *Alive and WEL* at this Conference and I don't expect it to disband once WEL History Project has published its book.

¹⁰ Preddey, *The WEL Herstory—The Women's Electoral Lobby in New Zealand 1972–2002*.

I discussed this problem of what could be considered a group in Australia with a colleague at work, who is on secondment from the Public Service Commission. I explained that Sue Gates had single handed run the electorate of Darling for WEL for many years and had done a marvellous job. My colleague suggested that perhaps we should define WEL groups according to their output and not worry about how many members there were.

Photo 6. WEL Cooma 'Meet the Candidates' NSW State Election—1976



The next photo is of a NSW country group in action. This is WEL Cooma holding a 'Meet the Candidates for Monaro' meeting for the NSW State Elections in 1976. Wilga Pruden, who is in the centre of the photo chairing the meeting, gave the photo to the NSW Treasures Collection in the NSW Office. Wilga joined WEL Cooma after she was transferred to Cooma to take up the position of Principal at the local TAFE College. Others in the photo are, on the left of Wilga, Tom Barry (Country Party Candidate), a WEL Cooma member who was the timekeeper, and on the right of Wilma, Hope Marland (Liberal Party Candidate) and John Akister (ALP Candidate).

Now, back to WEL Groups in NSW in 1974. Obviously Sydney, but I am not going to list the numerous electorate and action groups in Sydney in 1974. To the best of my knowledge these were the WEL groups outside the capital in 1974; Albury (as part of Border WEL), Armidale, Bathurst/ Orange, Bellingen, Bowral, Coffs Harbour, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Dapto, Grafton, Mudgee, Newcastle, Nyngan, Tamworth, Taree, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong and Yass. Those towns

which appear to have had Electorate Contacts rather than groups, were Deniliquin, Gilgandra, Glenn Innes, Scone and Wentworth Falls.

Photo 7. WEL Brisbane—1975



This is my final photo from the days of the Whitlam Government. It is a photo taken by a photographer from *The Australian* on 8 October 1975. WEL Brisbane members Anne Hollingsworth, Delma Brunello and Heather Williams are holding a 24-hour vigil in the Brisbane city square to protest at Elizabeth Reid's resignation. Their billboard reads:

WEL Brisbane requires an adequately staffed Women's Affairs Section in the Prime Minister's Dept headed by Liz Reid or a woman of equal capabilities with permanency and direct access to the Prime Minister.

Delma sent us the clipping from *The Australian* about the vigil. The photo in the clipping included a dog. I was very excited about this as I had many photos of WEL children but none of WEL dogs. Unfortunately, *The Australian* could not find the one with the dog, so sent us this one instead.

Now let's go on to the Fraser years.

The Fraser Governments

The Fraser Coalition Government was first elected on 13 December 1975, was re-elected on 10 December 1977 and 18 October 1980 and was defeated on 5 March 1983.

Photo 8. WEL Adelaide, International Women's Day—late 1970s



This is a photograph of WEL members marching in the Fraser years. It is WEL South Australia on International Women's Day in the late 1970s, proudly carrying their banner, *Think WEL Before You Vote*, through the streets of Adelaide.

This photo is from the Tribune Collection in the State Library of New South Wales. The Tribune Collection is a photographic researcher's dream, as you are not charged for the copyright. You only have to pay a small amount to the Library for the preparation of a copy. This does not mean that anyone can use the photos. You have to show The Search Foundation, which owns the copyright, that you are going to use the photos for legitimate purposes.

Analysis of Fraser cohort

As I mentioned earlier, the Fraser cohort of the survey consists of those respondents to the questionnaire who joined WEL in the seven years from the beginning of 1976 to the end of 1982.

The respondents who joined WEL in this period had a similar age distribution to those of the Founder cohort. In fact, much of the data about this cohort is similar to the Founder cohort, so I will just pick out findings that are markedly different.

When compared to other cohorts, the Founder cohort had the highest percentage of members who had attended single sex schools and the lowest percentage that had attended Government schools. I am not sure what these two findings mean, perhaps nothing.

When compared to the Founder cohort, the Fraser cohort had a much higher proportion of members with Bachelor degrees or above and a higher proportion of members in paid employment. On the other hand, the proportions of members who were married and who had children fell markedly. We will see that these trends continue in later cohorts.

Table 6. Education of the members of the Fraser cohort

Education	Percentage
Government schools	50
Single-sex school	66
Bachelor degree or higher	72

Table 7. Age of the members of the Fraser cohort at time of joining WEL

Age group in years	Percentage
18–29	26
30–39	41
40–49	20
50 and above ¹¹	10

Table 8. Marital, relationship and parental status of members of the Fraser cohort

Marital status	Percentage
Married	51
Never married	34
Divorced/ separated	12
Widowed	1
Relationship status	
Long-term relationship, other than marriage	13
Parental status	
Had children when joined WEL	53

¹¹ At the time of the Survey, the older joiners in the 1970s were more likely to have been deceased than younger joiners. Therefore, it is likely that we have an under representation of the 50 years and above age group in the Fraser cohort.

Table 9. Employment status of members of the Fraser cohort

Employment status	Percentage
Not in paid employment	22
In part-time employment	17
In full-time employment	59

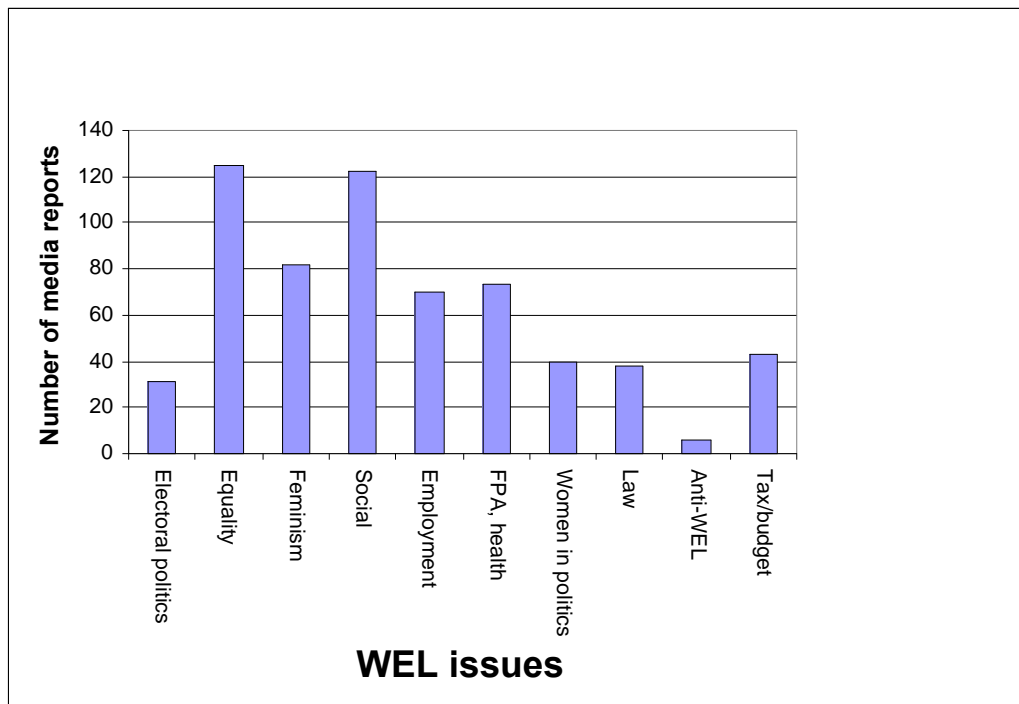
Issues of particular concern to respondents, when they first joined WEL, also differed. There was a big drop in those who listed equal pay as one of their first three issues of concern, 7per cent compared to 23per cent of the Founder cohort. Perhaps, with the publicity given to the successful cases on equal pay for jobs of equal value and the minimum wage for women, new members considered that there was not much work left to do here.

A higher proportion of the Fraser cohort listed women’s safety and domestic violence as an important issue, than any of the other cohorts. Maybe a reflection of the concern expressed by many, when the untying of Federal grants to the states threatened the funding of women’s refuges and rape crisis centres.

WEL Media in the Fraser Years

Now what media coverage was WEL getting in the Fraser years and what were they doing to generate this publicity?

Graph 3. WEL Media—Fraser Government 1975–1983



Here is the graph of our analysis of the media reports we have collected on WEL for these years. The electoral category is well down compared to the McMahon and Whitlam days. Most of these reports concern state elections. I have already shown you a photo of WEL Cooma holding a public meeting with candidates prior to the 1976 NSW elections.

The equality category is still high. Here we have WEL commenting on anti-discrimination laws that were being introduced by the states and providing strong support for Susan Ryan's Sex Discrimination Bill. Linked to this was WEL's support for the campaign to ratify CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Also a hot issue at the time was the boycott of ANSETT airlines, which was refusing to recruit female pilots. WEL was supporting Deborah Wardley in her attempt to fly ANSETT planes.

In the feminism category we continue to find articles about WEL and Women's Liberation. WEL was also called upon to comment on the policies of a new women's group, Women Who Want to be Women, who were opposed to childcare and sex discrimination legislation.

Under the social category childcare was still a big issue, WEL was opposing cuts to childcare and fighting for funding for more places. In late 1979 WEL mounted an unsuccessful campaign to have childcare accepted as a tax deduction. Later WEL policy was to emphasise the importance of increased funding for the establishment and operational costs of childcare centres, rather than tax deductions for those who already had access to childcare.

WEL joined the National Women's Advisory Council in opposing income splitting. WEL was explaining to the media that a family unit tax would benefit the high-income earner in the family (almost invariably the husband) by reducing his tax. It would increase disincentives for second earners who would be taxed at the higher marginal rates and would not have access to the tax-free threshold, which acknowledges the cost of earning an income. Instead, WEL and other women's groups wanted an increase in family allowances as a means of getting income to mothers.

In the employment category WEL is commenting on various public service reforms and criticising the Fraser Government for cutting back entitlements to Maternity Leave in the Australian Public Service. In 1978 WEL was again before the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, this time supporting the ACTU test case for unpaid maternity leave.

In the category that includes family planning, women's health and violence against women we find reports of WEL joining with other women's groups in hard fought campaigns. There was much adverse comment in the press about the Fraser Government's decision to untie grants to the states, where these funds had previously been ear-marked for women's services, such as rape crisis centres and women's refuges.

WEL was also opposing an anti-abortion bill in Queensland and the Lusher bill in the Federal Parliament. This bill, introduced by Stephen Lusher, Member of the House of Representatives, was an attempt to deny Medicare funding for abortions.

Photo 9. International Women's Day, Sydney—1979



Here is another photo from the Tribune collection. It shows WEL marching in Sydney, on International Women's Day in 1979, carrying banners opposing the Lusher bill. The banners read, STOP LUSHER MOTION ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION and HEALTH COVER FOR LEGAL SAFE ABORTION.

Media reports in the women in politics and government category mainly concerned the appointment of WEL women to positions in the bureaucracy. For example, Kim Boyer, a founding member of WEL Tasmania was appointed to the position of Woman's Adviser in Tasmania in January 1976.

WEL continued to obtain press in the law category; this included articles on the need for rape law reform, family law and the abolition of death duties between spouses.

Anti- WEL press was coming from a group associated with the (Catholic) National Civic Council and called the Women's Action Alliance.

The number of articles about WEL commenting on taxation and the Budget increased in the Fraser years. WEL was preparing yearly pre-Budget submissions and, as mentioned above, actively opposing income splitting.

To end my discussion of the Fraser years, I wanted to show you my last photo from the Tribune collection. It is WEL and Women's Liberation marching down Pitt Street in Sydney on International Women's Day in 1980. Appropriately enough, Women's Liberation, the forerunner of WEL, is in the lead.

Photo 10. WEL Sydney, International Women's Day—1980



The Hawke/ Keating Governments

The Hawke Labor Government was elected on 5 March 1983, re-elected on 1 December 1984, 11 July 1987 and 24 March 1990. On 20 December 1991 Paul Keating replaced Bob Hawke as Prime Minister. Paul Keating

led the Australian Labor Party to victory on 13 March 1993 but was defeated at the next Federal election on 2 March 1996.

The Hawke/ Keating cohort

The Hawke/ Keating cohort of the WEL History Survey includes those respondents to the WEL History questionnaire who joined WEL in the thirteen years from the beginning of 1983 to the end of 1995.

In this cohort the proportions of married women and women with children continued to decline. There were also marked differences in the age at which respondents joined WEL.

Of all the cohorts, the Hawke/ Keating cohort had the lowest proportion of members who were under 30 years of age. However, the proportion of members over fifty years of age was much higher than the previous two cohorts. This was probably due to an under representation of the 50 years and above age groups in the Founder and Fraser cohorts. The older joiners from these times were more likely to have been dead at the time of the Survey, than those who joined in the younger age groups.

Table 10. Age of the members of the Hawke/ Keating cohort at time of joining WEL

Age group in years	Percentage
18–29	13
30–39	38
40–49	27
50 and above	22

Table 11. Marital, relationship and parental status of members of the Hawke/ Keating cohort

Marital status	Percentage
Married	36
Never married	34
Divorced/ separated	25
Widowed	5
Relationship status	
Long-term relationship, other than marriage	27
Parental status	
Had children when joined WEL	52

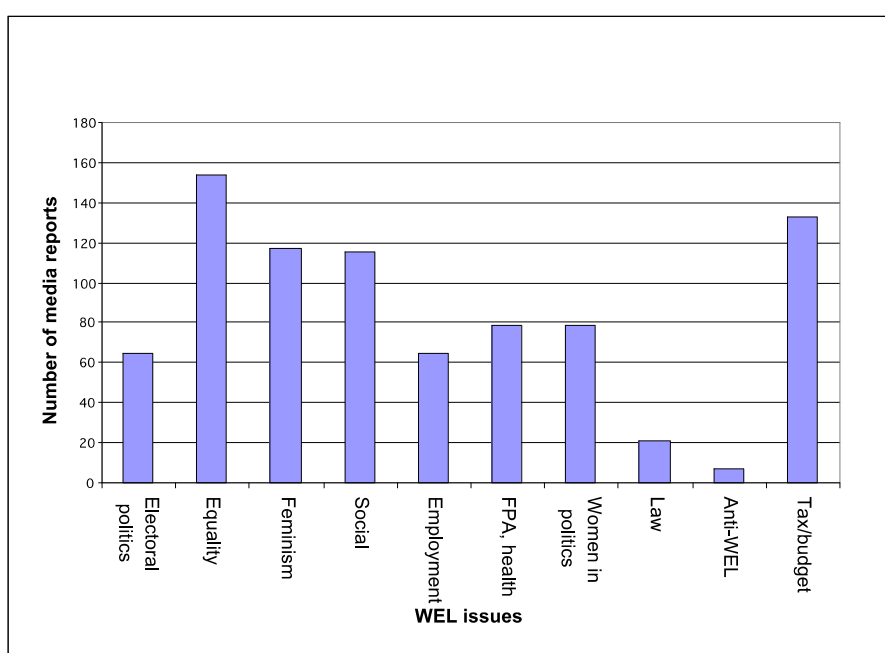
The concerns and interests of women joining in this period differed to previous cohorts. Women who joined in this period were more interested in the lack of women in all levels of government and lack of female participation in politics. Networking, the sharing and gaining of information, was seen as an important reason for joining WEL for the

first time in the Hawke/ Keating cohort. These were all issues that assumed importance on the feminist agenda in the late eighties and nineties.

There was more interest in equal pay than in the Fraser cohort, and interest in discrimination in the workplace remained high, perhaps as women realised that, despite the successful cases in the seventies, the battles for pay and employment equity were far from won.

WEL Media analysis for the Hawke/ Keating years

Graph 4. WEL Media—Hawke/ Keating Governments 1983–1996



What strikes you immediately about this graph are the high number of media reports in the equality category and, for the first time, in the Taxation/ Budget category.

The equality category is all good news, containing articles with WEL’s views on the ratification of CEDAW, the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the introduction of legislation to support Equal Employment Opportunity Programs in Australian government employment and Affirmative Action programs in the private sector. Under the Keating Government the Sex Discrimination Act was strengthened, as the result of the recommendations of the House of Representatives *Inquiry Into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Australian Women*. WEL groups made 13 submissions to the Inquiry.

Photo 11. Passage of Sex Discrimination Bill—1984



The spirit of the times is reflected in this photo of a party in Canberra, which was organised by WEL to celebrate the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act on 8 March 1984. Christine Fernon took this photo. On the left is Pamela Denoon, WEL's National Co-ordinator, in the centre is Ian Macphie, Shadow Minister for the Status of Women, who worked hard to try and obtain bipartisan support for the Bill, and on the right is Senator Susan Ryan, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, who introduced the Bill.

The Hawke years were the time that WEL settled down to serious work on taxation. WEL's involvement in two major conferences on taxation generated considerable publicity for the lobby.

Firstly, the *National Women's Tax Summit* in June 1985; WEL was one of the 23 organisations which sponsored the Summit. Here the women opposed the Government's preferred option for a broad base consumption tax, saying that it would mean a transfer from purse to wallet, the costs being paid by women who did most of the household shopping and the benefits going to those who earned above average wages, mostly men.

Secondly, the *Women's Tax Convention* was held in Parliament House in Canberra in March 1989. This was a joint initiative of WEL and the National Women's Consultative Council. The women at this Convention

resolved that the tax cuts promised by Government should be targeted to low-income earners and those with children.

As often is often the case, tax cuts had been mooted for those earning above the female average wage. Does this sound familiar? Yes this year, 2004, the Government provided tax cuts for those earning above \$52,000 per year, thus excluding 50 per cent of female earners.

The *Women's Tax Convention* also called for abolition of the Dependent Spouse Rebate and its replacement by a combination of direct cash payments for children and low-income families as well as an expansion of the Children's Services Program.

Photo 12. WEL Brisbane 1992—GST Debate



Here is WEL continuing its fight against a broad-based consumption tax in June 1992. This time WEL Brisbane is opposing John Hewson's announcement that he would introduce a Goods and Services Tax (GST) if the Coalition were to win Government. On the left is Sherrill Molloy, with her children Lisa and Daniel, and on the right is Margaret Carroll. The women had carried out a survey of a number of household items and published a report setting out what these items would cost under a Hewson-style GST. They had found that the price of 454 household items out of 499 surveyed would cost more under a GST¹².

Margaret sent me the newspaper clipping with this photo. It is from the Brisbane edition of *The Sun-Herald*, but Fairfax said that they do not have the original of the photo and do not own the copyright. Greg

¹² WEL Brisbane, *The G.S.T. Its impact on the Household Budget*.

Abbott, a free-lance journalist who used to sell stories to *The Sun-Herald* for its Brisbane edition, wrote the article. If anyone can tell me how to contact him I would be very pleased, as I would like to discuss use of the photo with him??

I asked Margaret if they had taken any photos themselves? She said, 'no', they had been much too busy. They had launched their report in front of a Brisbane supermarket and the local Liberals had called the police!

In fact, WEL Brisbane received a surprising amount of publicity for its report, with headlines such as 'Abuse flies as GST debate turns nasty'. The Queensland Liberal Leader Joan Sheldon, 'described the WEL women as 'airheads' with an 'intellectual shortfall' who had compiled a 'rather silly shopping survey'¹³. On the other hand, Wendy Fatin, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, issued a Press Release on 5 May 1992 headed 'GST Study Essential Reading for Women – Fatin'. Peter Reith, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer, countered with a Press Release on the same day headed simply 'WEL Survey wrong'.

Not receiving so much press, but of considerable importance, was WEL's statement of concerns, which was issued to governments and employers in 1992, on the likely impact of enterprise bargaining on women's employment.

The Howard Governments

The Howard Coalition Government was elected on 2 March 1996, re-elected on 3 October 1998 and 10 November 2001. It is now preparing for another election.

My next photo shows WEL NSW in Sydney on International Women's Day 1996 marching off into the Howard years carrying their banner, *Women's Electoral Lobby Feminism is Alive and WEL*. Elaine Odgers Norling, who was not only a member of WEL but also a professional photographer, took this photo. It is from the Treasures Collection in the WEL NSW office, where you can find many excellent portraits of WEL members taken by Elaine.

Photo 13. WEL Sydney, International Women's Day—1996

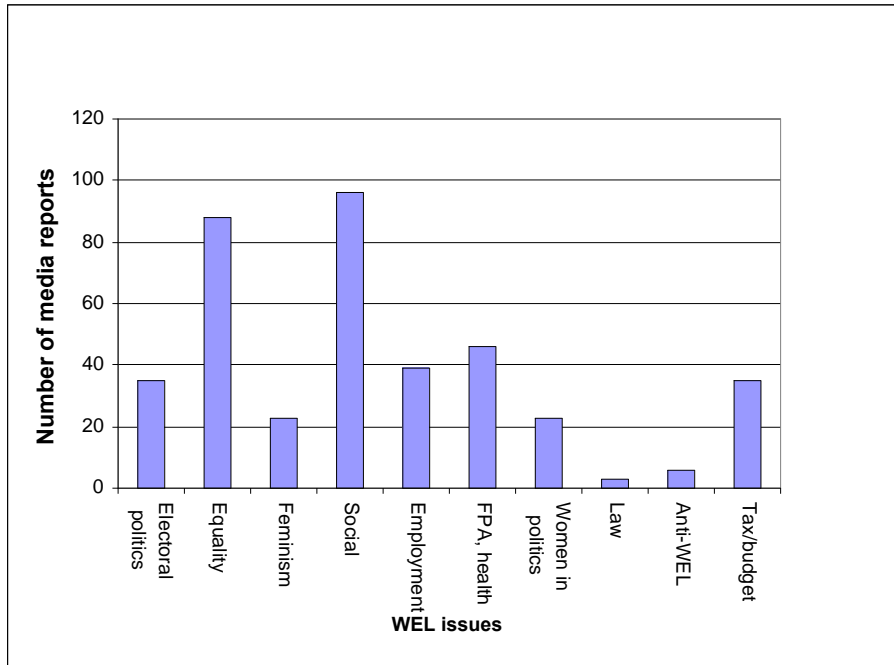
¹³ Abbott, 'Abuse flies as GST turns nasty'



Media Analysis for the Howard years

What was WEL doing and what publicity were they receiving in the Howard years?

Graph 5. WEL Media—Howard Government 1996–2003



Here is Sarah's analysis of the media coverage WEL received up until the time her contract ended in 2003.

I will not spend much time going over the issues here as they will be familiar to you all and we have been discussing numbers of them today.

The two largest categories on this graph are equality and social. Unlike the equality category in the Hawke/ Keating period, the reports in this category in the Howard years are not good news for WEL. They concern cut backs to EEO programs, affirmative action and human rights legislation and attacks by the men's lobby.

The social category contains articles on the, as yet, unsuccessful campaign for unpaid maternity leave as well as articles on the baby bonuses, other changes to child support payments and the impact of the GST on families.

The family planning and health category contains better news. WEL Victoria spearheaded the successful Lisa Meldrum case to the High Court, thus preventing changes being made to the Federal Sex Discrimination Act that would have denied IVF treatment to single women. WEL groups also worked actively with other groups on the decriminalisation of abortion in Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT.

Photo 14. 'I bleed and I vote' Australia-wide Demonstration—2000



Here is a photo of another WEL campaign against an indirect tax. Unfortunately, the outcome was not as successful as that of WEL Brisbane but it was just as successful at attracting media attention.

This is Erica Lewis on 25 February 2000, Acting National Co-ordinator and National WEL Spokesperson, addressing a rally in Canberra, calling for the removal of the Howard Government's GST from sanitary products and lactation aids. Her T-shirt reads, *I bleed and I vote*. The Canberra rally was part of a national day of action when women demonstrated around Australia; some wore red capes, other women dressed as tampons, thus creating ideal 'visuals' for the media.

Photo 15. WEL Western Australia—1998



My final photo is of a celebration. A photographer from *The West Australian* took this photo in the Legislative Assembly in Perth. The women were celebrating the passage, at 4 am on 21 May 1998, of legislation to decriminalise abortion in Western Australia. From left to right are Ruth Grebble and Barbara Buick from WEL and Cait Calcutt from the Abortion Law Reform Association.

Analysis of the Howard cohort

The Howard cohort includes those respondents who joined WEL from the beginning of 1996 until the time of the WEL History survey in the

summer of 2002–2003. Now, let us look at what distinguishes this cohort from the other three.

First, what did we find out about the parents of this cohort? Compared to the other three cohorts, this cohort had the highest proportions of parents with Bachelor degrees or above and mothers who were in paid employment, when the members were growing up.

Table 12. Parents of the members of the Howard cohort

Parents	Percentage
Mothers with Bachelor degrees or above	20
Fathers with Bachelor degrees or above	36
Mothers in paid employment, when the respondents were growing up	73

Turning now to the educational background of members of the Howard cohort. When compared to the other cohorts, a smaller proportion attended single sex-schools, but larger proportions joined WEL with Bachelor degrees or above, or were studying full-time.

The age distribution for members of the Howard cohort also differed from that of previous cohorts. A larger proportion were 50 years and above when they joined WEL, but a smaller proportion of members had joined in their thirties.

A higher proportion of this cohort, almost half, had never married, only one third were married while a quarter were in long-term relationships other than marriage. This cohort also had the lowest proportion of members with children. Compare this with the Founder cohort in the 1970s where three-quarters were married and you get some idea of the magnitude of the social changes, which had been taking place over three decades. This is also evident in the increased access of women to higher education –whereas half of the Founder cohort had university degrees, this had risen to almost 80 per cent in the Howard cohort.

A large majority of the Howard cohort were in paid employment and were working full-time.

Table 13. Education of the members of the Howard cohort

Education	Percentage
Government schools	59
Single-sex school	39
Bachelor degree or higher	79

Table 15. Age of the members of the Howard cohort at time of joining WEL

Age group in years	Percentage
18–29	29
30–39	26
40–49	19
50–	25

Table 16. Marital, relationship and parental status of members of the Howard cohort

Marital status	Percentage
Married	33
Never married	47
Divorced/ separated	15
Widowed	3
Relationship status	
Long-term relationship, other than marriage	26
Parental status	
Had children when joined WEL	42

Table 17. Employment status of members of the Howard cohort

Employment status	Percentage
Not in paid employment	22
In part-time employment	19
In full-time employment	59

Sixty per cent of the members of the Howard cohort were active in community organisations when they joined WEL. The Howard cohort had the highest proportions of members involved in environmental groups and local politics. This reflects the general rise in salience of environmental issues and the movement of reformers into this area. Other women’s organisations and local community service groups remained popular choices. Not so popular were school or child base organisations, the Howard cohort had the lowest proportion of members involved in these. Not surprising as this cohort also had the lowest proportion of members with children.

What were the issues of concern for women who joined WEL in the Howard years? Women’s issues, feminism and equality were of concern to the highest number of members in this group. Lack of female participation in politics, first a major concern in the Hawke/ Keating years, continued to be of concern in the Howard years. Safety of women and domestic violence were issues that were also listed by a high proportion of members, as had been the case in the Fraser years. These are issues that are generally given prominence by more conservative governments.

Family planning/ abortion and workplace discrimination were also listed, but by a lower proportion of members from the Howard cohort than any of the other three cohorts. On the other hand childcare, which had been declining as an issue, rose slightly in importance in the Howard cohort.

The Future of WEL?

The WEL History Survey asked, ‘Does WEL still has something to contribute to Australian Society?’ Eighty-eight per cent of all respondents answered ‘yes’!

The most important contribution WEL could make to Australian Society, as expressed by members of all the cohorts, was:

- Keeping women’s voices and issues noticed.

Support for the following varied between cohorts:

- WEL must ensure that past gains are not lost¹⁴.
- There are still things for WEL to do¹⁵.
- The WEL approach is still needed¹⁶.

What issues should WEL be addressing?

The questionnaire asked, “What are the main issues WEL should be addressing?”¹⁷

The major issues identified were:

- Equity issues relating to employment, such as discrimination, the glass ceiling and pay equity¹⁸;

¹⁴ 12 per cent in the Founder cohort compared to 2 per cent in the Howard cohort.

¹⁵ Founder 17 per cent and Hawke/ Keating 16 per cent, Howard 13 per cent and Fraser 10 per cent

¹⁶ Founder cohort 15 per cent, Fraser cohort 17 per cent, Hawke/ Keating cohort 8 per cent, Howard cohort 15 per cent.

¹⁷ We coded up to three responses. The percentages given below indicate the number of respondents who mentioned the issue in their reply to the question.

¹⁸ Fraser cohort 28 per cent, Hawke/ Keating cohort 24 per cent, Founder cohort 22 per cent, Howard cohort 18 per cent

- Work/ home balance, including maternity leave and flexible hours¹⁹;
- General social issues, such as education and health²⁰;
- Childcare²¹; and
- Political participation by women, including the need for more women in parliaments²².

The Feminist Heart of Australia

I will leave you with these optimistic words from a new member who filled in the WEL History questionnaire.

She told us that:

While there is life in WEL, the feminist heart of Australia remains unconquered.

Abbott, Greg, 'Abuse flies as GST debate turns nasty', *Sun-Herald*, 7 June 1992

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¹⁹ Howard cohort 28 per cent, Fraser cohort 22 per cent, Hawke/ Keating cohort 19 per cent, Founder cohort 18 per cent

²⁰ Fraser cohort 22 per cent, Founder cohort 20 per cent, Hawke/ Keating 18 per cent, Howard cohort 15 per cent

²¹ Howard cohort 17 per cent, Founder cohort 16 per cent, Hawke/ Keating cohort 13 per cent, Fraser Cohort 12 per cent

²² Fraser cohort 18 per cent, Hawke/ Keating 15 per cent, Howard cohort 15 per cent, Founder cohort 10 per cent

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