

A History of WEL in Canberra

A talk by Dr Gail Radford to the ACT Heritage Studies Network in the Canberra Historical Society Rooms, Canberra Museum and Gallery, 16 March 2004

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What is WEL?

I am working at the Australian National University with Professor Marian Sawyer on an Australian Research Council funded Project to write a history of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL).

Our leaflet on the WEL History Project explains that:

The Women's Electoral Lobby is a feminist political organisation founded in 1972. It is a non-party-political and non-sectarian women's political lobby. It is the women's organisation most often referred to in parliament, the media and books on Australian politics.

A recent leaflet prepared by WEL ACT provides a thumbnail sketch of activities of the Lobby:

WEL's role as an advocate for Australian women is recognised in the political and social history of Australia. WEL has been at the forefront of the struggle for equal employment opportunities, access to quality childcare, the introduction of sex discrimination legislation, equal representation on boards and women's election to parliaments. WEL continues to fight for safe legal abortion and fertility treatments.

History of WEL

Over the years much has been written about and by WEL. However, perhaps due to the sheer volume of material no full-scale history has been written.

Marian and I are preparing such a history. It will explore WEL's influence on government over the years and how this was achieved, as well as the meaning of WEL for those who were involved.

We have been very busy, but we are far from finished. So far, we have carried out a survey of past and present members and have examined Hansard and the mass media for mentions of WEL. In addition, I have spent many hours looking through WEL archives and reading old newsletters.

Luckily, WEL groups around Australia have been very conscious of the need to preserve their records and have placed them in state or university libraries. Records from the WEL National Office are here in Canberra in the National Library of Australia. We are building up quite an archive ourselves at the Australian National University, but this will all be passed on to the National Library when we have finished the history project.

If you want to learn more about the WEL History Project, I have copies of our information brochure here for you. But in my talk today, I want to concentrate on the first year of WEL in Canberra and my role in it. How WEL started and why those early days in Canberra were so important. This is a subject that is dear to my heart, as I was the first Convenor of WEL ACT. As we are meeting in the Canberra Historical Society rooms, I have brought some memorabilia from those early days to show you.

Women's Liberation

You will be told that Women's Electoral Lobby, WEL, began in Canberra in May 1972. But the seeds for WEL in Canberra were sown well before this in Canberra Women's Liberation.

I returned from post-graduate studies in Canada in 1970 and joined the newly formed Canberra Women's Liberation that was meeting at a now famous house in Canning Street in Ainslie. This was the Canberra home of the Moratorium movement, which opposed Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, opposed conscription and helped to hide draft dodgers.

Here are two T-shirts I wore in the 1970s. They were made in the screen-printing workshop in the garage at Canning Street. The first is a Women's Liberation T-shirt, with the clenched fist in the middle of the female symbol.



Photo 1. Women's Liberation T-shirt from 1970s

And, here is another from that time, with *call me ms* emblazoned across the front. This request met with a surprising amount of hostility in those days.



Photo 2. T-shirt from the 1970s

I was dining with Jack Waterford earlier this month. Today, he is well known as the editor of *The Canberra Times* but in the early 70s he was a rebel who lived at Canning Street. He says that he remembers sitting at the back of meetings of Women's Liberation knitting! But Julia Ryan, who was also a member of Canberra Women's Liberation, says that this is an apocryphal story, as men were not allowed in Women's Liberation meetings.

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)

While later, WEL was to become known as a respectable if pushy lobby group, its beginnings in Canberra were considered to be far more subversive. Women's Liberation was definitely thought to be a threat to society by ASIO, who bugged the phone at Canning Street and took photos of those who attended Women's Liberation meetings.

I always said that the photos that they took would be useful when we were writing our history. Now, as part of my research into WEL's history, I intend to go over to the National Archives of Australia and see what they have about the early days of Women's Liberation and WEL.

In case you think that we had a bad case of paranoia in those days, I have to tell you that this was not the case. Jack has gone to the National Archives and seen the evidence of ASIO's preying. You may not have thought of

ASIO as being a valuable recorder of Canberra's heritage, but now you know!

Press

Another organisation that did not look upon Women's Liberation very kindly was the press. We were all bra burning rat bags to them. I must say that the only burning of bras that I witnessed in those days was done by ABC television; bras were thrown by ABC staff into a burning kerosene tin in their studio, as an introduction to a program on Women's Liberation.

That is not to say that we all wore bras, the bra-less look under T-shirts was very fashionable amongst young Women's Liberation members. Here are some photos of Women's Liberation members in Civic on International Women's Day (IWD) in 1972, so you can see what we were wearing then.



Photo 3. Street theatre, Canberra Women's Liberation, IWD March 1972

International Women's Day 1972

In 1972 International Women's Day was celebrated on Saturday 11 March, which was also Canberra Day. Canberra Women's Liberation joined in the festivities in Civic by presenting street theatre, speeches and songs in Petrie Plaza and organising a very successful stall in Civic Square.

The four street theatre sketches dealt with abortion, role-playing, odd and interesting male attitudes to women and children's liberation.



Photo 4. Beryl Henderson explaining Women's Liberation's demands.

Speakers explained the Women's Liberation demands of the right to work, equal pay, equal opportunity for work and education, free child care and pre-school facilities, free, safe contraceptives and safe, legal abortion on request.



Photo 5. Bobbi Gledhill, Petrie Plaza, IWD 1972

Bobbi Gledhill led the singing and soon had everyone singing along to the words of Glen Thomasetti's Equal Pay Song, 'Don't be too polite girls'.

The stall sold publications and badges, as well as articles made in the screen-printing workshop, such as T-shirts, tea towels, shoulder-bags and posters. The April 1972 edition of the Canberra Women's Liberation newsletter records that it was "a resoundingly successful stall" and that it "grossed \$159 in sales". This enthusiastic demand for their goods seemed to surprise the Women's Liberation members, but, as a result of their success, they applied to the Department of the Interior to hold a Friday night stall once a month.

In February 1972 Canberra Women's Liberation had moved into its own house, at 12 Bremer Street Griffith, and the proceeds of these stalls often went towards the payment of the rent.

What was Women's Liberation?

Now what was Women's Liberation? In a talk I gave in 1971 I said that:

Women's Liberation consists of groups of women who are coming together all over the world to press for full equality with men in a changed more humane society. A society in which men and women's lives are no longer dominated by the artificial rigid sex roles which exist today.

Despite its bad press, Canberra Women's Liberation was a serious group. We used to study and debate Women's Liberation literature from the USA and UK and examine the writings of the early feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft.

For the last few months of my time in North America I lived in a town house in Beacon Hill in Boston. A member of Women's Liberation lived on the first floor and a Black Panther lived in the basement. So you could say that my education in these matters started before my return to Australia.

On my way back to Australia, in late 1970, I stopped in New York and visited feminist bookshops where I purchased the latest literature including this copy of *Sisterhood is Powerful* which was hot off the press.

This was the first copy of *Sisterhood is Powerful* in Australia. It is an anthology of writings from the Women's Liberation Movement and, you can see from its battered condition, that it was well read by the Canberra Women's Liberation Group. The American feminist Robin Morgan edited the book. Robin visited Australia in 1990. When I explained its importance to us, she wrote in it, "For Gail, because Sisterhood is **still** powerful 20 years later!"

But we not only discussed books and papers in Canberra in the early 70s, importantly, we would talk about our own personal experiences and listen to other women talking about their own lives.

Everyone had one or more issues that they felt strongly about. For me it was the education of girls. I had been to a girls' school that did not teach science, except for biology, and regarded my ambition to be a vet as a

passing phase. I went on to study and graduate as a veterinary surgeon, so I became very aware of the problems of women working in predominantly male professions. I was also very cross about discrimination on the basis of marital status. I had married a diplomat but when we were posted overseas I was told that I could not work as a vet, as diplomats' wives were not allowed to work. I was furious!

In the main, we were young and married with small children. Lack of freely available family planning, contraception and abortion were issues for many. Lack of affordable good quality childcare was the main issue for others. Others had had searing experiences in the divorce courts.

For many of us philosophical discussions about women and society and how to build a better world were all engrossing. But others, myself included, wanted to do something to improve things right away. We formed the Canberra Women's Liberation Action Workshop.

Divorce submission

In 1972 we saw an advertisement for a Senate enquiry into divorce law and decided to write this submission. I will pass it around. It is called *Women and Divorce* and was submitted, in June 1972, to the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs: Enquiry into Divorce and Family Matters by Canberra Women's Liberation.

As far as I am aware, this is the first submission to government ever written by a Women's Liberation group in Australia! Other Women's Liberation groups were far too busy planning the revolution to sell out by writing a submission to the government at that time.

In Canberra, we interviewed 24 women who were separated or divorced, as well as social workers and lawyers, and put together this submission arguing for no fault divorce ("that the only ground for divorce be irretrievable breakdown of marriage").

I worked on this submission, with Margo Snyder and Carol Ambrus. Little did we know at the time that this was to be the forerunner of hundreds of submissions to be written by WEL in the next 30 years.

WEL Starts in Melbourne

WEL started in February 1972 when Beatrice Faust gathered together a group of ten women in Melbourne to discuss an article in the American feminist magazine called *MS Magazine*.

This article, *Rating the Candidates. Feminists Vote the Rascals In or Out*, by Brenda Feigen Fasteau and Bonnie Lobel, reported on the answers to questions on feminist issues, in a questionnaire and at interview, by candidates for the forthcoming US Presidential election. The authors also researched the candidates' voting records, statements by them and statements about them. The results were summarised in a chart.

I will pass around a copy of the article so you can see for yourselves.

Some of the women who met with Bea Faust in Melbourne were sick of endless talking in Women's Liberation meetings, while others felt that more conservative women's organisations were not serving women well. They decided that they would form a new women's group called the Women's Electoral Lobby and its members would question all the candidates for the forthcoming Federal Elections and publish the results.

Bea Faust wrote to her contacts in Women's Liberation and ALRA, the Abortion Law Reform Association, and embarked upon a tour of capital cities to spread the word about WEL.

WEL in Canberra

Bea wrote to Biff McDougall in early April asking if Canberra Women's Liberation was going to establish a branch of WEL or would it work with WEL NSW? Aware that there could be sensitivities about WEL in Women's Liberation Bea wrote, "If you believe that the democratic process is useless, perhaps you could pass this on to someone who still has hopes of it". Biff passed this on to the Women's Liberation Action Workshop and I replied, on 19 April 1972, on behalf of the Workshop that, "We are very interested in taking part in WEL." And that, "We'll establish a sub-committee for WEL in Canberra."

So you can see that this is the evidence that the decision to start WEL in Canberra was made by Women's Liberation. News about WEL activities

was reported regularly in the Canberra Women's Liberation newsletter, under the heading of Action Groups, until 1973, when WEL ACT started its own newsletter.

I arranged a meeting on 3 May 1972 for people to hear Bea Faust talk about WEL. The meeting was held at Women's House at 12 Bremer St, Griffith. Twenty to thirty people attended, they were mainly members of Women's Liberation and ALRA. Thomas Mautner from ALRA went out to the airport to pick up Bea but came back and reported that she was not on the plane! !

I was chairing the meeting and was taken aback by the news that Bea was not to be there. However, I went on to talk about WEL, relying on what I had gleaned from the first three *Broadsheets* produced by WEL in Melbourne. Victoria Green, Elizabeth Reid and Susan Butler (Ryan), who were also members of Women's Liberation, joined in. The meeting was enthusiastic about the idea of forming a WEL group in Canberra. It decided that we should try and get more members and that we would interview the two nominees for pre-selection for the Liberal Party for the ACT. Victoria Green was to go to talk to WEL in Sydney.

At our next meeting Victoria Green pointed out that we must have office holders, if we were to comply with the WEL constitution. It was decided that I should be Convenor and that I should go to Melbourne to see Bea. The ACT Deputies were Victoria Green, Susan Butler (Ryan), Louise Lake and Meredith Ardlie (Stokes) (who was in charge of membership and finances).

I travelled to Melbourne and back on the Greyhound bus. When I tell people today that I went to Melbourne on the bus, they are surprised. It seemed quite a natural thing to do at the time. We did not have any funds and, as a post-graduate student, I had travelled around North America on Greyhound buses.

I met with Bea at her house in Carlton. She told me what needed to be done, to go and see Helen Glezer, who was designing the questionnaire for the candidates, and then to go back to Canberra and get on with it. I found Bea to be a formidable woman so I followed her instructions to the letter.

Spreading the word

Kep Enderby, the local Member of the House of Representatives, pointed out that we would need to broaden our membership base and we wrote to many organisations in Canberra to introduce ourselves. We then embarked on a speaking tour of organisations in Canberra and surrounding districts.

Back to the screen-printing workshop again! Here is a WEL T-shirt from the 70s, with WEL in the middle of the female symbol instead of the Women's Liberation clenched fist. We also made bumper stickers with the message *Join Women's Electoral Lobby*. Bumper stickers were very popular in those days and you soon saw many WEL stickers travelling around Canberra, on the cars of WEL members.



Photo 6. WEL T-shirt from the 1970s



Photo 7. Kirsty McEwin and Meredith Hinchliffe resting after screen-printing WEL T-shirts at the Women's House, 12 Bremer Street, Griffith. (Photo Chris Ronalds)

Chris, Kirsty and Meredith had been making these T-shirts to raise money to pay the rent at the Women's House. WEL and Women's Liberation were both meeting in the Women's House and the screen-printing workshop made items for both organisations.

Below are some knickers, screen-printed with the Women's Liberation symbol, which were made on the same day as the WEL T-shirts.



Photo 8. Women's Liberation knickers, screen-printed at Bremer Street. (Photo Chris Ronalds)

Packaging Demonstration

WEL was very conscious of the bad press Women's Liberation had received, so sought advice on how to handle the press from working journalists who were members of WEL. In particular, Sally White and Iola Hack in Melbourne provided advice. In Canberra we were lucky to have Noel Pratt, a journalist from *The Australian*, as a member and consulted her regularly. One lesson we learned was that it would be important to have 'visuals' for the cameras.

Dorothy Darroch (Broom) from the Association for Social Responsibility in Science, who had joined WEL, suggested that we hold a demonstration on unnecessary packaging and polluting packaging and the need to recycle bottles and tins. Still timely today given the debate about pollution caused by all those plastic bags from supermarkets.

So that was what we did. WEL ACT held its first demonstration at lunchtime in Civic on Friday 16 June 1972. Here we are, this photo from the article that appeared in the *Canberra Times* the next day.



Photo 9. Left to Right Patricia Fyfe (Rees), Dorothy Darroch (Broom), Barbara O'Dwyer, Margot Snyder (Collett) (Photo The Canberra Times)

WEL members did their weekly shopping at the Coles Supermarket in Civic. The store is no longer there but I am sure that some of you will remember it. With the agreement of the management of the store, we sorted our shopping in the front of the store, after we had passed through the checkouts. We put all the unnecessary packaging, such as plastic wrappers, into two shopping trolleys with a big notice in front of them *rubbish you pay for it*. Glass containers were placed in another two trolleys and shoppers were urged to recycle their glass bottles and jars at a depot at Fyshwick. Another trolley contained tin containers with a notice about taking these to a metal recycling company. We then put our own unwrapped shopping into baskets to carry home. Other women handed out information sheets to shoppers and passers by.

The demonstration received good coverage on Channel 9 national news, as well as in the Canberra Times.

Bea Faust, however, was critical of WEL Groups that worked on consumerism or the environment. She considered that WEL should stick to core feminist business, and leave non-feminist activities to other organisations. WEL ACT was undaunted. The packaging demonstration had been good publicity for the WEL in Canberra and had attracted new members.

Public Education Campaigns

WEL ACT began its political activities by interviewing the Liberal Party candidates for preselection for the seat of Canberra. WEL ACT did not publicise the results of these interviews but they had made the WEL members realise how ignorant the candidates were about issues of concern to women. We decided that we needed a program to educate candidates and the public in general about these issues.

We decided that we would hold public education campaigns, what we called Blitzes, about a number of issues. Areas to be covered were:

- Family Planning and Contraception;
- Employment Problems of Women in the ACT;
- Child Care in the ACT;
- Retraining Opportunities for Women; and
- Discrimination / Equal Opportunity.

For each Blitz a Subcommittee:

- Researched the topic, this was also helpful in providing information for questions to be put to the candidates for the federal election.
- Planned a demonstration, if this was the best way to focus the press.
- Screen-printed a poster to advertise the Blitz or demonstration.
- Organised the sending of letters or telegrams to relevant people.
- Produced information sheets, which could be handed out to people at the demonstration and to the press.
- Wrote a press release.

Here are some examples of the information sheets we prepared:

- *Why Do Day Care Centres Fail to Meet the Needs of All Mothers Especially Those of Working Mothers?*
- *High Rates of Female Unemployment Hidden.*
- *Prime Minister less than honest on equal pay.*
- *Australian women have a right to cheap, safe contraception.*

Our artists designed excellent posters for these Blitzes; we used to put them around all the shopping centres. Butchers always had space in their windows and were particularly accommodating. Unfortunately I cannot find a single copy today of a poster that we made for a Blitz. It is part of our heritage that has been lost.



Photo 10. Screen-printing WEL posters in 1972. On the left is Victoria Green and on the right is Margot Snyder (Collett) (Photo ABC Four Corner's program *The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box*)

But all is not completely lost. A Four Corners team, from the ABC, made a program about WEL called *The Hand That Rocks the Ballot Box*. It went to air on 7 October 1972. I helped them with the Canberra segment and made sure that they photographed the screen-printing workshop with our posters.

The WEL History Project has bought a video of the program and has, with the ABC's permission, made some still photos from the video.

Contraception and Family Planning

The Contraception and Family Planning Subcommittee devised a different way of obtaining press about their area of interest. This Blitz kicked off earlier than expected with the presentation of a submission to a Tariff Board Inquiry in Melbourne on Tuesday 25 July 1972.

This submission came about as a result of my regular Friday evening attendance at a favourite Canberra watering hole, the News Bar in the Wellington Hotel, more commonly known as "the Wello". The News Bar was a dimly lit and smoke filled room crowded with journalists, public servants and various other movers and shakers in the political life of Canberra, everyone drinking and smoking to excess and talking excitedly. One evening I was describing WEL to Peter Cullen, a Canberra-based lobbyist, when he said to me, "If you want to learn how to lobby you had better come and see me in my office on Monday." This I did. When I showed him our list of demands about contraceptives and family planning, he said that he had an idea that could help us launch our campaign.

He called in Jim Cooper, who worked with him. Jim was a professional tariff consultant. He told me that the Tariff Board was reviewing the customs duty on 1,040 items in the light of Britain entering the Common Market. Jim showed me the lists of these items and said if I could identify those items, chemicals etc, that were used in contraceptives, he would write us a submission to the Tariff Board. I did this and Jim prepared a submission on our behalf requesting that the general rate on contraceptives be reduced to the present preferential rate, this was the rate applying the goods from the United Kingdom at that time.



Photo 11. Victoria and Margot were making this poster for WEL NSW. It reads ‘WEL demands safe cheap contraception and the right to advertise it’. (Photo ABC Four Corner’s program *The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box*)

We had hoped to present the submission to the Tariff Board in August, during our planned Blitz, but the Board wanted to hear from us in July. We could not go at such short notice and could not afford the petrol to drive down or airfares to fly, so Bea Faust arranged for Dr June Blackwell, a gynaecologist who was the doctor in charge of the Municipal Family Planning Clinic in South Melbourne, to present it on our behalf.

This received excellent press, including a favourable editorial article in the Melbourne Age, a long article in the Financial Review, another in the Nation Review and two in the Canberra Times. Not only press about the existence of the tariff itself but also about the other items of concern, as outlined on the information sheet, which had been prepared by the Contraception and Family Planning Group in Canberra. This information sheet set out the different components in the price of contraceptives, the reliability of different methods of contraceptives and laws applying to the advertising of contraceptives and Family Planning Clinics. WEL called for:

- The removal of the luxury tax of 27¹/₂% from all forms of contraceptives (this tax was the same as that on mink coats and cosmetics).
- The placement of all forms of contraceptives on the pharmaceutical benefit list.
- An end to the laws banning the advertising of contraceptives.
- An end to the laws prohibiting Family Planning Clinics from advertising their services.
- Government support for Family Planning Clinics.

Not only did this Subcommittee manage to obtain good press but also it met its aims of providing general education on the topic.

We got an immediate response from the Opposition (but none from the MacMahon Government). On 1 August 1972 the ALP Shadow Minister for Health, Bill Heydon, told *The Age* newspaper that, “Contraceptives supplied on a doctor’s prescription would be free under a Federal Labor Government,” and that a Labor Government would help pay to set up family planning clinics throughout the community. This was not altogether unexpected, as we knew that placing *The Pill* on the ‘free list’ was part of the ALP health policy. But, as all lobbyists know, a policy is one thing but getting the policy implemented can be an entirely different matter.

Jim and Peter did not charge us for their services and we were very grateful to them for this. Peter Cullen remained a firm friend of WEL and spoke about lobbying at WEL’s first National Conference in January 1973. His wife, Ann joined WEL and became a very active member.

Unfortunately, I cannot show you the submission. I have found a letter that I wrote to a WEL member, who had moved overseas, telling her about the submission and saying that I am enclosing my last copy!

This was the very first submission written by a WEL Group!! Little did I know that I would be destined to research WEL submissions for our history. So far I have collected information more than 600 submissions written by WEL over the years. But this one was the first.

Bea Faust was pleased with WEL ACT this time. She said that it was this submission which first made the press sit up and realise that we were a professional organisation.

You may be amused to learn that a report on the submission to the Tariff Board, in the August 1972 edition of the Canberra Women's Liberation newsletter, concluded with the words:

It's all called "learning how to play the male chauvinist pigs' game – so you can beat them at it.

The Questionnaire

While WEL ACT was busy educating everyone, WEL in Melbourne developed a questionnaire for the candidates for the Federal elections. WEL Sydney did not agree with the contents or structure of the questionnaire and WEL ACT found itself adjudicating. I said that we felt like the meat in the sandwich. When I joined the public service several years later I found that this was a common experience for those in the bureaucracy in Canberra.



Photo 12. Carmen Lawrence and Pat Strong, working on the 1972 WEL survey in Melbourne (Photo ABC Four Corner's program *The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box*)

Despite all the problems, the questionnaire was finished in time to interview the candidates.

WEL ACT not only interviewed candidates for Canberra and surrounding electorates but also interviewed many sitting Members for other WEL groups.

We worked closely with WEL groups from around the country. When a sitting Member told the WEL group in his electorate that he was too busy in Canberra to be interviewed in the electorate, a WEL member from his electorate would phone WEL ACT. We would then arrange to interview the Member here. However, if the Member told us that he was too busy with parliamentary business to see us before he had to return to his electorate, we would phone the WEL group in his electorate and tell them what plane their Member would be arriving on. A member of the local WEL group would meet him at the airport to arrange a time to interview him in the electorate. We had a lot of success with these tactics.

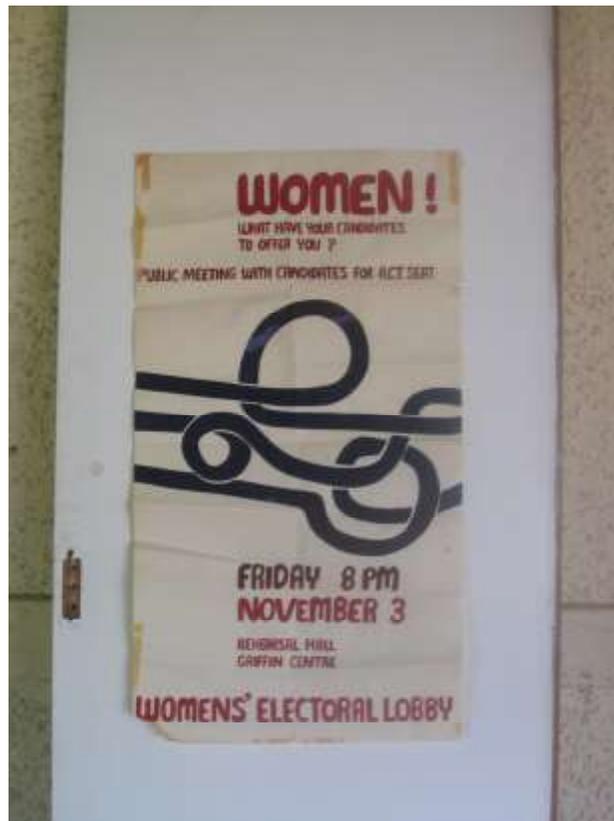


Photo 13. Poster for the WEL ACT public meeting in 1972

Public Meetings

WEL members also attended public meetings and asked candidates questions.

On 3 November 1972 WEL ACT held a public meeting in the Rehearsal Hall at the Griffith Centre, in Civic, and all the Federal candidates for the ACT were invited to speak and answer questions.

WEL Wagga organised a public meeting on 26 September 1972, where all the candidates for the Federal electorate of Farrer were invited to provide answers to the question, 'why should we, the women of Wagga, vote for you'. WEL ACT had been helping the country WEL groups that had grown up in the area surrounding Canberra and Pat Clarke, the Convenor of WEL Wagga, asked me to chair their meeting. I suggested to the Four Corners team that they come along too, which they were happy to do, as they had to include items about activities outside the Capital cities in their programs.



Photo 14. Pat Clarke, Convenor of WEL Wagga in 1972 (Photo ABC Four Corner's program *The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box*)



Photo 15. Members of the audience chatting over supper at the meeting of candidates organised by WEL in Wagga in September 1972. (Photo ABC Four Corner's program *The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box*)

The Form Guide

Next, WEL ACT found itself in the middle of another controversy. How to handle the publishing of the results of the survey? What should we publish from the wealth of information we had collected in the answers to the questionnaire? Once again, there was a heated difference of opinion between WEL Sydney and WEL Melbourne. I organised a meeting in Canberra and vowed that no one would leave until they reached agreement. Finally, it was agreed that the Form Guide was to be kept brief. Each state would handle its own publicity but the Melbourne Form Guide would also contain the ratings of the Liberal/Country Party Cabinet and the ALP Shadow Cabinet.

The Melbourne Form Guide, *The Age Women's Voters' Guide*, was published as an insert in *The Age* on 20 November 1972. It was published as a green insert in the middle of *The Age*, as was the case with the form guide for the races.



Photo 16. WEL holding a general meeting in Melbourne. (Photo *The Age Women's Voters' Guide*)

In the ACT Pat Eatock, a Black Liberation candidate, was given full marks. Kep Enderby, the sitting Member and Labor candidate followed her closely. On Election Day, 2 December 1972, WEL ACT handed out information sheets at the Polls, with summaries of the results of the WEL questionnaire for all the ACT candidates for the House of Representatives. One of these is reproduced below.

THINK WEL

This information sheet shows where your candidates stand on issues of vital importance to women: 1. Equality of education and job opportunity; 2. Planned parenthood; 3. Child care, and 4. Awareness of women's issues.

Eatock, J.P	100%	Mrs Eatock has an outstanding appreciation of the problems confronting women in this society.
Enderby, K.E.	91%	While in office Mr Enderby has consistently given public and unambiguous support to women's issues.
Fitzgerald, A.J.	76%	Mr Fitzgerald is consistently ambiguous on any controversial matter.
Hughes, P.D.	73%	Dr Hughes has seen fit to stand for election whilst being ill-informed on the situation of women in the community.
Blair, B.J.	69%	Mr Blair appears to have only a vague understanding and commitment to the major issues raised by W.E.L.
Salvador, M.M.	63%	We have charitably assumed that the inconsistencies of Mr Salvador's attitudes are due to his naiveté and lack of forethought.
Christie T.J.	56%	Mr Christie has an extremely limited view of the role women should play in society.
Burns, A.L.	40%	Prof. Burns is consistently self-contradictory in his attitude towards

women.

Marsh, H.H.

Not available for interview.

WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY (A.C.T.)

85 Stradbroke Street, Deakin 2600

Whitlam Elected

Labor was elected and immediately, and much to my surprise, the Prime Minister met some of WEL's demands. Mr Whitlam announced that the sales tax was to be removed from all contraceptives and oral contraceptives were to be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. This meant that 'The Pill' would be available for a dollar. The ACT Pharmacy Ordinance was also amended to remove the prohibition on the advertising of contraceptives and the advertising of family planning clinics in Canberra. Later, the Government made grants to family planning organisations.

(The gloriously named *Sales Tax (Exemptions and Classifications) Act 1973* was assented to on 11 April 1973. This Act deemed the removal of sales tax from contraceptives "to have had effect on and from 8th December 1972." The ACT Pharmacy Ordinance was amended on 19 December 1972. In February 1973 oral contraceptives were listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, which was also known as the National Health System list)

Also in December 1972, the Prime Minister briefed Mary Gaudron to apply to the Arbitration Commission to re-open its hearing on the ACTU's application for equal pay in Federal awards. The Whitlam Government supported equal pay for women. As a result the Commission accepted the principle of equal pay for work of equal value

Whitlam also announced that he would appoint a woman to his personal staff to adviser him on women's affairs. The press said that she would have to be a 'Superwoman'.

Women who were short-listed for interviews for the 'Superwoman job' came to Canberra in March 1973. Our screen-printers whipped off to their workshop and made them Superwoman T-shirts. After the interviews the women went to a party, organised by Gordon Bilney in Hughes, all wearing

their Superwoman T-shirts. As you know, a Canberra woman, Elizabeth Reid, was appointed to this job.



Photo 17. A Superwoman T-shirt, 1973

Later we made more Superwomen T-shirts in a variety of colours, once again to raise funds for the Women's House.

National Conference

Back to 1972, you may remember that in December 1972 and January 1973 there was a heat wave. Others may have gone to the South Coast to escape the heat, but not the members of WEL ACT. We organised WEL's First

National Conference. It was held at Burgmann College at the Australian National University, this was the only College that said we could bring our children. We found, much to our surprise, that enormous numbers of members were coming. What to do? Where would we put them? I said, "Hire a tent, we could hold some of the sessions there." This is what we did.

ACT wanted sessions on policies and organisation, others wanted information sessions. We settled for a mixture. Once again WEL ACT found itself in the middle of a blue. Interstate groups felt that Canberra had too much power; we wanted some rules about who could speak on behalf of WEL etc.

After a lot of discussion, it was agreed that Canberra was to be the central communications point for the next year. Any local group could take local decisions on any issue; however, at the state level there must be state-wide consent. At the national level, all WEL groups must be consulted and if a majority approved a particular issue, Canberra, or any other group, may be authorised to lobby on the issue on behalf of WEL Australia. Press Releases on behalf of WEL Australia would be released to the National Press via Canberra and simultaneously to local groups to be released to local papers.

Throughout the rest of the 70s WEL ACT continued to play an important role lobbying Federal politicians on national issues. It was not until the National Conference in 1978 that WEL Australia decided to establish a National Office, also in Canberra.

Make policy not coffee

Here is my final T-shirt, *Make Policy not Coffee* it says.

This could be seen as a harbinger of what was to be in store in the years to come, when WEL women were to move into the bureaucracy and the parliaments, to make policies and laws that would be for the benefit of all Australian women.



Photo 18. Make Policy not Coffee T-shirt

In conclusion, I just want to say that no one was more surprised than me to see WEL grow from its humble beginnings in Women's Liberation to an important player on the political stage in less than a year. Neither did I dream that I would be writing its history 32 years later.