

Snippets from the 2002/03 WEL History Survey

A lot has been written about WEL, in the press, in politics texts and other academic and popular works. Some of that material has contributed to myths and stereotypes about WEL and its members. We now have the data from the 2002/03 survey of past and present members to construct a full picture of the changes in the organisation, its members and their priorities over time (see the WEL History Survey Report above). We received 550 completed responses to the survey.

Here are a few snippets from what we received:

"I find it hard to remember myself before I joined WEL. They were heady days of working with women who believed as passionately as I did that we could change the world for women".

"The early days from 1972-75 were a time of exhilaration, adrenaline, trepidation, sisterhood, achievement and purpose...It was rewarding to find our well-researched and professionally written submissions were being listened to and were having an effect, even if limited".

"For the first 14 years of my WEL membership I was in the country and treasured my monthly newsletter. It opened up to me another world--of women who cared enough about women to spend their free time meeting and writing submissions..."

"It was apparent very early that we could not expect serious coverage in the local press; any press releases issued by WEL were included in the social pages (if at all). A meeting with the Editor demonstrated just how difficult this would be to change. He insisted that we be identified by our husband's name - Mrs. JOHN Smith etc, and wanted to send the social reporter to any WEL functions, to describe our fashions! Later as community video facilities became available we not only learned how to use it, but used it effectively to train ourselves how to perform capably before the camera. The result was that most issues were commented on by WEL members, as local TV producers realised that an interview with a spokesperson who didn't "um and er" or freeze with nerves was a relatively easy option."

"Driving to Canberra for a WEL conference in the 70s with three other women. First time drove cross-country--broken fan belt but refitted it ourselves. We felt invincible."

"I am disappointed WEL fizzled out on its own success. For perhaps 15

years it was like a ginger beer plant: growing, maturing and dwindling as women gained confidence, experience, skills and moved on--to be replaced by new women."

"X later became one of my mentors and guided a very naive me around the importance of networking and lobbying. Now that I'm an adviser in government, she rings me up and lobbies about stuff. This makes me laugh sometimes".

[new member]"While there is life in WEL the feminist heart of Australia remains unconquered".