

## **National Co-ordinators and the WEL National Office**

Long after the establishment of WEL groups around Australia it was decided, at the 1978 national conference, to set up a national office in Canberra – originally in the laundry of the Canberra Women’s House in O’Connor. A part-time national communications officer was employed whose role was restricted to facilitating exchange of information between WEL groups, monitoring federal government activities and supporting national campaigns. By 1982 the office had moved into the main part of the Women’s House and the part-time national communications officer had become a part-time national co-ordinator.

Over the years, however, the position evolved into a more professional lobbyist position. Jane Elix, a former national co-ordinator, made a powerful plea at the 1987 WEL national conference for the holder of the position to be authorized to be a media spokeswoman.

Elix observed that although founding WEL members believed in non-hierarchical structures and opposed specialization of roles and functions, in practice this made it difficult to compete in the political arena of the 1980s. While WEL groups clearly did not want to lose power to ‘Canberra’, often WEL members were in sensitive jobs and were unable to speak publicly on policy.

At the end of 1993 the WEL national office moved out of the Women’s House into rented premises in Canberra city. However, there was no meeting room so the office moved again in 1998 to Jamieson House, where it was co-located with the ACT Council of Social Services, the National Women’s Justice Coalition and the National Women’s Media Centre. In 1997 the national co-ordinator position was renamed ‘executive officer’ reflecting the growing pressure on non-government organisations to become ‘corporatised’, but had reverted to the title of national co-ordinator by 2000.

Finances had always been a problem for WEL and it used subscriptions and some assistance from small grants and community employment programs to staff the national office. Under the Hawke government WEL for the first time received operational funding to support the national office. This funding ceased under the Howard government in 1999. The national co-ordinator position could no longer be paid and the office space in Jamieson House had to be surrendered. WEL–ACT members packed up the papers from the national office and passed them onto the WEL history project, prior to their archiving in the National Library of Australia.

The WEL national office had become a virtual office in 2002 with functions performed in members’ homes and offices. Operations moved to Sydney as WEL–NSW members were elected to the unpaid national co-ordinator position, later called chairperson or chair of WEL–Australia. Sandy Killick oversaw the last of the WEL national conferences in 2004, the energetic and media savvy Eva Cox was in the position for the next 5-6 years; Helen L’Orange was the driving force behind the WEL 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2012 and she passed the baton

to the younger generation at the end of that year. Melanie Fernandez took over the chair and is still there at the time of writing in 2014.

### **WEL National Co-ordinators\***

| <b>Date</b>         | <b>Name</b>                    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1978                | Maria De Leo                   |
| Feb. 79–Sept 82     | Yvonne Carnahan                |
| Oct 82–March 84     | Pamela Denoon                  |
| March–Sept 1984     | Lorelle Thompson               |
| Oct 84–Dec 84       | Jo Morgan                      |
| Jan-Feb–1985        | Lynne Gallagher (a/g)          |
| March 85–July 86    | Jane Elix                      |
| Sept 86–March 87    | Lynn Lee                       |
| May–Sept 1987       | Glenys Rogers                  |
| Sept 87–Feb 88      | Lynn Lee                       |
| March–Nov 88        | Joy Taylor                     |
| Dec 88–April 89     | Nooshin Guitoo                 |
| June 89–Feb 91      | Anne-Marie Mioche              |
| March 91–Dec 94     | Ann Wentworth                  |
| (June–Aug 92)       | Julie McCarron Benson<br>(a/g) |
| Jan 95–April 96     | Ingrid McKenzie                |
| April 96–Jan 97     | Rivera Morton-Radovsky         |
| April 97–Sept 98    | Lyn Peryman                    |
| Sept 98–April 2000  | Helen Leonard                  |
| June 2000–Aug 01    | Erica Lewis (a/g)              |
| Sept 2001– Sept 04  | Sandy Killick                  |
| Jan 2005– Sept 2010 | Eva Cox                        |
| Oct 2010–Sept 2012  | Helen L'Orange                 |
| Oct 2012– 2014      | Melanie Fernandez              |

\* Title—the national co-ordinator position began in 1978 as a national communications officer, turned into national co-ordinator in 1982, into executive officer in 1997 and then into an unpaid chairperson or chair.