

## Which National Conference? Who's Counting?

Any WEL member who attended to the First National WEL Conference, in Canberra in January 1973, will never forget it. WEL was a success! WEL had arrived on the political scene, a force to be taken seriously. We could hardly believe it! Oh, the excitement of meeting women from all over Australia, who had only been names in newsletters or voices on the phone. It was a typical Canberra January, too hot to sleep; we stayed up all night talking. But where was WEL going? What were we to do next?

In June this year we will have another National Conference. How many National Conferences have we held since that first one? What number is this one in June? I wondered about this in January, another scorcher, so I retired to the air-conditioned comfort of the National Library of Australia to ferret through the WEL archives.

I found that WEL, while having the greatest confidence about giving complicated economic advice to Government, seemed unable to count its National Conferences. The press release for the sixth conference proudly announced the *Resolutions from the Fifth National WEL Conference*. It was held in Canberra; perhaps the mistake was my fault?

WEL Victoria confused matters by calling the conference they held in March 1987 a National Meeting. In her opening address Mary Owen is quoted, in Inkwel of March/April 1987, as saying:

Welcome to what is, in effect, the 17<sup>th</sup> National Conference – although it's billed this year as a meeting – mainly because it was felt that, in view of the very volatile political and economic situation, instead of the usual general conference on WEL affairs, we should have a tighter meeting devoted to issues likely to be central to the next Federal election – which may well be held sooner than we thought.

Fair enough, so it was a National Conference by another name. But according to my calculations it was not the seventeenth, it was the twelfth. Maybe, Mary was misquoted by Inkwel or it was a typographical error?

If you look my table, which is set out below, you can see that the Seventeenth National WEL Conference was not held in Melbourne in March 1987, it will be held in Sydney in June this year!! Perhaps there is a warning for us in Mary's message to the 1987 conference; will the Federal Election be sooner than we think?

I have included the venues in my table of conferences, as I think that this makes it easier to remember if you were there or not. Looking at the table, you can see that WEL held National Conferences each year until the early 80s. There was only one conference between 1983 and 1992. What happened to national conferences?

WEL was not idle. In 1985 the *National Women's Tax Summit* was held in Canberra; originally a WEL initiative, WEL was one of the 23 sponsoring women's organizations.

In 1986 WEL organised *The National Agenda for Women Conference* in Canberra. In 1989 the *Women's Taxation Convention* was held in Parliament House in Canberra. This was a joint initiative of WEL and the National Women's Consultative Council.

CAPOW, the Coalition of Australian Participating Organizations of Women, was formed at the WEL National Conference in January 1992. In September that year CAPOW held its first conference in Parliament House in Canberra, WEL and BPW did most of the organising. Prime Minister Keating announced the strengthening of the Sex Discrimination Act at this conference.

So there you are, now you have some idea of what I found in the WEL archives. I haven't even started looking at conferences held by state or regional WEL groups. I have been collecting information about the submissions written by all WEL groups and, so far, I have found almost 700. I don't think I will even try and find all the WEL conferences. Life is too short. If, however, any one has other lists of WEL conferences, the WEL History Project would be very please to receive them.

But I do wonder if any WEL member has attended all sixteen WEL conferences? If she comes to the seventeenth as well, I think that she should be given an award.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone again in Sydney in June. Lets try and make it as exciting at the first conference in January 1973.

Gail Radford  
ARC Project on WEL History

### **Table of National WEL Conferences**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Conference and Theme</b>	<b>Venue and Date</b>
<b>1973</b>	First National WEL Conference <i>The Future of WEL</i>	Burgmann College, Australian National University, Canberra 19 - 21 January 1973
<b>1974</b>	Second National WEL Conference	La Trobe University, Melbourne 18 - 20 January 1974
<b>1975</b>	Third National WEL Conference <i>The Future and Future Action by WEL</i>	Women's College, University of Sydney, Sydney 24 - 27 January 1975
<b>1976</b>	Fourth National WEL Conference	Western Australian Secondary Teachers College,

		Perth 24-26 January 1976
<b>1977</b>	Fifth National WEL Conference <i>Women in Isolation</i>	Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Brisbane 6-8 May 1977
<b>1978</b>	Sixth National WEL Conference	Burgmann College, Australian National University, Canberra 17 – 19 February 1978
<b>1979</b>	Seventh National WEL Conference	Lincoln College, Adelaide 16 – 18 February 1979
<b>1980</b>	Eighth National WEL Conference <i>Women and Power</i>	London Hotel, Melbourne 25 – 27 April 1980
<b>1981</b>	Ninth National WEL Conference <i>Strategies, Action Programs and Ideas for the 1980s</i>	University of New South Wales, Sydney 4-5 July 1981
<b>1982</b>	Tenth National WEL Conference <i>WEL Beyond the Patriarchy – Strategies for the 80's</i>	Turner Primary School, Canberra 2 – 4 October 1982
<b>1983</b>	Eleventh National WEL Conference	Murdoch University, Perth 22-23 October 1983
<b>1987</b>	Twelfth National WEL Conference <i>Federal Election Strategies</i>	Swinburne Institute of Technology, Melbourne 14-15 March 1987
<b>1992</b>	Thirteenth National WEL Conference <i>Looking Back – Moving Forwards</i>	Australian National University, Canberra 25-27 January 1992
<b>1996</b>	Fourteenth National WEL Conference <i>Women's Rights – Human Rights</i>	University of Technology Sydney 26-28 January 1996
<b>1999</b>	Fifteenth National WEL Conference <i>Women: Staking Our Claim</i>	Point Walter Conference Centre, Perth 16-18 April 1999
<b>2000</b>	Sixteenth National WEL Conference	Australian National

*Making it WEL for Women*

University, Canberra  
1-3 December 2000

**2004**    *Seventeenth WEL National Conference*  
*Is Australian Democracy Working for*  
*Women?*

Sydney Mechanics' School of  
Arts, Sydney on 12 – 13 June  
2004