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Women and government in Australia

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Introduction

In 1902 Australia became the first country in the world where most women had the right both to vote and to stand for the national parliament. Women had gained the right to vote for parliament in New Zealand in 1893, but were not able to stand as candidates until after the First World War. But although Australian women gained these political rights very early, they did not succeed in entering the federal parliament until four decades later. Entry into the higher reaches of government took even longer. Although the suffragists had spoken eloquently about the need for women to take their share in "housekeeping the state", it was more than sixty years before the first woman achieved ministerial responsibility for a federal department - appropriately the Ministry of Housing. It was almost another 20 years before the first woman became Secretary to a Commonwealth Department. For most of the century women's careers in the Commonwealth Public Service had been truncated by the bar on employment or recruitment of married women. Women were also notable for their absence for most of the century from government-appointed bodies. This article provides an overview of the 20th century in terms of women's entry into government.

Early hopes

The first election in which women were able to vote for an Australian parliament was in South Australia in 1896. The Adelaide Observer (2 May 1896) was impressed by the refining influence of women voters on the electoral process, and inspired to reproduce these verses written in anticipation of the event:

Lovely woman, hesitating
Round the booths in sweet dismay
Her gentle bosom palpitating
Lest she cast her vote away

And when she glides in graceful, pretty,
 To vote in her most charming frock
 The poll clerks in suburb and city
 Will thrill with an electric shock.

Subsequently, South Australian delegates to the Constitutional Convention insisted on a clause in the Constitution (§41) that would prevent South Australian women voters being denied the Commonwealth franchise. The resultant disparities in the federal franchise made inevitable the provisions for uniform suffrage in the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* despite the fears of Sir Edward Braddon that it would lead to husbands being left to cook their own dinners and mind the baby (CAPD IX 23 April 1902: 11937). These provisions were not quite uniform, however. For example, the federal franchise did not become uniform for Indigenous Australians until the amendment of the Electoral Act in 1962.

Women in South Australia had already voted for the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1897, some of them for Catherine Helen Spence, Australia's first woman political candidate. In both South Australia and Western Australia women voted in the referenda on federation. The other States lagged behind in terms of women's political rights, but the granting of these rights at the federal level had a galvanising effect (table C3.1).

C3.1 THE INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS IN AUSTRALIA

Parliament	Right to vote(a)	Right to stand	First elected lower house	First elected upper house
Federal	(b)1902	1902	1943	1943
State				
South Australia	(c)1894	1894	1959	1959
Western Australia	1899	1920	1921	1954
New South Wales	1902	1918	1925	(d)1952
Tasmania	1903	1921	1955	1948
Queensland	1905	1918	1929	n.a.
Victoria	1908	1923	1933	1979

(a) The dates for the right to vote at State level refer to equal rights for women and men, but not necessarily universal rights. In most cases, property qualifications limited the franchise and eligibility for the upper house.

(b) Women in SA and WA were able to vote in the 1901 federal election.

(c) The Constitution Amendment Bill 1894 was not proclaimed until 1895.

(d) Two women had been appointed to the upper house in 1931 when it was an appointive body.

Source: Sawer and Simms 1993.

Australian women promptly stood for the new federal parliament in the 1903 election. Of these the suffragist Vida Goldstein was the most famous, standing as a Victorian candidate for the Senate, but two other women stood for the Senate in NSW and one for the House of Representatives. In her Manifesto to the Electors of Victoria, Goldstein argued that the women's interests could only be effectively protected by women MPs and that the increasing volume of social legislation made it particularly important for women to be

present as "representatives of the home". She also stood on a platform of equal pay and equal employment opportunity for women in the new Commonwealth Public Service. Despite rumours that she had unsound views on marriage, Goldstein attracted large audiences for her election meetings, for the first time often dominated by women. Although unsuccessful, she polled over 50,000 votes and went on to stand for federal parliament four more times. A federal electorate was named in her honour in 1984.

While none of the women candidates for the federal parliament were successful in 1903, or indeed for another 40 years, the fact that Australian women were exercising their political rights was an inspiration to women campaigning for the suffrage elsewhere. Australian suffragists joined the struggle in the 'mother country'. Adelaide-born Muriel Matters became known as the first woman to give a speech in the House of Commons - while chained to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery in 1908. The following year she floated over Westminster on the day of the state opening of parliament, in an airship inscribed 'Votes for Women', scattering handbills over the side.

Federal parliament also attempted to influence the course of events in the UK. In 1909, a motion put forward by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin concerning the positive effects of women's suffrage in Australasia was unanimously passed in both houses. The resolution read in part: "That Australasian experience convinces this House that to adopt Woman Suffrage is simply to apply to the political sphere that principle of Government that secures the best results in the domestic sphere, the mutual co-operation of men and women for the individual and general welfare" (CAPD LIV: 7017).

In 1910 the Parliament of Australia again tried to bring pressure on the British Prime Minister, Asquith, through a resolution passed in both houses and cabled to him. It spoke of the beneficial results produced by women's suffrage, including the more orderly conduct of elections. It ended with the plea that "Because the reform has brought nothing but good, though disaster was freely prophesied, we respectfully urge that all nations enjoying representative government would be well advised in granting votes to women" (CAPD LIX: 6300). As well as being cabled to the British Prime Minister, the resolution and associated speeches were promptly republished in London by the Woman's Press under the title *Australia's Advice*.

In 1911 many Australasian politicians travelled to London for the coronation of George V. Mrs Fisher, the wife of the Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, marched in a huge coronation suffrage procession behind the striking Commonwealth of Australia banner that is now displayed in Parliament House in Canberra. It depicted Australia as a young woman pleading with Britannia to "Trust the women, mother, as I have done".

The right to stand but not to sit

In most countries, women entered parliament soon after gaining the right to stand. Finland was the second country in the world where women gained this right (1906), and already in the following year 19 women were elected to the Eduskunta. Only New Zealand and Norway were like Australia in having a significant gap, but nothing like the forty years women had to wait to gain a seat in the national parliament.

A handful of women were elected to State parliaments before the Second World War, but the major parties remained resistant to the idea of women candidates in anything but seats that were safe for the other side. When the first woman was elected to parliament in 1921, Edith Cowan in Western Australia, the *Age* editorial was congratulatory but expressed its

fears that her example might lead other women to stand for parliament, meaning neglected homes sacrificed on the altar of political ambition (*Age* 15 March 1921). During her campaign she had been accused of heartless neglect of her husband and children, although her youngest child was thirty at the time.

Cowan included in her 'maiden speech' examples of the way in which the absence of women had resulted in defective legislation and policy. She suggested that were the Minister for Railways forced to parade the streets of Perth for the whole of one afternoon, with a heavy infant on one arm and a bag of groceries on the other, it might make him more sensitive to the plight of mothers unable to bring prams to town because of the shilling charge for them on the train. During her term in parliament Cowan succeeded in having playgrounds established in her seat of West Perth and baby health centres elsewhere, as well as making some progress on juvenile justice issues. Her crowning achievements, however, were two private member's bills. The first was the *Administration Act Amendment Act 1922*, which dealt with the inheritance rights of mothers. It made her the first woman in the British Empire to author a successful private member's bill - the second was Lady Astor in the UK with her *Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to Persons under 18) Act 1923*.

Edith Cowan's second successful private member's bill became the *Women's Legal Status Act 1923*. As introduced, it would have prevented anyone being disqualified by sex or marriage from exercising any public function, from holding any civil or judicial office or practising law or any other profession. The bill was amended by the Premier, Sir James Mitchell, so that marriage remained an allowable ground of exclusion from the professions or public life (for women). The Premier was concerned over the consequences for the family if wives were no longer economically dependent on their husbands nor available to look after the family (WAPD 69: 1375-76). Nonetheless the bill was a breakthrough in terms of allowing women to practise law and other professions in Western Australia.

In South Australia, the pioneer of women's political rights, no women were elected to the State parliament until 1959, a gap of about 65 years. Even then an unsuccessful candidate for Liberal and Country League pre-selection brought a suit in the Supreme Court against the returning officer for allowing two women to nominate for the Legislative Council. The major ground for the challenge was the interpretation of the word 'person' in the South Australian Constitution. The defence lawyers included Don Dunstan (later Labor Premier) and the finding was that women were indeed persons. The last male monopoly of this kind was the Victorian Legislative Council, where the first women were only elected in 1979.

In the 1990s the 'under-representation of women' had become part of the international agenda. As a slogan it gained power from multiple levels of meaning, encompassing the representation of interests, the representativeness of the legislature and the equal right to act as a representative. Underpinning it were international treaties such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and international platforms such as that adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action nominates the sharing of power and decision-making as one of its 12 critical areas of concern. All over the world, organisations such as the European Union have taken up the issue of the 'democratic deficit' caused by the under-representation of women in political decision-making. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has developed its own "Plan of Action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life" (1994), and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has created a Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group to focus on the same issue.

In Australia the increase in activity around parliamentary representation of women was

signalled in 1992 by the formation of the non-government Women into Politics Coalition. The following year the Commonwealth-State Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women commissioned research on the representation of women in parliament, and inquiries were also set up in the federal and South Australian parliaments. Their reports added to the growing volume of action plans and strategies to remove gender imbalances in parliamentary representation. Suffrage centenaries in South Australia (1994) and Western Australia (1999) provided occasion for reflection on how far women still had to travel to become equal partners in government. In 1994 Labor women committed their party to achieving 35% representation of women in all its parliamentary parties by the year 2002, while Liberal women set up a Liberal Women's Forum that provided training and support for potential parliamentary candidates.

The inquiries pointed out that the design of parliamentary institutions assumed that parliamentary representatives are not at the same time primary carers for family members. Recommendations were made for family-friendly sitting hours and parliamentary sessions aligned with school terms as well as childcare centres, facilities that have become standard in overseas parliaments with significant female representation.

It was also generally agreed that the privileging of adversarial styles of politics, commonly found in Westminster systems where two teams face each other across the chamber, discriminated against women as well as contributing to community disenchantment. Most women parliamentarians aspire to the transformation of existing parliamentary norms into a more consensus-based politics (Black and Phillips 2000). This would also enable them to play a more effective role in parliament. As the Australian Government said when reporting to the UN five years after the Beijing Conference: "Women have a right and a responsibility to participate in the decision-making processes that shape the nation" (Office of the Status of Women 2000).

This focus on the issue of representation led to an acceleration of what had been quite a slow rate of increase of women in Australian parliaments (graph C3.2). The major parties began to field more women in winnable seats while minor parties such as the Australian Democrats and the Greens had, from their formation, fielded a relatively high number of women candidates. From its formation in 1977 until overtaken by the Greens in 1990, the Australian Democrats fielded both a larger number and a higher proportion of women candidates than any other political party for the House of Representatives. In 1990 the Democrats were overtaken by Greens in terms of the proportion of candidates who were women, although not in terms of the number of women candidates (table C3.3). In 1998 the Democrats were overtaken by both Greens and the ALP in terms of the number of women candidates as well as the proportion of candidates who were women (table C3.4).

C3.3 PARTY AFFILIATION OF WOMEN CANDIDATES, House of Representatives - 1972-98(a)

Year	ALP	Lib.	NP	AP/LM/AD	Greens(b)
1972	4	3	-	14	-
1974	3	5	1	27	-
1975	6	3	1	8	-
1977	15	2	1	22	-
1980	23	5	1	30	-
1983	20	10	1	25	-

1984	18	14	9	36	-
1987	26	12	4	44	1
1990	19	18	6	39	14
1993	26	21	6	33	29
1996	30	(c)34	2	50	46
1998	51	31	5	42	57

(a) Selected parties only.

(b) In this table and table C3.4 this covers all Green parties, including the Western Australian Greens and the United Tasmania Group.

(c) Including Pauline Hanson who was disendorsed after ballot papers were printed.

Source: Australian Electoral Commission Nominations Details.

C3.4 GENDER BREAKDOWN, House of Representatives Nominations: Selected Parties - 1998

Parties	Males	Females	Females
	no.	no.	%
Greens(a)	66	57	46.3
ALP	97	51	34.5
Democrats	106	42	28.4
Liberals	103	31	23.1
National Party	27	5	15.6
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	121	18	12.9
Abolish Child Support	10	1	9.1

(a) In this table and table C3.3, this covers all Green parties, including the Western Australian Greens and the United Tasmania Group.

Source: Australian Electoral Commission Nominations Details.

The proportion of women in the different State and Territory legislatures varies considerably (table C3.5). In 2000 the ACT had the lowest proportion of women, with women forming only 12% of members of the Legislative Assembly. This was unexpected in the jurisdiction with the highest proportion of voters with tertiary education and the highest proportion of women in the workforce. Some attributed it to the shift from a party list form of proportional representation to the Hare-Clark system, as before the latter was adopted the ACT had the highest proportion of women legislators (35% after the 1992 election).

C3.5 GENDER OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN POLITICS - 30 August 2000

	Females	Males	Females
	no.	no.	%
Commonwealth Parliament			
House of Representatives	34	114	23.0
Senate	22	54	28.9

Total	56	168	25.0
State/Territory Parliaments			
New South Wales	27	108	20.0
Victoria	34	98	25.8
Queensland	17	72	19.1
Western Australia	20	71	22.0
South Australia	19	50	27.5
Tasmania	11	29	27.5
Australian Capital Territory	2	15	11.8
Northern Territory	4	21	16.0
Total	134	464	22.4
Local government	1,511	5,960	25.3
ATSIC Regional Councils	116	271	30.0

Source: Parliamentary Library; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

The party composition of women's representation has varied over this period, mostly due to changes in the electoral tide (graph C3.6). The first women to enter Australian parliaments were mostly from non-Labor parties. By the end of the century, however, the ALP had a higher proportion of women than the Coalition in almost all its parliamentary parties (table C3.7). The one exception was the ACT, where there were no Labor women in the Legislative Assembly.

C3.7 COMPOSITION OF AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTS, By Party(a) and Gender - 30 August 2000

Total Parliament(b) by jurisdiction	Males no.	Females no.	Females %
Commonwealth (3.10.98)			
ALP	69	26	27.4
LPA	72	24	25.0
NPA	17	2	10.5
AD	5	4	44.4
GRN	1	-	0.0
Other	1	-	0.0
IND	3	-	0.0
Total	168	56	25.0
NSW (27.3.99)			
ALP	55	16	22.5
LPA	24	5	17.2
NPA	15	2	11.8
AD	1	-	0.0
GRN	1	1	50.0
Other	7	1	12.5
IND	5	2	28.6
Total	108	27	20.0
VIC (18.9.99)			

ALP	35	22	38.6
LPA	50	10	16.7
NPA	11	1	8.3
AD	-	-	-
GRN	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-
IND	2	1	33.3
Total	98	34	25.8
QLD (16.6.98)			
ALP	33	12	26.7
LPA	8	1	11.1
NPA	21	2	8.7
AD	-	-	-
GRN	-	-	-
Other	6	-	0.0
IND	4	2	33.3
Total	72	17	19.1
WA (14.12.96)			
ALP	23	8	25.8
LPA	36	7	16.3
NPA	8	1	11.1
AD	1	1	50.0
GRN	1	2	66.7
Other	-	-	-
IND	2	1	33.3
Total	71	20	22.0
SA (11.10.97)			
ALP	18	12	40.0
LPA	27	5	15.6
NPA	-	1	100.0
AD	2	1	33.3
GRN	-	-	-
Other	1	-	0.0
IND	2	-	0.0
Total	50	19	27.5
TAS (29.8.98)			
ALP	13	5	27.8
LPA	8	2	20.0
NPA	-	-	-
AD	-	-	-
GRN	-	1	100.0
Other	-	-	-
IND	8	3	27.3
Total	29	11	27.5
ACT (21.2.98)			
ALP	6	-	0.0
LPA	5	1	16.7
NPA	-	-	-
AD	-	-	-
GRN	-	1	100.0
Other	-	-	-
IND	4	-	0.0

Total	15	2	11.8
NT (30.8.97)			
ALP	5	2	28.6
LPA	16	2	11.1
NPA	-	-	-
AD	-	-	-
GRN	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-
IND	-	-	-
Total	21	4	16.0
All Parliaments			
ALP	257	103	28.6
LPA	246	57	18.8
NPA	72	9	11.1
AD	9	6	40.0
GRN	3	5	62.5
Other	15	1	6.3
IND	30	9	23.1
Total	632	190	23.1

(a) Includes parties formed after election of Ind. member, resignations from parties, and Ind. ALP in Tas. Legislative Council.

(b) Dates shown beside jurisdictions are for the latest general election.

LEGEND: ALP - Australian Labor Party; LPA - Liberal Party of Australia, includes Country Liberal Party in NT; NPA - National Party of Australia; AD - Australian Democrats; GRN - Greens (including Western Australian Greens); Other - includes: Better Future for our Children, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, City Country Alliance Queensland, CPQ (Country Party Queensland), Christian Democratic Party, Shooters' Party (John Tingle), Independent - No Pokies, Outdoor Recreation Party, RLS (Reform the Legal System), Unity Party; IND - Independent.

Source: Parliamentary Library.

Australia currently ranks 22nd internationally, in terms of the representation of women in its national parliament (lower house only). The leading countries in terms of women's parliamentary representation are Sweden (42.7% of seats), followed by Denmark (37.4), Finland (36.5), Norway (36.4), The Netherlands (36.5), Iceland (34.9), Germany (30.9) and at last in our own geographical region, New Zealand with 30.8% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 25 August 2000).

Australia would do better on international rankings if there was a composite figure for the national parliament. Australia has been unusual in having a popularly elected upper house and one where women have been better represented than in the lower house. An important factor is the electoral system used since the passage of the *Representation Act 1948*. This is known as the single transferable vote (STV), a form of proportional representation first used for parliamentary elections in Tasmania. International research (Rule & Zimmerman 1994) suggests that multi-member electorates with proportional representation facilitate the parliamentary representation of women, while women are generally disadvantaged by systems based on single-member electorates, as in the House of Representatives. All the countries in which women constituted over 30% of parliamentarians in August 2000 used proportional representation to elect their members of parliament.

The STV form of proportional representation was popularised in Australia in the nineteenth century by Catherine Helen Spence through her journalism, public lecture tours and candidacy for the Constitutional Convention on a platform of 'effective voting'. It was largely due to her "unwearied advocacy by word and pen" that the Hare-Clark system (known at the time as the Hare-Spence system) was introduced in Tasmania in 1896. Women's organisations such as the Australian Federation of Women Voters campaigned for many decades for the more general adoption of STV in Australia.

While generally speaking the Australian evidence has supported the proposition that women are disadvantaged by electoral systems based on single-member electorates, such disadvantage can be neutralised through mechanisms such as quotas. Elections in the United Kingdom and South Australia in 1997 showed that the adoption of quotas by a major party can have a significant effect on representation, resulting in the South Australian lower house, with its single-member electorates, gaining a higher proportion of women than the upper house elected through proportional representation. The gap between the House of Representatives and the Senate in the proportion of women has narrowed in recent years, with women constituting 23% of the House of Representatives and 29% of the Senate in August 2000.

While the presence of women in parliaments has been increasing, the diversity of women in the community is still far from represented. The first women born in non-English speaking countries began to be elected to Australian parliaments in the 1980s, but there are still no women from countries that have been important sources of our current population, such as Greece or Viet Nam. There are still no Indigenous women in Australian parliaments.

Women in positions of political leadership

Although women aspired to partnership with men in housekeeping the state, it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that progress towards this goal was achieved. Dame Enid Lyons, widow of the pre-war Prime Minister Joe Lyons, was appointed to Cabinet by Sir Robert Menzies in 1949. However she was given no portfolio and, as Vice President of the Executive Council, she said her major duty was to pour the tea. Dame Annabelle Rankin, known for her mothering role as Government Whip in the Senate, did not achieve Cabinet status but did become Minister for Housing in 1966.

The arrival of a new wave of the women's movement at the end of the 1960s, the creation of new organisations such as Women's Electoral Lobby and the consciousness-raising of International Women's Year in 1975 were to change forever the view that the absence of women from government was something entirely unremarkable. At the federal level, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle became the first woman to be a Cabinet Minister with portfolio responsibilities, first as Minister for Social Security (1975-80) and then as Minister for Finance (1980-83). Senator Susan Ryan became the first woman to serve in a Labor Cabinet, first as Minister for Education (1983-87) and then as Special Minister of State (1987-88). In her role as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women she introduced the Commonwealth's *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, briefly earning herself the title of 'Australia's feminist dictator'.

From the 1980s women also started achieving positions of party leadership. Not surprisingly, this first happened in a relatively new party, established after the arrival of the more recent wave of the women's movement. The first woman to lead a parliamentary party was Senator Janine Haines, who became Leader of the Australian Democrats in

1986. Subsequently three other women have led the party, Senators Janet Powell (1990-91), Cheryl Kernot (1993-97) and Meg Lees (1997-), leading to campaign slogans such as 'the party that puts women first'.

Women have also now achieved leadership positions in the older political parties. The first woman to attend a Premiers' Conference as head of government was Rosemary Follett, who attended in 1989 as Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory. Carmen Lawrence became Premier of Western Australia (1990-93) and Joan Kirner Premier of Victoria (1990-92). In 1995 Kate Carnell defeated Rosemary Follett to become the first Liberal woman to head an Australian government, a position she held until October 2000. By then there were three women Leaders of the Opposition, in NSW, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, but no other woman head of government.

Cabinet decision-making lies at the heart of responsible government and, as remarked by Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, that is where women need to be if they are to have any real effect. Women have been increasing their presence in Australian Cabinets, most notably at the State level. One milestone was the inclusion of five women in the Western Australia Cabinet announced by Dr Carmen Lawrence in February 1990 - 31% of Cabinet. By September 2000 women constituted over 20% in all but one State Cabinet, and they constituted 44% of the Victorian Cabinet (table C3.8).

At the federal level, there has always been a woman in Cabinet over the last 25 years, except in 1989-90 when there was none and except in 1996-97 when there were two. In 2000 women formed 6% of Cabinet and 13% of the ministry (table C3.9). In addition women constituted 4 out of 12 Parliamentary Secretaries. Looking at the Opposition, women were 19% of the Shadow Ministry and one of the seven Parliamentary Secretaries to Shadow Ministers.

When women first entered State Cabinets after the Second World War they were almost invariably allocated 'nurturing' portfolios such as health, education and welfare. By the 1990s the range of portfolios held by women had become diverse. Except in Victoria, however, they were still under-represented in economic roles.

C3.8 STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS, Number and Percentage of Women in Cabinet - September 2000

State/Territory Cabinets	Males	Females	Females
	no.	no.	%
New South Wales	17	3	15
Victoria	10	8	44
Queensland	14	4	22
Western Australia	16	2	11
South Australia	12	3	20
Tasmania	7	3	30
Australian Capital Territory	4	1	20
Northern Territory	9	1	10

Source: Parliamentary Library.

C3.9 FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, Ministry and Shadow Ministry by Gender - September 2000

	Males	Females	Females
	no.	no.	%
Cabinet	16	1	6
Outer Ministry	10	3	23
Ministry as a whole	26	4	13
Shadow Ministry	26	5	19

Source: Parliamentary Library.

The gender stereotyping observable in ministerial roles also applied to women's roles in Parliamentary Committees. For example, in the federal parliament the first committee to be chaired by a woman was the Senate Select Committee on Medical and Hospital Costs, chaired by Senator Ivy Wedgwood. In 1970, when the new Legislative and General Purpose Standing Committees were created in the Senate, she became Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare. The first all-woman committee in the federal parliament was the Senate Select Committee on Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes, established in 1981 and chaired first by Senator Shirley Walters and then, after the change of government, by Senator Pat Giles.

Women have also occupied leadership positions as presiding officers in parliament. Anne Levy was appointed President of the Legislative Council in South Australia in February 1986, a few hours ahead of Joan Child being appointed Speaker of the House of Representatives. In 1996 Senator Margaret Reid became President of the Senate and in 1999 Dr Meredith Burgmann became President of the Legislative Council in NSW.

Unlike Australia's close neighbour New Zealand, where there have been two women Prime Ministers and two women Governors-General, in Australia neither position has yet been filled by a woman. However women have filled the position of Governor in two States - the first being Dame Roma Mitchell, appointed Governor of South Australia in 1991, and the second being Leneen Forde, sworn in as Governor of Queensland in 1992.

Women in local government

Women's entry into local government was also very late in comparison with countries such as the United Kingdom, where women were more active at this level than in parliamentary politics. Although the first woman official was elected in 1919 (table C3.10), forty years later (1960) women's representation had reached only 1%, despite the efforts of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, established in 1951. Unlike in other countries, the functions of local government in Australia remained for most of the twentieth century restricted largely to "roads, rates and rubbish". Local government was not involved in the provision of education, health and welfare, the areas which attracted women into local government in other countries. Another barrier to women's participation in local government was the existence of property qualifications that restricted both the franchise and eligibility for local government election, disqualifying more women than

men, even though formal sex barriers had been removed.

In Australia, the pattern of women's eligibility to be political candidates tended to be in the reverse order from that in other countries - with these rights coming first at the national level. This sequence in the acquisition of rights, together with the allocation of functions between the tiers of government peculiar to Australia, helped delay the entrance of women to local government. This in turn affected women's participation at other levels of government, as local government is the level easiest to combine with family responsibilities as well as providing a pathway to a parliamentary career.

In the 1970s new organisations such as Women's Electoral Lobby and Women Active Politically began targeting local government for action on issues such as childcare and the environment. The proportion of women in elected local government positions began rising - to just over 6% in 1980, 13% in 1986, and over 25% in 2000 (table C3.11). Women's representation continued to lag behind in rural areas, however. Concern over continuing under-representation of women led to renewed campaigns supported by federal and State Governments in the 1990s.

In Victoria women's and local government organisations began work on two projects: the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter and the Victorian Local Government Women's Participation Project. The Charter encouraged Councils to take steps such as providing a carers' allowance and revising sitting times. The Participation Project provided mentors and training for women candidates and popularised slogans such as "Don't get mad...Get elected". The Project set up an electronic tally room for the 2000 elections and was able to report an increase in women's participation in rural and regional councils from 18% to 22%. While before the election there had been 11 councils with no women, afterwards there were only three (Women's Tally Room 2000).

The first woman to become mayor in Australia was Lilian Fowler in 1938, who directed her energies in the cramped inner-Sydney municipality of Newtown towards issues such as children's playgrounds and low-rise public housing. Today a federal electorate is named in her honour. In the 1980s women began to hold the position of Lord Mayor in the capital cities for the first time, including Sallyanne Atkinson (Brisbane 1985-91), Doone Kennedy (Hobart 1986-96), Lecki Ord (Melbourne 1987-88) and Winsome McCaughey (Melbourne 1988-89). A familiar dilemma from the time of Lilian Fowler onward was who was to fill the role of mayoress, traditionally associated with charity work. In some cases it was an adult daughter, while in others a husband was pressed into this unfamiliar role. Today, women are still less likely to become a mayor of a rural than a metropolitan council, and the proportion of mayors who are women also varies between States (table C3.12).

C3.10 WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA

	Right to vote(a)	Right to stand	First elected
State			
South Australia	1861	1914	1919
Western Australia	1876	1919	1920
Victoria	1903	1914	1920
Queensland	1879	1920	1925
City of Brisbane	1924	1924	1949
Tasmania -			
Rural	1893	1911	1957
Hobart City Council	1893	1902	1952

Launceston City Council	1894	1945	1950
New South Wales -			
Sydney City Council	1900	1918	1963
Municipalities and Shires	1906	1918	1928

(a) The dates for the right to vote refer to equal rights for women and men but not universal rights. In most cases, property qualifications limited the local government franchise and eligibility for election.

Source: Smith 1975.

C3.11 WOMEN AS LOCAL COUNCILLORS(a) - August 2000

	Females	Total	Females	1994	1980
	no.	no.	%	%	%
New South Wales	449	1,752	25.6	20.2	7.8
Victoria	157	594	26.4	20.0	6.9
Queensland	328	1,160	28.3	21.2	3.7
Western Australia	308	1,409	21.9	19.6	4.3
South Australia	208	760	27.4	21.6	6.8
Tasmania	61	285	21.4	16.4	5.8
Australia	1,511	5,960	25.3	20.5	6.2

(a) Includes the Mayor.

Source: Parliamentary Library.

C3.12 WOMEN AS MAYORS - August 2000

	Females	Total	Females
	no.	no.	%
New South Wales	26	171	15.2
Victoria	15	78	19.2
Queensland	19	124	15.3
Western Australia	26	144	18.0
South Australia	17	67	25.4
Tasmania	6	29	20.7
Australia	109	613	17.8

Source: Parliamentary Library.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission has 35 Regional Councils, elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are enrolled on the Commonwealth electoral roll. There have been four elections since the establishment of ATSIC in 1989. In the last election, in October 1999, women formed a record 34% of candidates and 30% of those elected as Councillors. This compared with the 1996 election when women were 23% of those elected. Former ATSIC Chair, Lowitja O'Donoghue, had campaigned to increase the number of Aboriginal women standing for election.

Women in the Australian Public Service

One of the important ways in which women can contribute to public decision-making is through public service employment. When the Commonwealth Public Service was created for the new Commonwealth of Australia, however, the concept of equal employment opportunity was far from accepted. Despite lobbying by women's organisations, those designing the new public service, such as the First Public Commissioner, D.C. McLachlan, believed women's role should largely revolve around their special aptitude for typing. It was not envisaged that women would fill administrative positions in the service, although there was no formal bar to this. A number of women clerical officers were transferred from colonial public services to the new federal service and even enjoyed equal pay with their male colleagues, although these early gains were short lived. From 1903 women were not permitted to take the entrance examination for the clerical division, but were still permitted to apply for promotion to it from the general division where they were employed as typists and telephonists. From 1915 this loophole was closed and the number of women in the clerical division continued to dwindle at the same time as preference for returned soldiers was introduced.

To some extent these developments were made inevitable by the provision in the *Commonwealth Public Service Act 1902* that every female officer was "deemed to have retired from the Commonwealth service upon her marriage" - the marriage bar that was to remain in place for over 60 years. In an era when most women married, it meant that women were not considered useful candidates for the clerical division, from which it was possible to rise to the senior positions in the Service.

In 1918 McLachlan was appointed as Royal Commissioner to inquire into the administration of the Public Service. His Report contained a section on the employment of women in which he justified the continuing restrictions on their employment and noted with satisfaction that with few exceptions, the only female officers in the clerical division were those inherited from the States. He did recommend, however, that junior clerical positions be made available to women in the records branches of departments, thus releasing 'promising youths' from duties that were purely routine and improving their scope for advancement (RCPSA 1920: 77). Commissioner McLachlan observed that women suffered physiological handicaps, so that the limits of their usefulness was reached at comparatively early age when they filled positions ordinarily filled by men in the Public Service: "While they may stand the pressure and strain of work for a time, usually reaction follows with accompanying nervous break-down" (RCPSA 1920: 76).

This rationale for restricting women to routine rather than career positions was still influential at the time of the Second World War. R.S. Parker wrote in his 1942 review of public service recruitment that there was some evidence that women were "more adaptable to monotonous work than men", so their employment in a separate class would free up officers "capable of and destined for more responsible tasks" (Parker 1942: 223).

Women were finally admitted to the clerical division of the Commonwealth Public Service in 1949, but the marriage bar continued to restrict opportunities. Single women were denied training because of the assumption that it would be wasted when they had to resign on marriage. Married women were able to return as temporary staff members, particularly as typists as this work was regarded as unsuitable for men. However as temporary employees, married women were unable to occupy supervisory positions and forfeited their superannuation rights.

The prolonged struggle to lift the marriage bar, following the recommendation of the Boyer Committee on Public Service Recruitment in 1958, was a turning point for women's public sector employment. The issue was already a political hot potato in 1961, when Cabinet decided not to lift the ban but, in the context of a forthcoming election, to tell parliament that they had not yet come to a conclusion (Cabinet Minute 24 October 1961). In 1966 Australia became almost the last democratic country to lift the ban, which by this time had blighted the careers of many women, forcing others to "live in sin" (Sawer 1997).

Other milestones were the Australia's ratification of ILO Convention No 111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) in 1973, and the setting up of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (the Coombs Commission). As part of its inquiries, the Coombs Commission published a discussion paper on the employment of women under the eloquent title *Sexism in Public Service* (RCAGA 1975). By this time women constituted 28% of Australian Public Service staff and 24% of permanent staff.

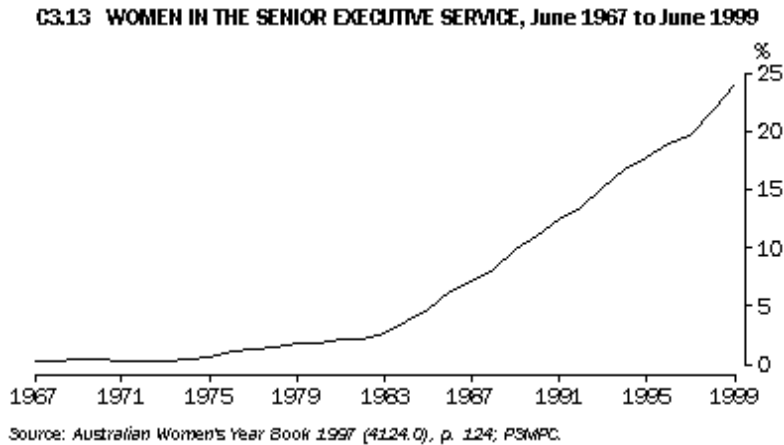
In 1974 over half of the women were employed in three occupations - as telephonists (17%), typists and steno-secretaries (16%) and clerical assistants (24%). There was no career structure for the women-only occupations. The peak of a career for most steno-secretaries was Grade 2, reached in their early twenties. Few could aspire to the next grade, as secretary to a head of department. Of the 1,143 Second Division officers (equivalent to today's Senior Executive Service), only four were women, including Marie Coleman who headed the newly created Social Welfare Commission. No woman had yet headed a Commonwealth department, and this was not to occur for another decade when Helen Williams was appointed Secretary of the Department of Education in 1985.

At this time a number of steps were taken to address the dramatic horizontal and vertical sex segregation of the Australian Public Service, revealed in the Coombs Commission Report. The *Maternity Leave (Australian Government Employees) Act 1973* provided for three months paid leave and for the total leave period to be extended to 12 months. At the end of 1972 the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission had brought down its equal pay for work of equal value decision, and this was implemented in the Service the following year. At the time, women were paid 75% of the pay of male officers doing the same work, so equal pay substantially increased their earnings. Upper age limits for recruitment into clerical and other positions, that had discriminated against women re-entering the workforce, were abolished and the Public Service Board repealed restrictions creating 'men only' and 'women only' jobs. Towards the end of 1975, as a direct result of the evidence given to the Coombs Commission concerning systemic discrimination in the Service, an Equal Employment Opportunity Section was created in the Board to develop and implement EEO programs.

After a decade of patchy progress, the development of such programs became mandatory for all departments under §22B of the *Public Service Reform Act 1984*. The Public Service Board also more than doubled the intake of women into the executive development scheme. At the same time statutory provision was made for permanent part-time employment, intended to facilitate the balancing of work and family responsibilities without losing the career benefits of permanent employment. Flexible patterns of employment to accommodate family needs remained elusive, however, and it was mainly women who took advantage of the new provisions. By 1999 only 6% of permanent positions were filled on a permanent part-time basis, with women filling 86% of these.

After 25 years of equal employment opportunity programs, the Australian Public Service now looks quite different from the picture presented in *Sexism in Public Service*. In June

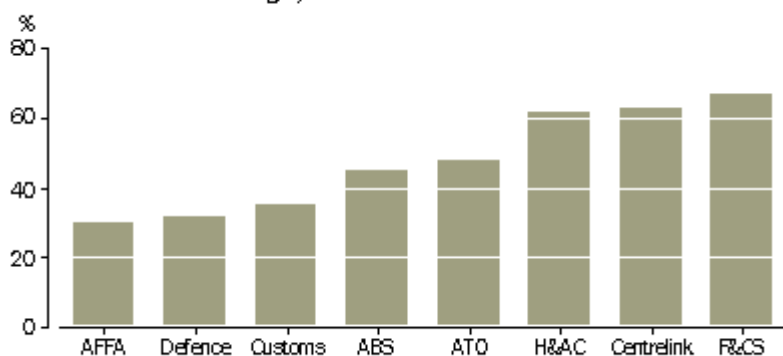
1999 the proportion of permanent officers who were women had doubled to 48%. Women form a majority at all levels up to ASO6, while men form a majority of those from ASO6 upwards. Women now constitute 24% of the Senior Executive Service (SES), as contrasted with 0.3% of the Second Division in 1974. The steep rise from the 1980s can be seen in graph C3.13. In 1998-99 over 36% of new appointments to the SES were of women.



Pat Turner became the first Aboriginal woman to head a federal agency when she was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1994-98). Another prominent Indigenous public servant, Dawn Casey, was responsible for the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. In December 1999 she was appointed Director of the National Museum of Australia. Women have also been representing Australia overseas in increasing numbers. In 2000, women filled 11 out of the 79 Head of Mission or Head of Post positions, including very visible positions such as Australian Ambassador to the UN. A woman, Professor Erh-Soon Tay, was also appointed in 1998 as President of Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

There continued to be a very uneven distribution over the Service, however, with women still concentrated in the human service areas. Looking at agencies with over 3,000 staff (graph C3.14), women constituted over 65% of permanent staff in the Department of Family and Community Services and over 60% in Centrelink and the Department of Health and Aged Care, but only 30% of staff in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia. Although the numbers and seniority of women had increased, their distribution had changed little from that 25 years before. In 1974 women had constituted under 12% of permanent staff of the Departments of Agriculture, Transport, and Housing and Construction, but over 50% of staff in the Departments of Health, Education and Social Security.

C3.14 PROPORTION OF PERMANENT STAFF WHO WERE WOMEN, Agencies Exceeding 3,000 Permanent Staff—June 1999



Source: APS Statistical Bulletin 1998-99, Public Service and Merit Protection Commission.

At the State level, women were more visible as heads of department than at the federal level in the 1990s, with women achieving high-profile positions such as head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria. In NSW the number of women who were CEOs of departments and statutory bodies rose from 8 to 19 between 1995 and 2000.

Women on boards and committees

An index commonly used to measure the participation of women in public life is their representation on government-appointed boards and committees. Australian women were notably absent from such bodies for most of the twentieth century. The appointment of Mildred Muscio, President of the National Council of Women, to the Royal Commission on Child Endowment in 1927 was exceptional. She submitted a minority report, along with John Curtin, calling for its immediate introduction. The appointment of Mrs Claude Couchman, later Dame Elizabeth Couchman, to the board of the new Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1932 was another remarkable event. She served for ten years, at which point statutory provision was made for one of the five Commissioners always to be a woman (*Australian Broadcasting Act 1942*).

For the most part, however, Australian governments remained unconvinced of the need for women's participation in public decision-making. This was true even during the Second World War, when the Government was mobilising women for the war effort. In its first 12 months the Curtin Government set up 67 boards and committees with 387 members, of which only one was a woman (CAPD, House of Representatives 6 May 1942: 966). The one woman was appointed to the Women's Employment Board, established to determine wages where women were brought into male jobs.

When Norman MacKenzie was commissioned in 1958 by the Social Science Research Council of Australia to inquire into the role of women in professional and public life in Australia, he was surprised at the general absence of women from government-appointed bodies. In 1951 there had been only seven women on the 121 Commonwealth government bodies he surveyed. By 1960 this number had only increased by one. There was a similar pattern at the State level - for example no women on the public library boards of NSW, Victoria, Queensland or South Australia. One State premier offered the explanation that a board needed no more than one woman member "to put a woman's view", but to have just one woman on a board might lead to embarrassing situations (MacKenzie 1962: 251).

Since the 1970s there has been greater realisation that if full advantage is to be taken of the talent available in the community and if community perspectives are to be adequately reflected, women need to participate along with men on government bodies. A number of

strategies have been established to ensure that women are not overlooked. At the Commonwealth level there is: a whole-of-government monitoring system called 'Appoint'; a pilot executive search program established in 1998; and an early warning system to ensure that departments are provided with names for forthcoming vacancies on boards. In the first six months of 2000 the Commonwealth Government appointed 152 women to its boards, taking the proportion of board members up to 32.2%. In 1995 the figure had been 30.5%. State and Territory Governments also had strategies in place to promote gender balance on boards and committees. The ACT had led the way since 1989, when Chief Minister Rosemary Follett established a target of 50% for government bodies. Her successor, Kate Carnell, continued to promote gender balance, with women making up 44% of membership by September 2000. The South Australian Government also had a target of 50% representation of women on government boards and committees.

Women were less in evidence in the upper echelons of the private sector, but there was some progress. Women constituted 4% of non-executive directors and board members in 1995. By 2000 this had risen to 10% for non-executive directors and 8% for board members (Korn/Ferry International 2000).

Conclusion

A hundred years after Federation not all the aspirations of the suffragists have been met. Women have taken up the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and have entered government, overcoming a range of obstacles. They have not, however, succeeded in making the kind of difference to politics which was both desired and feared at the time of Federation, when it was thought that women would be a purifying influence on public life and create a new and more moral world.

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