

Submissions prepared by WEL–Western Australia

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Submissions prepared by WEL—Western Australia

1. Introduction

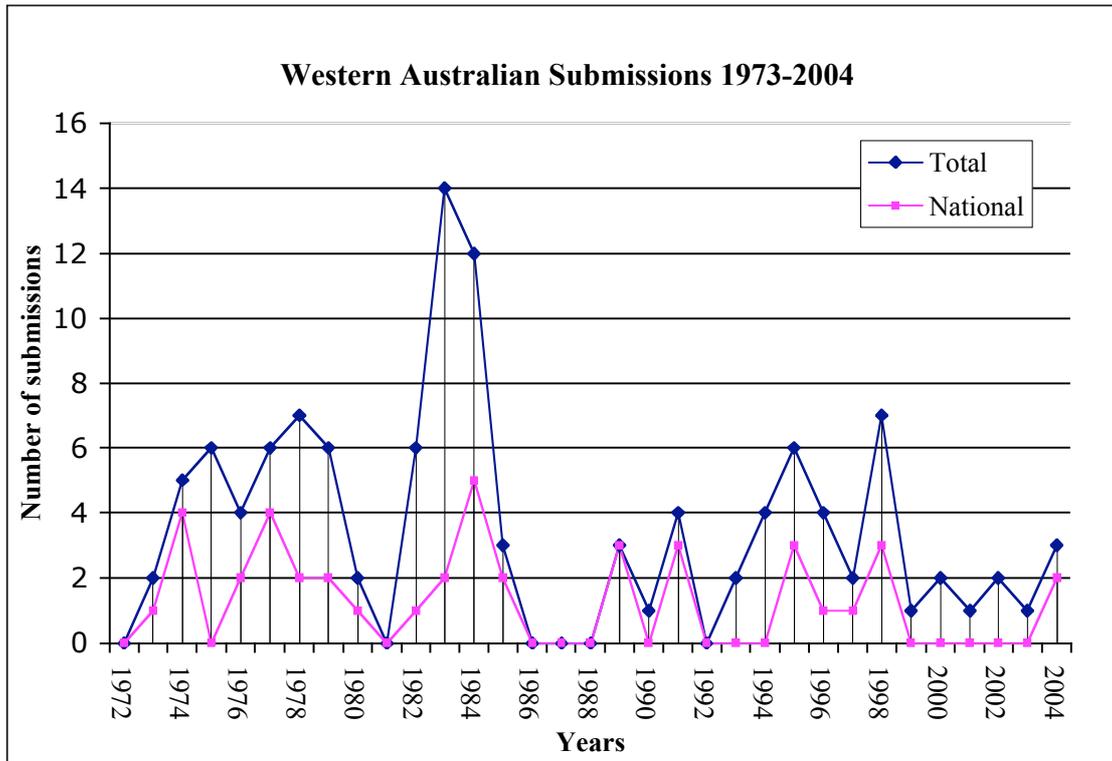
The tradition of women's non-party political advocacy has strong roots in Western Australia. WEL—WA inherited a legacy of political activism from the Women's Service Guilds and the Australian Federation of Women Voters based in the State. When WA women found out, in 1972, that WEL was being created on the other side of the country some joined up immediately, before WA had a chance to establish its own WEL group. These early members in WA were members of the founding WEL group in Victoria.

The inaugural meeting of WEL—WA was held in March 1973 and the group wrote its first submissions in 1973. The WEL history database lists 118 submissions prepared by WEL—WA in the years 1973–2004. These submissions are discussed in this report.

The submissions were identified in Pat Burnett's history of WEL—WA¹, copies of the WEL—WA newsletter, *Broadsheet*, and newsletters from other WEL groups. In addition, Val Marsden, a long-time member of WEL—WA, sent information about submissions prepared in the later years.

The majority of the submissions concern matters specific to WA; however, just over one third concern matters of national importance and were sent to national bodies, national inquiries and members or committees of the Federal Parliament. WEL—WA also contributed to submissions prepared by WEL—Australia on national issues. These submissions will be discussed in a separate report on WEL—Australia.

2. Number of submissions prepared each year

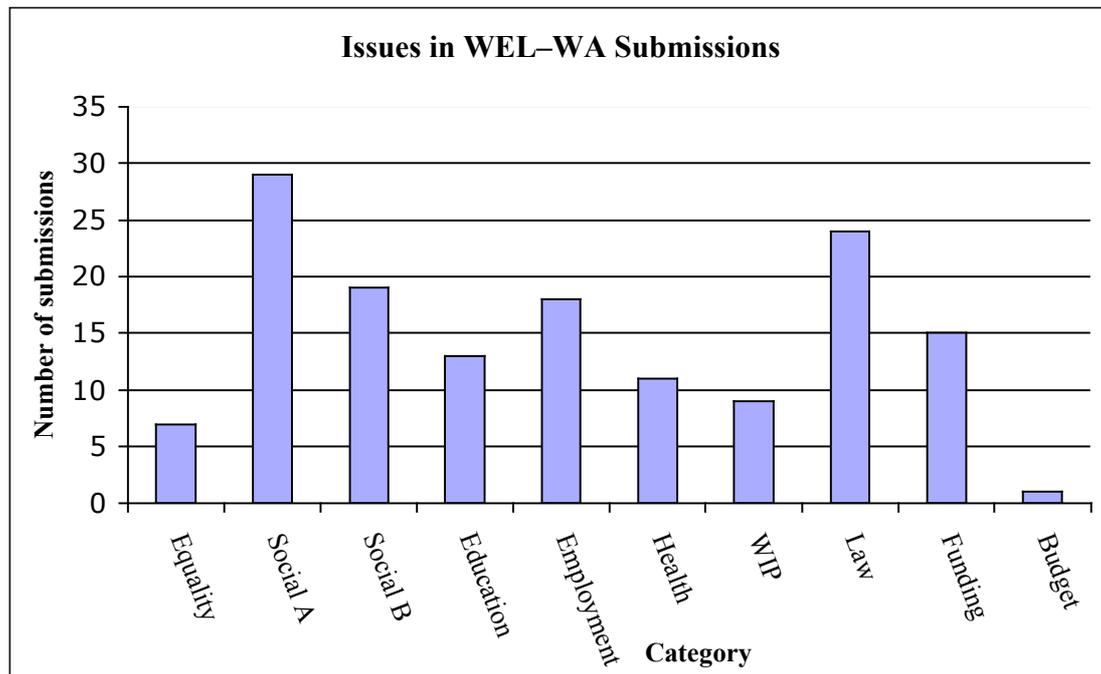


The graph shows the number of WEL–WA submissions prepared in each of the years 1973–2004.

In its first ten years WEL–WA sent an average of one to two submissions to national bodies and two to three submissions to State bodies. The abrupt rise in the number of submissions in 1983 reflected the new opportunities presented by the election of the Burke Labor Government in WA and the subsequent rise to twelve in the number of submissions to State bodies. A similar rise in the number of submissions was not seen with the election of the Liberal Coalition Governments of Sir Charles Court in 1974 and Richard Court in 1993 or with the election of the Gallop Labor Government in 2001.

The graph shows a number of years when there were no submissions. This may not be a reflection of the true situation; there may have been submissions in those years that the WEL history team has not been able to locate.

3. Issues in submissions



The bar chart shows the issues addressed in the WEL–WA submissions in the WEL history database. They have been divided into the ten categories: Equality, Social A, Social B, Education, Employment, Health, Women in Politics, Law, Funding and, finally, Budget. The coding frame, used to allocate submissions to these categories, is in the Appendix to this report. In most cases a submission was allocated to one category, but in some cases it was allocated to two.

As can be seen in the bar chart, the greatest numbers of submissions, 29 submissions, fell into the Social A category. This category includes issues such as childcare, welfare, divorce and domestic violence.

Next was the Law category with 24 submissions. As explained above, a number of submissions were allocated to more than one category. This was particularly true of those to do with legislation, where numbers of submissions were allocated to the category of the subject matter as well as the Law category, if the submission was seeking changes to legislation or the introduction of new legislation. For example, in December 1983 WEL–WA sent a submission to the WA Attorney-General on the

Revision of the Criminal Code, recommending the repeal of those sections dealing with abortion². This has been recorded under both the Health and Law categories.

4. Discussion of submissions in each category

Category 1: Equality

In 1978 WEL–WA sent a submission to the WA Attorney-General documenting cases of discrimination and urging the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. This submission was not successful. Undaunted, WEL continued to lobby for State anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation. However, it was not until 1984 that their efforts were rewarded, with the introduction of the *WA Equal Opportunity Act 1984*. WEL member Yvonne Henderson, was given the honour, as a backbencher, of introducing the Bill into the Legislative Assembly. Yvonne was one of five WEL members who were successful candidates for Labor in the 1983 elections³. Later she became a Cabinet Minister and then the WA Commissioner for Equal Opportunity in 2003, replacing long-time Commissioner June Williams (from WEL–NSW).

Over the years WEL–WA made submissions on discrimination and equality to reviews by national bodies; these included submissions to:

- The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, on sexism in the media (1977, 1980 and 1983);
- The Women’s Advisory Body Working Party, on sexism in the media (1977);
- The Women, Sport and the Media Working Party, which was convened by WEL member Senator Rosemary Crowley (1984); and
- The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on the review of the Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*⁴

Category 2: Social A

WEL successfully lobbied for government funding for childcare and greater availability of childcare places; submissions on childcare were presented in all decades. The first, on *Early Childhood Services in Western Australia*, being made in 1974 to the WA Minister for Community Welfare and the Liberal Party Policy Subcommittee on Child Care and Pre-School. In 1978 the WEL Subcommittee on Childcare surveyed childcare in government hospitals in Perth and, as a result, a submission was sent to the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It was pointed out that while two other Perth hospitals had crèches, the Sir Charles Gairdner complex had potted plants, piped music, carpets and wide hallways but nothing for children. Disappointingly, the only result of the submission—plus a delegation, letters to the Minister and some media publicity—were some toys placed in the main waiting room⁵. In 1982 WEL–WA wrote to the National Women’s Advisory Council about childcare and they continued to press for funding for childcare in submissions in the 1990s.

Ten of the twenty-nine submissions in Social A category related to family law and/or domestic violence. In 1979 WEL–WA sent a submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Family Law Act, another to the Family Law Council, containing an analysis of telephone calls received by WEL on family law matters, and a third to the Family Policy Task Force. In 1984 a submission to the Commonwealth Legal Aid Council argued that family law matters must be a justifiable part of the legal aid budget. WEL also wrote to the National Women’s Consultative Council on the *Reform of Matrimonial Property Law in Australia*. In 1985 and 1991 submissions were made to committees of the Federal parliament inquiring into the operation of the Family Law Act. In 1985 and 1995 there were submissions to WA bodies concerned with family and domestic violence. An earlier submission to the WA Minister for Police had focused on the need to train police to handle domestic violence cases (1984).

One group of submissions in the Social A category concerned a matter not seen in the submissions of other WEL groups. In 1976 WEL–WA started a campaign to have the

WA *Birth, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* amended to allow parents to choose the surname of their child (the Act said that the child must take the father's name whether or not the parents were married), sending two submissions on this subject to the Registrar General, another to the Chief Secretary in 1979 and one to the Attorney General in 1983. They also wrote to the Registrar General and the Minister for Administrative Services asking that the mother's occupation be recorded on birth and death forms. When they received a negative reply they sought the assistance of the Women's Advisory Council and the Minister for Industrial Relations. Legislative changes were introduced in 1985.⁶

In 1975 the Hills/ Darling Range WEL group made the first of the WA submissions on welfare. The submission was sent to the State Enquiry into Pensioner Concession Benefit. In 1979 WEL–WA wrote to the WA Department of Community Welfare about the sexual abuse of children and in 1983 wrote about women and welfare to the Welfare and Community Services Review. Two submissions were prepared on matters relating to the welfare of migrant women: these were on the need for increased availability of English language classes for migrant women (1982) and the need for specific legislation to deal with genital mutilation (1994). Another two welfare submissions concerned women as applicants for legal aid (1977, 1984).

Category 3: Social B

Submissions on a variety of social issues, which do not fit easily into the Social A category, have been grouped under Social B. A number of these submissions concern WEL's attempts to reform the WA laws relating to prostitution (made in the years 1984, 1991, 1999/2000, 2000/2001 and 2003).

In late 1999 WEL–WA was galvanised into action when the Government introduced the *Prostitution Bill 1999* to control street and child prostitution. The Bill was based on the premise that all sex work is a criminal offence and gave greatly increased powers to the police. Members of WEL lobbied MPs, wrote to all MPs, spoke to the media and wrote letters to newspapers. The Government rejected compromise legislation by the Labor Opposition but finally a compromise of a two-year sunset

clause was accepted. The *WA Prostitution Act 2000* came into force at the end of July 2000.

WEL met with Phoenix (a sex worker outreach service), and sex workers to explore what could be done in the light of the new legislation and the possibility of change in two years. They formed the Sex Workers Action Group (SWAG). The majority of WEL activities on sex law reform were done in collaboration with the SWAG and the Coalition to Decriminalise Sex Work. WEL considered that this method of action supported the sex workers without the risk of a patronising stance of speaking for women in the sex industry. SWAG organised a protest rally and a public forum, wrote to political parties and met with Members of the Legislative Council and the Minister for Police in pursuit of the WEL policy of complete decriminalisation of sex work. The negative effects of the current legislation on the well being of sex workers were emphasised.⁷

This lobbying did not produce the desired result with the incoming Labor Government. In 2002 the new Government introduced the *Prostitution Control Bill 2002*. The WEL–WA Convenor, in a media release on 9 December 2002, stated that ‘WEL has supported the decriminalisation of prostitution for over 20 years and the current proposal is NOT decriminalisation. There are 45 offences attracting a jail term listed in the Bill...This Bill must go’.⁸ In 2003 WEL sent a submission to the Government opposing the *Prostitution Control Bill 2002*.

Some 40 community and health organisations opposed the Bill and, to the relief of many sex workers, it was withdrawn. However, subsequent legislation removed the sunset clause from the *Prostitution Act 2000*, which was not a satisfactory conclusion for street workers. A SWAG member complained that this Act ‘forced street-workers underground and support agencies have consistently reported increased occupational risks (such as violence and sexual assault) for such workers.’ It was said that violence against street-based sex workers went unreported because sex workers feared that reporting assaults to the police would result in them being prosecuted for breaking the law.⁹

Conditions in the Bandyup Prison, the State's only women's prison, have been of continuing concern to WEL. In 1996 WEL–WA sent a submission to the WA Minister for Justice commenting on what they considered to be sub-standard conditions for adult women offenders in this prison. In 2001 WEL joined with other community groups seeking to improve the conditions in this prison and the State Attorney General was approached on a number of human rights issues. A working relationship was established which resulted in WEL–WA accepting an invitation to be represented on the Women's Reference Group for the Inspectorate of Prisons. In 2004 WEL sent a joint submission with the National Council of Women on the prison and justice system for women in WA to the CEDAW Shadow Report Project¹⁰, which was being co-ordinated by the Women's Rights Action Network Australia (WRANA).

Other submissions to State bodies that have been placed in the Social B category were made on the following subjects:

- Improving library and information services for women (1978);
- Opposing uranium mining at Yeelirrie (1978);
- Updating WA adoption laws (1990); and
- The importance of involving women when planning public transport (1998).

Submissions in this category were also sent to national bodies on:

- Freedom of Information (1978);
- Violent and obscene and pornographic videos (1985);
- Gun control (1995);
- Banning landmines (1996);
- Opposing the signing of the treaty on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (1998); and
- Changes to questions in the 2001 Census to recognise women's unpaid work (1998).

Category 4: Education

The Education Subcommittee was very active in the early days of WEL–WA. In the group's first ten years the Education Subcommittee prepared 12 submissions on the

provision of equal opportunities for women and girls and their teachers. The first two were to national inquiries, the Open University Committee (1973) and the Schools Commission, which was enquiring into the education of girls (1974). In 1975 they wrote to the WA Minister for Education seeking the formation of a committee to investigate the disadvantage of girls within the WA education system. Following a meeting with the Minister and Director General of Education, a committee of five was established which included WEL member Lyn Tuit. In 1976 they sent a submission to the ALP National Education Policy Committee based on the recommendations of the Schools Commission.¹¹

In 1978 the Education Subcommittee wrote to the WA Department of Education about *Sexism in Education* and, importantly, sent a submission to the Executive Officer of the Schools Commission in Perth, supporting the establishment of a resource centre for equal opportunity. WEL members sat on the committee to establish the Equal Opportunity Resource Centre (EORC), which, initially, was to promote equal opportunity in schools, but later its role was broadened in response to requests for resources on equal opportunity in areas such as health and welfare.¹²

WEL member Queenie Fogarty worked on the committee to establish the EORC. In an interview for the WA Broadsheet she explained that in 1979 the Federal Government gave \$3,000 for the EORC, to be spread over three years. After the first year the State Minister, Mr Hassell, decided that the women involved were ‘unsuitable recipients’ and blocked the rest of the funding. Luckily, the Centre was able to obtain funds from other sources for the next few years. The Centre moved from the Teachers’ Union to the Women’s Information and Referral Exchange in 1984 and subsequently became part of the library of the Equal Opportunity Commission.¹³

Other submissions which addressed the WA education system concerned sexism in technical education (1979); early childhood education (1982); perpetuation of traditional stereotypes in a high school program (1982) and elimination of discrimination against female teachers (1982 and 1983).

In 1983 WEL–WA made a submission to the Beazley Committee Enquiry into Education in WA suggesting the appointment of a full-time Superintendent of Equal Opportunity. Later that year they wrote to the Minister for Education supporting the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Unit and the appointment of an Education Officer for Women’s Interests in TAFE. In early 1984 two positions to promote equal opportunity were announced. These were the Superintendent of Equal Opportunity in the Education Department (Sandra Brown, a WEL member, was appointed to this for a three year term) and the temporary position of Women’s Officer in TAFE.¹⁴

Despite the introduction of Federal and State anti-discrimination legislation in 1984, WEL–WA still felt the need to write to the Director General of Education of WA in 1994 about the problems encountered by women teachers when seeking permanency.

Category 5: Employment

1975 was a busy year for the WEL–WA Workforce Committee. In that year they prepared four submissions: firstly, to the WA Minister for Labour seeking amendments to the *Industrial Arbitration Act 1912-1969* on industrial protection for domestic workers, equal pay and the removal of references to male and female in the section on minimum wages. WEL members met with the Minister who said that he considered that the amendments sought were reasonable and that he would introduce an amendment bill to give them effect, but he failed to do so.¹⁵

The next three submissions were sent to the WA Industrial Commission and concerned the adult minimum wages in State awards; paid maternity leave; and equal pay in State awards. Yvonne Henderson intervened on behalf of WEL at the equal pay hearings. The principle of equal pay was accepted and gradually introduced in most State Awards. Yvonne Henderson was also given leave to intervene on behalf of WEL in the Trade and Labour Council’s application for paid maternity leave. WEL supported the concept of six months paid leave for the mother and two years unpaid leave for either parent. The WA Industrial Commission granted 12 months unpaid leave for women in private employment.¹⁶

The WEL–WA Workforce Committee/ Action Group continued to be active at the State level. They wrote to the WA Minister for Labour about trade training courses in 1980 and again in 1983. Also in 1983, women and employment was the main subject of their submission to the WA State Economic Summit. In 1984 their submission concerned youth employment and unemployment and by 1993 they were before the WA Industrial Commission again, with a submission on the adult minimum wage. In 1994 they contributed to the WA Labour Relations Review. In 2004 they wrote submissions on the pay gender gap and discrimination in superannuation.

WEL–WA also made a number of submissions on women’s employment to national bodies, these include:

- The Review of the Commonwealth Employment Service (1976);
- The Kirby Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (1984);
- The House of Representatives Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women (Discussion Paper on *Women and Work*)(1991, two submissions);
- The Regulatory Review of the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* (1998); and
- The House of Representatives inquiry on increasing participation in the paid workforce (2004).

Category 6: Health

In an extraordinary General Meeting at the end of April 1973, WEL–WA decided that their policy on abortion was to be: ‘The repeal of all laws preventing those women who wish to have an abortion from obtaining one.’ At the same meeting they decided to join other WEL groups in the campaign to support the Federal *Medical Practice Clarification Bill 1973*. They worked together with the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) in this campaign. This Bill was defeated, but WEL continued to work with ALRA¹⁷ for changes to WA laws.¹⁸

Numbers of submissions were written about abortion law reform over the years. WEL–WA’s first submission was sent to the WA Minister for Health by the Birth Control Choice Subcommittee of WEL Perth (1973). In December 1983 WEL–WA

sent a submission to the WA Attorney-General on the *Revision of the Criminal Code*, enclosing comments, redrafting and recommendations. They recommended the repeal of those sections dealing with abortion, 199, 200, 201 and 259 (old code), saying that WEL ‘believes that abortion should be legal, free, humane, safe and readily accessible to all women.’¹⁹ Over the years they continued to press for these changes and in 1989 the Abortion Action Group wrote to the House of Representatives Inquiry on Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women. In late 1995 they sent a submission to the National Health and Medical Research Council review on *Termination of Pregnancy Services* emphasising the need to decriminalise abortion performed by a qualified doctor.

It was not until May 1998 that sections 199, 200 and 201 of the WA Criminal Code were repealed by the *Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act 1998*; this meant women would no longer be prosecuted for having an abortion. Cheryl Davenport MLC, a WEL Member, introduced a private members bill, a repeal bill, into the Legislative Council in March 1998. Diana Warnock, another WEL member, had carriage of the Bill in the Legislative Assembly. Complete with a lobby kit, WEL and ALRA members worked tirelessly lobbying members of Parliament. The Government also introduced its own bill, drafted by the Attorney General; it became known as the Foss Bill. Coalition members were to have a free vote on this bill. As a result Davenport was forced to make a number of compromises to her bill; for example the legislation, as passed, failed to remove sanctions against doctors from the Criminal Code.²⁰ In 2002 WEL–WA sent a submission to the review of the operation and effectiveness of the *Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act 1998*.

Other WEL–WA submissions that the WEL history project has placed in the health category concerned the WA ambulance services (1984), in-vitro fertilisation (1984), and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (1989). In 2000 WEL sent a submission to the Inquiry into the Obstetric and Gynaecological Services at King Edward Memorial Hospital recommending that the hospital remain on its present site and that funding of \$25 million be allocated to it immediately.

Category 7: Machinery of Government (MOG)

WEL–WA worked actively for the establishment of government machinery for women. In 1976 WEL wrote to the Premier, Sir Charles Court, on the need for a women’s adviser for WA, but received a negative reply. In December 1976 the Federal Government appointed a Working Party to draw up proposals for a National Women’s Advisory Body that would consult with women and advise the Government. WEL–WA sent submissions to the Working Party and met with its members in Perth in February 1977. The National Women’s Advisory Council was established in 1978 and, in November, WEL–WA members met with its Convenor Beryl Beaurepaire; she said that she had mentioned to Sir Charles Court that WA should appoint an adviser on women’s affairs. WEL wrote to Sir Charles Court again urging him to appoint a women’s adviser, but once again they received a negative reply. By 1982 there was still no State women’s adviser or women’s advisory council. WEL formed a sub-group of interested women’s groups to draft a submission to Premier O’Connor requesting that he appoint a women’s advisory committee. The Premier announced in late 1982 that he would **not** be appointing a women’s adviser.²¹

The Burke Labor Government was elected in February 1983 with a policy, passed at the 1982 State ALP Conference, of setting up government machinery for women. Yvonne Henderson MLA was attached to the Premier’s office to organise the setting up of a women’s advisory council. Women’s groups were asked to put their proposals to the Premier and once again WEL forwarded a submission. The WA Women’s Advisory Council was announced in September 1983; of the 20 Council members eight had been involved in WEL.²²

Deborah McCulloch, a member of WEL–SA and the first Women’s Adviser to the Premier of South Australia, was engaged to set up a Women’s Interests Division in the WA Premier’s Department, a women’s information and referral centre and to prepare WA equal opportunity legislation for introduction into the Parliament²³. Lisa Newby was appointed to the position of Director of the Women’s Interests Division (Women’s Adviser) in May 1984. The Women’s Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) was officially launched in September 1984. It was a telephone and walk-in

service that advertised that it offered ‘information of any type to women’.²⁴ The Equal Opportunity Resource Centre, which at that time was housed in the Teachers Union, was moved to WIRE.

The election of the Richard Court Liberal Coalition Government in 1993 spelt trouble for these advances. There was a Review of the Office of Women’s Interests and WEL–WA put in a submission. However, overall there was a downsizing of the women’s policy machinery as well as the abolition of the Women’s Information and Referral Exchange.²⁵

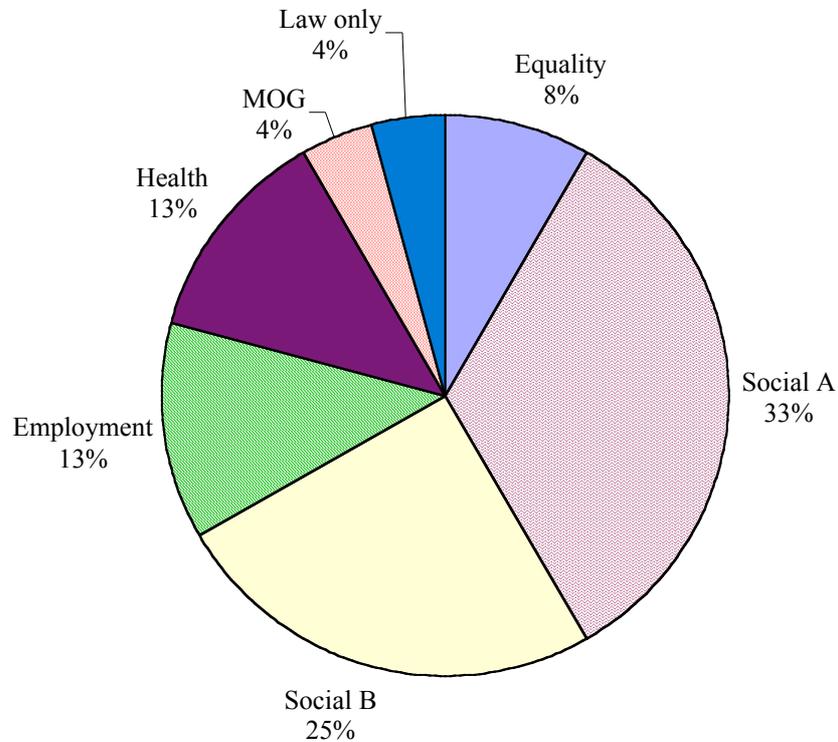
At the local government level, WEL applied to the Federal Government in 1974 for funding to set up a Local Government Reference Bureau, as an initiative for International Women’s Year (IWY). The objectives of the bureau were to actively encourage women to stand for local government and to encourage women to be more aware of what was happening in their community. Unfortunately, the scheme did not go ahead.²⁶ These objectives were included in their submission to the Local Government Inquiry in the early 1980s.

Category 8: Law

Twenty-four submissions, or 20 percent of the total number of WEL–WA submissions in the WEL history database, were seeking the introduction of legislation or amendment to existing legislation or opposing the introduction of legislation. Many of these submissions were allocated to more than one category and have already been discussed under categories such as Social A or Health. One was placed only in the Law category; this submission concerned changes to the *WA Interpretation Bill 1984*.

The pie chart below shows the distribution of the submissions in the Law category. One third were in the Social A category and all but one of these submissions concerned family law. One quarter of the submissions were placed in the Social B category and all but one of these submissions related to laws on prostitution.

Issues in Law Category



Category 9: Funding

In Australia in the 1970s requests for funding for women’s refuges and centres were commonly made by members of Women’s Liberation and WEL working together. WA was no exception. In 1974 Women’s Liberation invited WEL to join a project to apply for International Women’s Year funds for a Women’s Health and Community Centre (WH&CC). The group became known as the Women’s Centre Action Group (WCAG) and had members from both Women’s Liberation and WEL. The Minister for Health approved the funding and the Centre opened in 1975. WCAG also set up the Nadine Women’s Refuge and a Rape Crisis Centre. In 1976 a split occurred

between the workers at the WH&CC and funding was cut but the Centre continued to function until 1979.

Following the de-funding of the WH&CC, a WEL general meeting approved a six-point position paper affirming the need for a Women's Health Centre and the need for public funding for such a Centre. The WEL position paper on a women's centre was sent to the Department of Health in January 1977, together with a submission seeking funds for a women's health centre. The funding from the WH&CC was given to the Women's Health Care House that opened in April 1977.²⁷

In 1974 WEL sent a submission to the National Advisory Committee for International Women's Year with a proposal to sponsor a One Women Show to promote the aims and objective of IWY. The submission was successful and the show, *The Company of Women*, was performed in 1975 in Perth, Port Hedland, Karratha and Derby. WEL—Perth was not happy with the 'non-feminist script', the actress would not perform a revised version and resigned. A new show, *WHICH*, was written by Justina Williams (WEL member Joan Williams) and performed in 1976 in Perth, Karratha, Kalgoorlie, Rockingham and Northam.²⁸

An edited tape of *WHICH* was broadcast on *Out of the Gilded Cage* on 6NR. *Out of the Gilded Cage* was a weekly 30-minute radio program produced by the Perth Women's Broadcasting Co-operative from mid 1976 until mid 1981. Eleven different women's groups, including WEL, were involved in making the programs.²⁹

In late 1983 WEL—WA applied to the Department of Employment and Training for funding for the 'Women's Development History Project'. A 52-week grant for this project was approved, with funding to cover three staff and office equipment. The result is the extremely useful booklet on the history of WEL in Western Australia in the years 1973–1984, which was prepared by Pat Burnett, the project's research officer.³⁰

In 1993 WEL—WA organised a public meeting to establish a community-based lobby to apply for funds to set up a women's legal service, similar to those operating in the

Eastern States. In June 1996 the Women’s Legal Service opened in Perth. WEL–WA retains its membership on the Steering Group for the WLS as a high priority.³¹

In the 1990s WEL–WA, with the support of the Network of Women Students of Australia, ran two national Hysterical Women Cartoon Competitions. Awards for the best cartoons were not financed through government funding but were donated by a variety of women’s organizations. Cartoons were selected for publication in booklets produced in 1993³² and 1996³³.

In 1996 WEL ran the *Reclaim the Night* march and made an unsuccessful submission for funding for *Reclaim the Night* to conduct arts events. *Reclaim the Night* marches are held throughout Australia and promote women’s right to walk in the streets after dark without fear of intimidation, assault or sexual violence. Traditionally, a candlelit twilight march through the streets is held annually, at the end of October or beginning of November. The first march was held in Perth in 1978 and WEL–WA has supported it ever since.³⁴

In 1997 WEL–WA successfully applied to the Women’s Suffrage Project Committee in the WA Women’s Policy Development Office for funding for the WEL–WA Banner Project. The idea came from an initiative of WA suffragists. In 1894 the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union collected signatures for a petition on votes for women and then pasted the sheets of paper on a piece of cloth 'a mile long' for presentation to the WA Legislative Council. However, it was not until 1899 that some women were given the vote in WA and Aboriginal women did not gain the same voting rights as other women until 1962.

The WEL–WA banner consisted of 220 one metre square panels made by women’s and community groups and schools. In all it had 59 sections; when strung together with rope it was 250 metres long. The panels addressed the themes of:

- Celebration - of women’s achievements since gaining suffrage;
- Recognition - of women’s struggles and historical heritage;
- Representation - of women’s diverse experience as citizens in Western Australia: and

- Future Vision – of women’s participation in public life in the 21st century.

The banner was launched in 1999 at the International Women’s Day March and rally in Perth, where women carried it through the streets of Northbridge. Early in 2000 a second submission was successful. WEL–WA was granted funds to produce a CD-Rom to record the history of the project.³⁵



Photo: Marching with *The Suffrage Banner*, Perth, International Women’s Day, 1999. (WEL–WA CD *The Story of the Suffrage Banner*)

Some submissions by WEL groups were requests for staff or equipment in their own offices. WEL–WA applied successfully to the Lotteries Commission for funding to purchase computer equipment for its office in 1996 and again in 2002, to up-date this equipment. In 2004 WEL–WA moved its office to new premises, having successfully applied to the WA Office of Women’s Policy for funding to assist with this move.

Category 10: Budget

In March 1983 the Burke Government organised a State Economic Summit to consult with selected groups prior to the Hawke National Economic Summit. WEL–WA presented a submission to the State Economic Summit that concentrated on the theme of women and employment, but also covered other areas such as anti-discrimination legislation and home help schemes. Janet Pine presented the submission and other WEL members, Val Marsden, Queenie Fogarty and Megan Sassi, accompanied her.

WEL–WA made contributions to the many WEL–Australia submissions which were prepared prior to Federal Budgets as well as WEL–Australia submissions on taxation and other economic issues. In October 1994 WEL–WA held a seminar *Short Changed? Women and Economic Policies*.³⁶

5. Conclusion

This report on submissions prepared by WEL–WA in the years 1973–2004 does not claim to be a report on all their activities and successes. The submissions, however, do provide an insight into the important work of this WEL group, their energy and diversity of interests.

When asking which submissions were successful, it is important to realise that submissions writing is just part of the lobbying process. Of equal importance can be visits to politicians and bureaucrats, media coverage and letter writing, or, in the earlier days, demonstrations. Finally, having the right person in the right place at right time may be what makes the difference between a successful or an unsuccessful campaign. That said it is clear that some submissions and accompanying campaigns resulted in more favourable policy outcomes than others.

Three stand out as submissions and campaigns that achieved notable successes for women in Western Australia. These were the introduction of State equal opportunity legislation and government machinery for women and reform of the State abortion laws. They also highlight the success of the WEL strategy of encouraging WEL members to enter politics and the bureaucracy, as it was WEL members in the WA Parliament and the public service who played an integral part in these changes.

One of WEL’s strengths has been its ability to work with like-minded organizations. In the early days the establishment of women’s centres and refuges were achieved together with Women’s Liberation, the reform of the abortion laws was the culmination of a long campaign by WEL and ALRA. Not so successful was the work done on prostitution law reform, with a coalition of sex workers and their supporters. However, persistence has been another hallmark of WEL–WA’s campaigns over the

years, so it could be considered that prostitution law reform is still a ‘work in progress.’

In Western Australia WEL inherited a rich history of political activism from feminist groups that had preceded them. It can be seen that WEL–WA has carried the banner for non-party political advocacy proudly and ably, both metaphorically and literally on International Women’s Day in 1999, when, as the result of another successful submission, they marched with their *Suffrage Banner*.

Endnotes

¹ Burnett, Pat (1985). *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*: WEL–WA.

² WEL–Australia *National Bulletin*, 7(1), February 1984, p. 3.

³ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 43–48.

⁴ Elsewhere referred to as the *Inquiry into Equal Opportunities and Equal Status for Women in Australia*.

⁵ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 65.

⁶ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 42.

⁷ WEL–Australia (2000). *Inkwel*, September 2000, pp. 3,4.

⁸ *Prostitution Control – Media Release*, 9 December 2002. Reproduced in WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 03 (1), January/February 2003.

⁹ Caruso, Chantal (2003). *Green Left Weekly*, 9 July 2003, pp. 3,4.

¹⁰ The final report of this two-year-long project, *Australian NGO Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDW)*, was forwarded to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in New York, in December 2005.

¹¹ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western, Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 34, 35.

¹² Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 31.

¹³ WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 96 (1), August 1996, pp. 10, 11.

¹⁴ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 39.

¹⁶ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 19, 20, 21.

¹⁷ ALRA later changed its name to the Abortion Law Repeal Association.

¹⁸ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 26.

- ¹⁹ WEL–Australia, *National Bulletin*, 7 (1), February 1984, p. 3.
- ²⁰ WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 98 (3), April 1998, p. 1; WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 98 (5), June 1998, pp. 1, 2.
- ²¹ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 127, 128.
- ²² Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 128.
- ²³ WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 11 (10), April 1984, p. 3.
- ²⁴ WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 12 (4), September 1984, p. 3.
- ²⁵ Brankovich, Jasmina (2005). *Burning Down the House: Feminism, Parliamentary Policy and Women’s Policy in Western Australia 1971-1998*. PhD Thesis, History Department, University of Western Australia, p. 30.
- ²⁶ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 122.
- ²⁷ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 118, 199, 120, 121.
- ²⁸ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 123, 124.
- ²⁹ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, pp. 50, 51.
- ³⁰ Burnett, *History of Women’s Electoral Lobby, Perth, Western Australia, 1973–1984*, p. 13, 14.
- ³¹ WEL (WA) Inc (1996). *Women’s Electoral Lobby (W.A.) Inc. Annual Report 1996*, p. 8.
- ³² Goldflam, Annie, Morgan, Denise, Ruth Greble (Eds) (1993). *Hysterical Women. A collection of 100 Australian feminist cartoons*. Perth: Women’s Electoral Lobby (WA) Inc.
- ³³ Goldflam, Annie; Murphy, Elaine; Hayden, Lorraine; Greble, Ruth (Eds) (1996). *Hysterical Women ’96. A collection of 100 Australian feminist cartoons*. Perth: Women’s Electoral Lobby (WA) Inc.
- ³⁴ WEL (WA) Inc (1996). *Women’s Electoral Lobby (WA) Inc. Annual Report 1996*, pp. 9, 15.
- ³⁵ WEL–WA *Broadsheet*, 98 (2), March 1998, p. 9; WEL–Australia *Inkwel*, June 2000, p. 9; WEL–WA (2001). CD *The Story of the Suffrage Banner Project*.
- ³⁶ Marsden, Val (Ed) (1995). *Short Changed? Women and Economic Policies*. The proceedings of WEL, WA Seminar, October 1994. Perth, Women’s Electoral Lobby.

Appendix: Coding for analysis of issues in WEL submissions*

GROUP	ISSUES	
(1) Equality	<p>Discrimination: sexism, chauvinism Equality: equal rights, equal opportunity, human rights Gender: sexuality, homosexuality Media: portrayal of women in media, discrimination against women in the media Sports: discrimination in sports, girls not allowed to play boy's sports, lack of funding for women's sport Feminism: feminist issues Women's issues: general, omnibus submissions on women covering many issues, a 'what women want' submission</p>	
(2) Social A	<p>Childcare: Family: divorce, defacto, single parents, domestic violence, child sex abuse, registration of births, deaths and marriages Welfare: social services, family allowances, mothers wage, poverty, legal aid, social issues, refugees, carers, aged services, housing Other welfare: Migrant (includes genital mutilation) refugees, Aboriginal, disability</p>	
(3) Social B	<p>Centenary of Federation Census requests Consumer Defence: national security Electoral matters Environment Firearms Freedom of Information Gambling Honours Information: library</p>	<p>International, treaties Nuclear: Uranium Peace Prostitution Pornography Privacy Prisons Telstra sale: Austel Trade Transport Violence</p>
(4) Education	<p>Education: gender issues in education, general education issues, sex education</p>	
(5) Employment	<p>Discrimination in employment: direct and systemic discrimination, harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action Employment: retraining, unemployment, apprenticeships, women's jobs, public service jobs Equal pay: minimum wage Industrial Relations: unions Maternity leave: parental leave, other conditions of employment Occupational Health and Safety: compensation, rehabilitation Superannuation:</p>	
(6) Health	<p>Fertility: abortion, contraception, family planning in-vitro fertilisation Health: general health matters, pregnancy, childbirth, alcohol, drugs</p>	

(7) Machinery of Government (MOG)	Women in government employment: structures, women’s advisers, committees for women in the public service
(8) Law	Ant-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation: Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Opportunity Act, Human Rights Equal Opportunity Act Constitution: Republic, Bill of Rights Law reform: probate (death duties), abortion law reform, rape law reform, family law reform, prostitution law reform
(9) Funding	Requests for others: women’s refuges, women’s centres, women’s health centres Requests for WEL: staff, project, conferences Complaints: de-funding, insufficient funds
(10) Budget	Budget: Tax: dependant spouse rebate, tax reform, economic summit

** In most cases a submission was allocated to one category, but in some cases it was allocated to two.*