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***Women in Parliament:  
An Update***

*by*

*Marie Swain*

***Briefing Paper No 1/97***

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Union

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The total membership of the New South Wales Parliament is 141 (99 seats in the Legislative Assembly and 42 in the Legislative Council). In the 51st Parliament there are 29 women parliamentarians, which represents 20.5%. 15 are in the Legislative Assembly (15.1% of all Lower House seats), and 14 are in the Legislative Council (33.3% of all Upper House seats).
- In Australia women have had the right to vote and stand for Federal Parliament since 1902. However it took two decades for a woman to be elected to a State Parliament; four decades before a woman was elected to the House of Representatives or the Senate; six and a half decades before a woman was made a Federal Minister; eight decades before women were included as a matter of course in Federal Cabinet; and nine decades before serious attempts were made to ensure women participated to a greater extent in the political and parliamentary process (pp3-7).
- Reasons given for the low participation of women in Australian Parliaments are many and varied. These include: attitudinal barriers which prevent women from putting themselves forward; negative perceptions of the political and parliamentary process; the intense scrutiny given to women parliamentarians and the portrayal of women politicians by the media. There are also financial barriers which make running for office difficult and structural barriers which hamper entry into politics. These include the preselection procedures; the need to balance home and family responsibilities and the problems posed by long sitting hours and lack of child care. Other factors such as the type of voting system in use may also play a part in the extent to which women are represented in Parliament (pp8-21).
- Arguments put forward as to why women should be represented in greater numbers include: women make up half the population and should therefore be represented proportionally; the democratic system would lose its legitimacy if only one group in the community were seen to be represented; the focus of the political agenda is broadened to include issues such as domestic violence, women's health etc; women bring a different perspective to the political debate; it is a more efficient use of human resources; greater involvement of women may temper the way in which politics today is often conducted (pp22-26).
- A number of ways have been suggested to increase the representation of women. Some do not require wholesale change, for example, encouraging women to participate in the political process. Then there are those which require changes to the present system such as endorsing women in safe or winnable seats; introducing "family friendly" parliamentary procedures and premises; and setting up funds for women candidates. Finally there are mechanisms such as implementing quota systems; weighting preselection votes; reserving seats; direct appointment and so on (pp27-36).
- In 1994 the representation of women in the major parties was fairly similar, with approximately 15% of the parliamentarians at the Federal level and 20% of the parliamentarians at the State level. This situation looked set to change

when the ALP introduced a quota system to ensure women would be candidates for 35% of winnable seats by the year 2002. However, following the massive swing to the Coalition at the 1996 Federal election, there are now only 13 women ALP representatives (5.8% of all ALP parliamentarians) compared with 26 women Coalition representatives (11.6% of all Coalition parliamentarians). While the increase in the representation of Coalition women is in part explained by the swing, another attributable factor is the greater effort which has been made to encourage more women to participate in programmes aimed at educating and training potential parliamentary candidates. Quotas are not supported by the Coalition parties. The smaller, newer parties have a higher representation of women without appearing to have any special mechanisms in place to achieve this (pp36-42).

- In 1995 Australia was ranked 49th in an international study on the representation of women in national Parliaments, which found that the world average was 10.4%. While our result (9.5%) was similar to that of the United States (10.9%) and the United Kingdom (9.5%), it fell way behind Canada (18%) and the Nordic countries which achieved representation of between 30% and 40%. However, following the March 1996 election women now make up 15.5% of the House of Representatives and 30% of the Senate (pp43-47).

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## INTRODUCTION <sup>1</sup>

The first section of this Briefing Paper gives an historical outline of women being elected to Parliament. The second section presents reasons put forward for why there have been comparatively few women parliamentarians to date. Section three contains a number of arguments why increasing the number of women should be encouraged and suggestions which have been made for how this could be achieved are listed in section four. The views and strategies of the major political parties are examined in section five and the situation in overseas countries is looked at in section six.

(As an exhaustive analysis of such a complex topic is beyond the scope of this Briefing Paper, a list of selected further reading is provided at **Appendix A**).

### 1 FACTS AND FIGURES

1894 South Australia, the first Australian State to give women the right to vote and enter Parliament.

1902 Women gain the right to vote and stand for the Federal Parliament.

In this year women in New South Wales also gained the right to vote. However it took another 16 years before they gained the right to stand for the Legislative Assembly and 24 for the Legislative Council.

1908 Victoria is the last State in Australia to give women the vote.

1918 New South Wales women gain the right to stand for the Legislative Assembly.

1921 With her election to the Western Australian House of Representatives, Edith Cowan (Nationalist), became the first woman elected to any Australian Parliament.

1923 Victoria, again the last State, allows women to stand for Parliament.

1925 Millicent Preston Stanley (United Australia Party), the first woman elected to the New South Wales Parliament, where she gained a seat in the Legislative Assembly.

1926 The New South Wales Constitution (Amendment) Act establishes the right of women to sit in the Legislative Council.

1931 Catherine Green (ALP) and Ellen Webster (ALP), first women members of the New South Wales Legislative Council.

1939 Mary Quirk (ALP), elected to the seat of Balmain in the New South Wales

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<sup>1</sup> This *Briefing Paper* is a substantially revised and updated version of *Briefing Paper 19/95* which it supersedes.

- Legislative Assembly was the first woman to receive party endorsement for a "safe" seat.
- 1943 Dame Enid Lyons (United Australia party - Tas) first woman elected to the Federal Parliament's House of Representatives;
- Dorothy Tangney (Labor party - WA), first woman elected to the Senate.
- 1944 Lillian Fowler (Lang Labor) was elected to the seat of Newtown in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. She was the first woman Alderman in New South Wales (Newtown 1929-48) and also the first woman Mayor in Australia (Newtown - 1938-39).
- 1947 Dame Annabelle Rankin, the first Liberal party woman elected to the Senate. She was the first woman to hold the office of Whip in the Federal Parliament. (Opposition Whip in 1947 and Government Whip from 1951-1966).
- 1949 Dame Enid Lyons, first woman in Federal Cabinet. She was the Vice-President of the Executive Council.
- 1959 Attempts were still being made as late as this to prevent women entering Parliament. In an action brought by Frank Chapman and Arthur Cockington, Jessie Cooper and Margaret Scott (the Liberal party and Labor party candidates respectively, running for the Legislative Council in the South Australian election), had to show that they were "persons" under the Constitution to be eligible to stand. The South Australian Supreme Court found in their favour and Jessie Cooper went on to win a seat in the Legislative Council.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that while South Australia was the first State to give women the right to vote and the right to be elected to Parliament, it was the last Parliament in Australia to actually have women members.
- 1962 Eileen (Mabel) Furley, first Liberal woman elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council.
- 1966 Dame Annabelle Rankin, the first woman Federal Minister.
- 1973 Mary Meillon, first Liberal woman elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.
- 1974 Joan Child (Vic) the first Labor woman elected to the House of Representatives.
- 1976 Senator Margaret Guilfoyle (Liberal party - Vic), first woman Cabinet member in the Federal Parliament.
- 1981 ALP Conference adopts national principle to increase representation in the House of Representatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Janine Haines, *Suffrage to Sufferance - A hundred years of women in politics*, Allen & Unwin, 1992 at pp126-128.



- 
- Elizabeth Kirkby (Australian Democrats) first woman from a non-major party elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council.
- Franca Arena (ALP), the first woman from a non-English speaking background elected to the NSW Parliament (Legislative Council).
- 1983 Jeanette McHugh (ALP), the first woman from New South Wales elected to the Federal House of Representatives.
- Susan Ryan (ACT), the first Labor woman Federal Minister.
- Rosemary Foot (Liberal party - NSW), the first woman to be elected Deputy Leader of a Parliamentary party.
- 1984 Judy Jakins first National party woman elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council.
- Janice Crosio, first woman Cabinet Minister in New South Wales (Minister for Natural Resources 1984-86).
- 1985 Wendy Machin, first National party woman elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.
- 1986 Joan Child, first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- Janine Haines (Australian Democrats - SA) first woman to lead an Australian political party.
- 1987 Bronwyn Bishop (Liberal party), first woman from New South Wales to be elected to the Senate.
- 1988 Three women from a non-major party elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly - Dawn Fraser (Ind), Clover Moore (Ind) and Robyn Read (Ind).
- Helen Sham-Ho (Liberal party), first woman from an Asian background elected to the NSW Parliament (Legislative Council).
- 1989 Rosemary Follett (ALP- ACT), first woman to head a State/Territory Government.
- 1993 In May the Senate passed a resolution that the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) would conduct an Inquiry into Women, Elections and Parliament. The JSCEM handed down its Report in May 1993.
- In December the Commonwealth/State Ministers Conference on the Status of Women called for a discussion paper on Women and Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand. The project was assigned to the Government Services Division of Coopers and Lybrand Consultants.
- 1994 At the ALP National Conference held in September, the party voted to support the resolution that women would be preselected to 35% of winnable

seats by 2002.

The Coopers and Lybrand Report <sup>3</sup> was endorsed by both Liberal and Labor State and Federal Ministers with responsibility for women's affairs. It was released in October for public comment. After this period closes on 30 June 1995, a blueprint for action will be issued. <sup>4</sup> (Details from this Report appear in the text below).

- 1995 In March a booklet entitled 'Every woman's guide to getting into politics' was put out by the Office of the Status of Women.

In keeping with the recommendation made in the Report by the JSCEM that it "monitor developments in the area of the participation by women in the electoral process" an advertisement calling for "information on any strategies, policies and programmes that are being developed or implemented to assist women in achieving greater participation in the electoral process" was placed in the Weekend Australian April 8-9.

Senator Margaret Reid (Liberal party - ACT), was elected Deputy-President in May. She is the first woman presiding officer in the Senate.

- 1996 The March election resulted in the highest number of women ever elected to the Federal Parliament.

At this election, De-Anne Kelly (Qld) became the first National party woman elected to the House of Representatives.

In August 1996 Senator Margaret Reid was elected President of the Senate.

For the first time, women were elected as Presidents of both the NSW Young Liberal movement (Gladys Berejiklian) and NSW Young Labor (Liz McNamara) in the same year. A woman, Joanna Woods, was also elected to the position of Secretary in NSW Young Labor, the first time in the organisation's history that women have held both these executive positions.

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<sup>3</sup> Coopers and Lybrand, 'Women & Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand: A discussion paper', AGPS, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Margo Kingston, 'Political bias against women recognised', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October 1994.

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## **2 WHY IS THERE A COMPARATIVELY SMALL NUMBER OF WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTS ?**

While it is manifestly evident that this is indeed the case, (see Figure 1) <sup>5</sup> the explanation is less clear and there is no single satisfactory response to the question. However, a number of attitudinal and structural barriers have been identified which impede women's involvement in the political process.

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<sup>5</sup> This information was compiled by Margaret Healy of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in May 1996.

Table 1 below <sup>6</sup> illustrates the position of women in all Australian Parliaments as at May 1996.

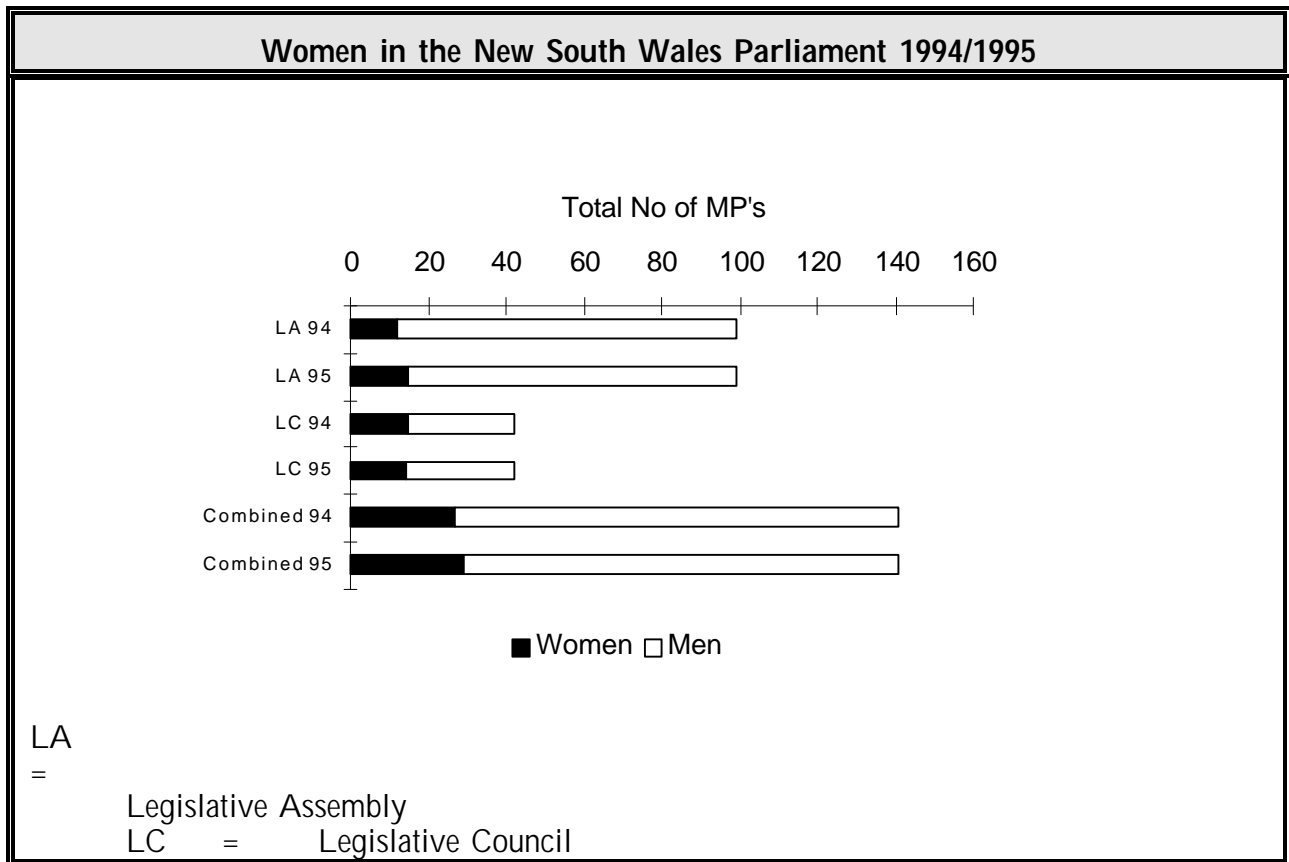
**Table 1**

<b>WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTS, MAY 1996</b>									
	Total Women	ALP	Lib.	NP	CLP*	AD	Other MPs	Total	%
HoReps	23	4	17	1	-	-	1	148	15.5
Senate	23	9	8	-	-	5	1	76	30.3
NSW LA	16	9	5	1	-	-	1	99	16.2
NSW LC	14	7	4	1	-	1	1	42	33.3
Vic LA	15	6	9	-	-	-	-	88	17.0
Vic LC	9	3	5	1	-	-	-	44	20.5
Qld LA	13	6	2	4	-	-	1	89	14.6
WA LA	12	7	3	1	-	-	1	57	21.1
WA LC	5	3	2	-	-	-	-	34	14.7
SA H of A	9	4	5	-	-	-	-	47	19.2
SA LC	6	2	3	-	-	1	-	22	27.3
Tas H of A	10	6	2	-	-	-	2	35	28.6
Tas LC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	0.0
NT LA	4	2	-	-	1	-	1	25	16.0
ACT LA	6	3	1	-	-	-	2	17	35.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>842</b>	<b>19.5</b>
* Country Liberal Party									

Figure 2 updates the figures for New South Wales following the March 1995 election.

**Figure 2**

<sup>6</sup> The information in this Table was compiled by Margaret Healy of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in May 1996. Details for the Senate are from 1 July 1996.



As at January 1997 although there are still 29 women representatives in the New South Wales Parliament, the composition in the Legislative Assembly has changed.<sup>7</sup>

### Threshold barriers

A number of factors are present from the outset which account in part for the low representation of women. These include:

#### *Attitudinal barriers*

- the socialisation of girls and women is such that they are unlikely to choose politics as a career unless they have already been exposed to the political arena. This explains in part the lack of interest or willingness of women to put themselves forward as political candidates.<sup>8</sup> Although women are just as likely to be as political as men, they are involved mainly in extra-parliamentary activities such as campaigning, lobbying and protests.

<sup>7</sup> There is now an additional Liberal Party member as the Hon P Seaton MP replaced the Hon J Fahey at the by-election for the Southern Highlands held in May 1996 and there are no National Party members following the resignation of the Hon W Machin in August 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p11.

- a distaste for current parliamentary processes, in particular the adversarial way in which debate is conducted. This comes through in descriptions such as "pretty rough in the bear pit"<sup>9</sup> and "I regarded Parliament as a travesty and I think that is the way many people still see the Parliament. We forget when we have been there for some time how it is viewed from the outside".<sup>10</sup> In evidence given to the South Australian Joint Committee on Women in Parliament, the following comment was made:

A male-dominated parliament is an intimidating domain for most women and the conduct of many male politicians, as seen on television is particularly repugnant to women. Many women feel daunted as the prospect of becoming embroiled in daily conflict. They shrink from the aggression and personal denigration that characterises Australian politics.<sup>11</sup>

- the difficulty of reconciling a politician's way of life (late sitting hours, lots of travel for country members and so on) with home and family responsibilities. The following comment is illustrative of this:

When one is working to support three children and then going home not only to do domestic jobs - even though the children might share in those jobs - but also to attend to home maintenance and family transport, it leaves little time, and even less money, to become a candidate.<sup>12</sup>

- the scrutiny given to women political representatives is more intense than that of their male colleagues.

In politics people are harder on women than men. That provides opportunity and cost. The opportunity is that there are fewer of us and so our visibility is high. The cost is that you can be over-exposed and pushed quickly...<sup>13</sup>

- portrayal of women parliamentarians by the media often trivialises the role and contribution women can make.

This point is made by Newall in her paper presented to the Commonwealth Women

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<sup>9</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p.11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>11</sup> Final Report of the Joint Committee on Women in Parliament, Parliament of South Australia, May 1996, p19.

<sup>12</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p12.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Carmen Lawrence, Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit. p31.

Parliamentarians Group in Canada in October 1994,<sup>14</sup> when she says women politicians are depicted by the media as either being incapable and naive or they are moulded to fit certain stereotypes and given labels such as 'glitzy bitch'.<sup>15</sup> Women politicians themselves comment on the way they are perceived by the media: 'The media is still more likely to ask about women's issues than anything else, and will more often comment on a woman's appearance or personal features ...'<sup>16</sup>

Then there are financial barriers and systemic barriers such as the practices of political parties.

### **Financial barriers**

Funding can be a major obstacle to women seeking nomination or, if nominated, running a campaign. It is recognised that many women have been:

long segregated in the private sphere and female job ghettos, ... they have neither the personal financial resources nor the moneyed networks to allow them to compete effectively in expensive electoral politics ...<sup>17</sup>

### **Structural barriers**

#### *Role of the major political parties*

When the structural barriers to women's entry into Parliament are being examined the role of the major political parties cannot be overlooked. Although women often make up half their membership, generally they hold only a fraction of the key decision-making positions and usually comprise less than half of the conference delegates.<sup>18</sup> A proposal was made by Linelle Gibson, Secretary of the Williamstown branch of the ALP in Victoria, to establish a women-only branch to overcome some of these perceived problems.<sup>19</sup> According to Ms Gibson, creation of such a branch would "help the ALP boost recruitment of talented women and could be used as a training ground to acquaint them with the party's internal processes". To date no

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<sup>14</sup> Newall's paper was presented at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group 6th Meeting in Canada in October 1994.

<sup>15</sup> These references by Fiona L Newall at pp28-29 of her paper 'Women in Decision-Making: Examining the role of women in politics with the Commonwealth with particular reference to Australia and Britain', were based on an article by Christine Wallace, 'Carmen Lawrence and the 'glitzy bitch' versus the stereotype', *Financial Review*, April 1994. Newall's paper was presented at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group 6th Meeting in Canada in October 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Response of one woman MP quoted in the Coopers and Lybrand Report, *op.cit.*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Task Force Interim Report of the 6th Meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group, 'Barriers to women's participation in Parliament', *The Parliamentarian*, LXXVI(I) January 1995, pp69-74 at p70.

<sup>18</sup> Coopers and Lybrand, *op.cit.*, p15.

<sup>19</sup> Michelle Coffey, 'ALP may establish women's branch', *The Australian*, 23 May 1995.

such action appears to have been taken. However, at the federal level, a new political party for women, the Australian Women's Party, was launched in August 1995. Based on the historical record of previous women's parties set up in Australia in the past,<sup>20</sup> political scientist Dr Marian Simms says it is 'highly unlikely that a new women's party will produce its own MPs'. At the March 1996 election the Australian Women's Party recorded between 1% and 2.5% of the vote in the five House of Representative seats it contested,<sup>21</sup> and polled approximately 49,000 votes in the Senate.<sup>22</sup>

### *Preselection*

Of all the potential barriers which might impede women's entry into Parliament, the preselection process itself probably has the most impact. Those preselected in a safe seat or a marginal seat currently held by the party, have a greater likelihood of being elected to Parliament. To date few women have been preselected in these seats. Many of the Coalition women candidates at the 1996 federal election were running in marginal seats. However, the size of the swing against the Labor government ensured that they nonetheless won the seat. Writing in the *Current Affairs Bulletin* Dennis Phillips states:

For years, it has been the custom of both the Liberal and the Labor Party to preselect women candidates for seats they had no hope of winning. Women had very little chance of increasing their numbers in parliament when they were preselected for seats safely held by the other side ... However, so great was the swing against Labor in the March 1996 election that female Coalition candidates won seats they were never expected to win ... Ten of 16 Coalition women to enter the new House of Representatives won a seat which was held previously by a member of a different political party. In other words, many women appear to have won in the 1996 Australian federal election primarily because they were the direct beneficiaries of the anti-Labor landslide that swept the Keating Government from office.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In 1903, Vida Goldstein founded the Women's Political Association, which disintegrated around the time of World War I; she was again instrumental in establishing the Women for Canberra Movement in 1942, which had fundraising and consciousness-raising components, but it also fielded its own candidates for the 1943 election. Although it failed to achieve parliamentary representation, two women were elected at the 1943 election: Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney. A new and third women's party emerged the late 60s and early 70s. It suffered the same lack of electoral success as did the Women for Canberra Movement. Although women have been elected to Parliament, none has been from a women's party. Darelle Duncan and Marian Simms, 'Women about the House', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 1996.

<sup>21</sup> S Keane, 'Women's Party looks to the future', *Refractory Girl*, Issue 50 Autumn 1996, pp11-12.

<sup>22</sup> WA - 10,904; Tas - 1,881; SA - 5,656; NSW - 17,407; and Qld - 12,904. Information provided to the author.

<sup>23</sup> D Phillips, 'Women in Australian and American Politics: Some Contemporary Comparisons', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 73(2) 1996, pp4-11.



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The point has been made by a number of commentators that because of the swing in the 1996 election '... it is expected many of the new Liberal women will be only single-term MPs when the pendulum swings back.'<sup>24</sup> An Editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated:

... a closer examination reveals that this boost in Liberal female representation is mainly the result of the landslide victory; it is too soon to trumpet it as an achievement of the Liberal Women's Forum ... Because so many of the Liberal women who will be heading to Canberra this time will be defending marginal seats at the next election, it follows that they will probably be struggling to hold on to those seats. Judgments about the Coalition's commitment to 'direct action' rather than 'affirmative action' should therefore wait until after the next election.<sup>25</sup>

The Coopers and Lybrand Report<sup>26</sup> found that men are three times more likely to be preselected for safe seats in Federal Parliament than women, and twice as likely to be preselected for marginal seats held by their party - see Figure 3 below.<sup>27</sup> A similar pattern would no doubt emerge if a study were done at the State level.

That preselection is a structural problem was recognised by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in its 1992 Report, *Half Way to Equal*.<sup>28</sup> In a section entitled 'Women in Political Life' it recommended at page 160 'that all political parties examine their selection procedures for systemic discrimination against women and develop appropriate affirmative action programmes which would give women equal opportunity to take a greater role in the political process'.

The question then arises as to why the experience of male and female candidates differs at the preselection stage.

### Figure 3

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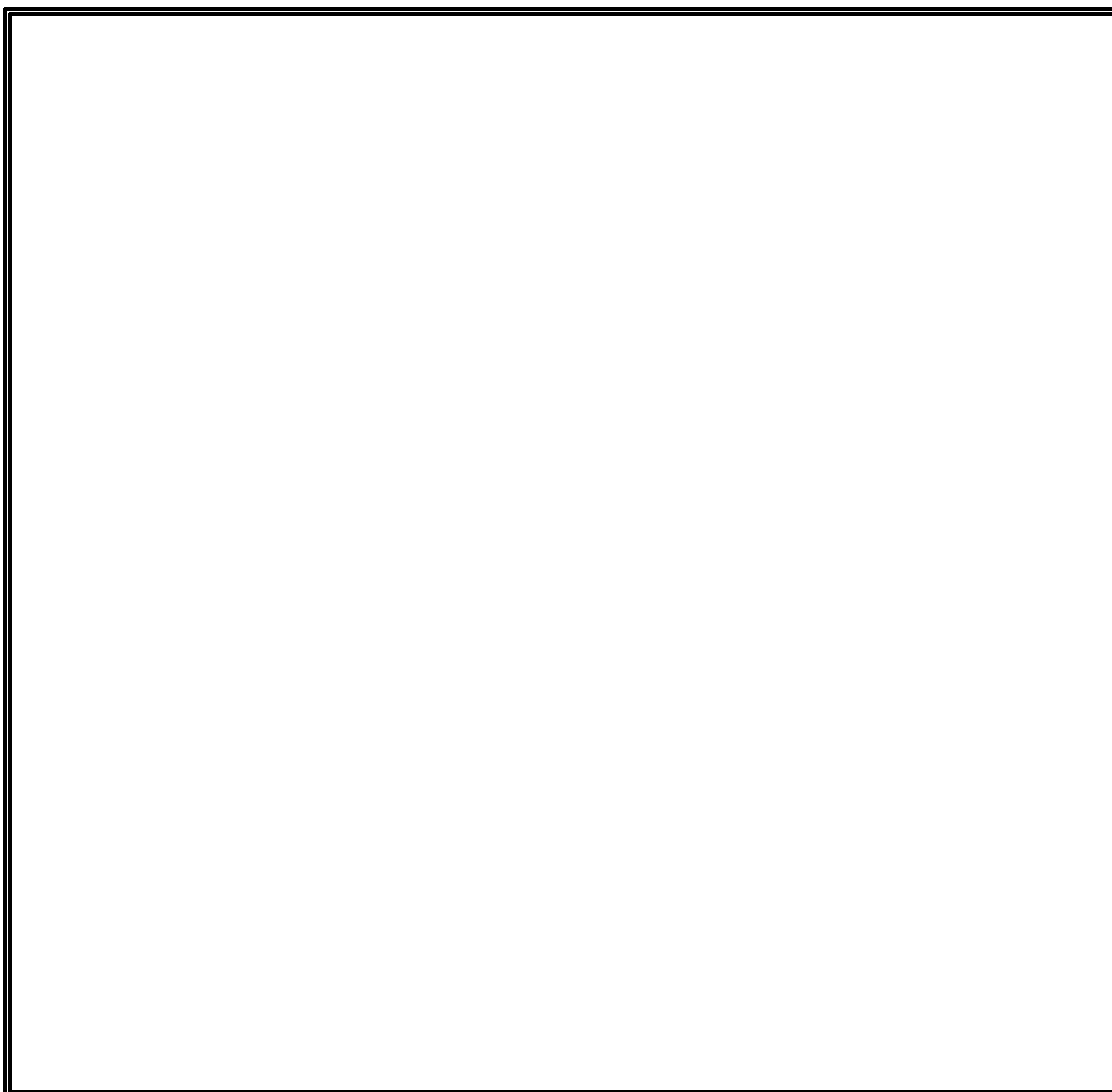
<sup>24</sup> Damien Murphy, 'Women in Labor', *The Bulletin*, 19 March 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial, 'The blue and the grey', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1996.

<sup>26</sup> While these predictions were based on the 1993 Federal election results, this is a common phenomenon. *Ibid*, p18.

<sup>27</sup> Coopers and Lybrand, *op.cit*, p18.

<sup>28</sup> This Report, arose out of the Committee's *Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women in Australia*. Parliamentary Paper No 98/92, AGPS, 1992.



(i) Perceptions of the electorate

Previously one of the most common reasons given for not endorsing women candidates was that they were an electoral liability and would lose the party votes. In a number of papers, Malcolm Mackerras, a noted Australian psephologist, has looked at whether there is any truth to this proposition.<sup>29</sup> After studying the results of various elections, his conclusion has consistently been that women perform equally as well as men (in winning votes) when they are preselected. In his 1980 article he made the observation that "women are elected or defeated in cases where men of the same party would have been elected or defeated". According to Mackerras, the explanation for why there are so few women in Parliament is due to the fact that they are rarely preselected for safe or winnable seats and not because of bias on the

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<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Mackerras, 'Do women candidates lose votes?', *The Australian Quarterly*, September 1977, pp6-10; 'Do women candidates lose votes? - Further Evidence', *The Australian Quarterly*, Summer 1980, pp450-455; 'Why women are getting elected', *The Australian Quarterly*, Summer 1983, pp375-387.

part of the electorate.<sup>30</sup> It has been said that "it is not the electorate that does not want women, so much as the 'selectorate'..."<sup>31</sup>

It would appear from the statements made by the various political parties that not having women candidates is now seen as an electoral liability.

Women are less identified with the sources of strong political disillusionment that are around. They are seen as honest, not captive and better placed to understand the problems of ordinary people living through a recession.<sup>32</sup>

(ii) Factional allegiances

Although all parties are prone to factionalism, this is a particularly enduring feature of the Labor Party. The fact that preselection may be linked more to "faction" than to gender accounts in part for the different experience of women and men in that party. While it is still arguably the case that in all the major political parties, power and patronage tend to be exercised by men for the benefit of men, the need to balance the factional interests creates an extra dimension in the Labor Party.

This was referred to recently by Alan Ramsey, writing on the withdrawal of Jennie George, from Labor's Senate ticket for the next election, despite her endorsement by the Prime Minister.<sup>33</sup> It would appear from Ramsey's article that decisions made along factional lines underlay George's decision. Ramsey said: "Her actual entry into Parliament, however, was wholly secondary when it clashed with the best interests of the factional organisers." Later in the same article, Ramsey makes it clear that although factional interests often predominate, men nonetheless seem to fare better than women:

In the coming election, two women are retiring ... their seats have gone to men ... Up in Queensland, Mary Crawford will be battling to hang on to her seat, after a redistribution took almost half her Labor votes and gave them to the neighbouring David Beddall, a Labor colleague. It was daylight robbery, but Crawford could do nothing to stop it or get redress in any way from head office. Women remain the chattels of politics.

There have been a number of other notable instances where men have been preselected in safe seats despite the introduction of the quota system: retiring MPs

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<sup>30</sup> These findings were presented at pages 57-58 in 'Women in Politics: Relevant Research', a paper prepared for the JSCEM by Shelley McInnis of the Social Policy Group of the Parliamentary Research Service in December 1993. This paper appears as Attachment 3 to the JSCEM Report, *Women, Elections and Parliament*, pp55-85.

<sup>31</sup> V Randall, *Women and Politics: An International Perspective*, (2nd Ed), MacMillan Education, 1987 cited in Shelley McInnis' paper *ibid*, at p73.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Robb, National Director of the Liberal Party, quoted in *Half Way to Equal* *op.cit.*, at p161.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Ramsey, 'Jennie George, left out in the cold', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 20 1995.

Wendy Fatin and Jeanette McHugh were replaced with men; Martin Ferguson secured preselection in Batman; Steve Bracks in Williamstown; and Mike Hatton in Blaxland. Gabrielle Chan wrote in *The Australian* that 'Blaxland was the 11th safe ALP seat since the quota system was established in 1994 where a male candidate had won after another retired or lost endorsement'.<sup>34</sup>

Whether men are put forward in preference to women because of factional allegiances, or whether tradition and history account for patronage being extended more often to men, women clearly are not present on a proportional basis in the major political parties. It would seem that the observation that "the definition of what makes a "good woman candidate" is narrower than the definition of what makes a "good candidate" ..." holds true.<sup>35</sup>

### *Voting systems*

According to a recent study of 23 democracies 'the type of electoral system is the most significant predictor of the number of women elected'.<sup>36</sup> In general, the number of women is higher in the Senate and Legislative Councils than in the lower houses. This fact is commonly considered to be a consequence of proportional representation, the system most used in upper house elections. In the proportional representation system used in Australia, a quota is established and all candidates who receive the minimum number of votes necessary are declared elected. At present only Tasmania and the ACT (from 1995) use a proportional system, in the Lower House (the Hare-Clarke system).

It is interesting to note that when Millicent Stanley-Preston was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1925 there were multi-member Lower House electorates. In 1927 this system was changed to a system of single member constituencies. Preston-Stanley, who had been one of five members for Eastern Suburbs then became a candidate for the single member seat of Bondi. She was defeated at the 1927 election.<sup>37</sup>

International research also shows that women's representation in Parliaments is usually higher where proportional representation is used than where there are single member electorates. This is generally true in Australia too.<sup>38</sup>

An analysis of how the proportional system benefits women was provided by

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<sup>34</sup> Gabrielle Chan, 'ALP call to recruit women', *The Australian*, 21 May 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p14.

<sup>36</sup> Lisa Young, MA thesis in political science, *Women in National Legislatures: An evaluation of the strategy of pursuing power for women through the legislative route in Nordic and Anglo-American Democracies*, Carlton University Toronto, 1994, cited in the Final Report of the Task Force of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians Group at page 12.

<sup>37</sup> M Sawyer and M Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, (2nd Ed), Allen & Unwin, 1993, p102.

<sup>38</sup> *Every woman's guide to getting into politics*, prepared by Kate Tulley for the Office of the Status of Women, 1995, p13.

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Nicholson in an article on women's representation in the Norwegian Parliament.<sup>39</sup> In concluding the author writes:

The most important characteristic of this system is its responsiveness to political opinion, and consequently to change. Not only is it fair, but ... voters insist that it is seen to be fair. The position of women in society as a whole is therefore more accurately reflected in Parliament than under other electoral systems. In times of transition, the system accommodates change by allowing it to be made gradually. Parties are not forced to reject male candidates outright if they select women, still less to unseat men in order to elect women, even when implementing gender quotas. This characteristic of the electoral system, along with the rate of turnover, has been of much greater importance than the quotas themselves in improving women's chances of election.

Within this system, the open, democratic and accountable process of nomination for parliamentary elections has ensured fairer treatment of women. ... Local autonomy within the parties and local recruitment of candidates have also been important, because they enable women at the grass roots to influence selection and enhance their chances of becoming candidates.

On the basis of the Norwegian evidence, one must conclude that the most fundamental influence on the representation of women is the prevailing conception of democracy and representation, how it relates to the position of women in society and how that relationship evolves over time.

However, though the mechanics of the electoral system cannot of themselves effect change, they are an essential framework within which the democratic process is played out. Norway has an electoral system which does not impose structural discrimination over and above the continuing bias against women in society, and this has been decisive in increasing women's representation.

Mackerras does not agree that a proportional voting system per se guarantees better results for women.<sup>40</sup> In 1990 the number of women elected to the New Zealand Parliament was higher than at least eight European countries which use proportional representation. The explanation according to Mackerras may have more to do with the culture of a particular country than its voting system. This, he says, accounts for the difference between countries such as Finland, which has approximately 39% women representatives and countries such as Greece where women comprise only 5% of the Parliament.

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<sup>39</sup> B Nicholson, 'From interest groups to (almost) equal citizenship: ♀'s representation in the Norwegian Parliament', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 46 (2) April, 1993, pp255-263 cited in the Shelley McInnis' paper, op.cit., p85.

<sup>40</sup> Kate Legge, 'Party machine splutters, but women press on', *The Australian*, 5 February 1994.

## Elevation to the Front Bench

In many countries even when women are successfully elected, the number given cabinet or ministerial responsibility is generally small and the portfolios they are allocated tend to be those considered as "soft" such as the arts, community development, sports, culture and consumer affairs. This term reflects a perception that these are less "powerful" ministries - yet many women and men parliamentarians agree that the management of these portfolios can be more difficult.<sup>41</sup>

It is rare to find women being made ministers for areas such as defence, transport, trade, foreign affairs, the economy or the law.<sup>42</sup> This is seen by many as an example of gender stereotyping - either that women are not capable of handling the so-called "tougher", more powerful portfolios or that the "soft" areas are more nurturing and therefore more in keeping with women's traditional roles. An illustration is provided by Wallace in an article in the *Financial Review*,<sup>43</sup> where the portfolios held by federal women parliamentarians, before and after the March election, are examined. Of the portfolios held by the Coalition female frontbenchers, in opposition Senator Newman was spokesperson on defence; Senator Vanstone was Shadow Attorney-General; Senator Moylan was spokesperson on small business and Senator Bishop was spokesperson on privatisation. Once in Government, Senator Newman became the Minister for Social Security; Senator Vanstone became Minister for Employment, Education and Training, and Senator Moylan became Minister for Family Services. 'Only Senator Bishop escaped stereotyping altogether in her junior ministry of Defence Industry, Science and Personnel, but she had to wear demotion from Cabinet to the second X1'.

On the Labor side, before the election Dr Lawrence was Minister for Health; Senator Crowley was Minister for Family Services; and Hon J McHugh MP was Minister for Consumer Affairs. Wallace says of this allocation: 'In sex stereotyped terms, the three ministries could be shorthanded nursing, mothering and shopping respectively'. There is not much difference in the allocation of portfolios in the Opposition front bench following the election: Dr Lawrence is spokesperson on the environment; Senator Macklin is spokesperson for family services with added responsibility for the aged and community services; and Senator Neal is spokesperson for consumer affairs.

The United Nations publication, *Women: Challenges to the Year 2000*, describes women's worldwide predominance in education, health and social welfare portfolios as "ghettoisation".<sup>44</sup> Criticisms of this nature will continue while portfolios are not

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<sup>41</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit, p35.

<sup>42</sup> Although Dame Margaret Guilfoyle was appointed Federal Minister for Finance in 1980.

<sup>43</sup> 'When power counts, old habits win', *Financial Review*, 25 March 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Fitzherbert, 'Cabinet clout a must for women', *The Australian*, 10 April 1995.

always allocated strictly according to professional expertise.

In countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway, where there is a high percentage of women in the Parliament (the figure ranges from 35% to 40%) there is also a high proportion of women cabinet ministers (33%, 22% and 44% respectively).<sup>45</sup>

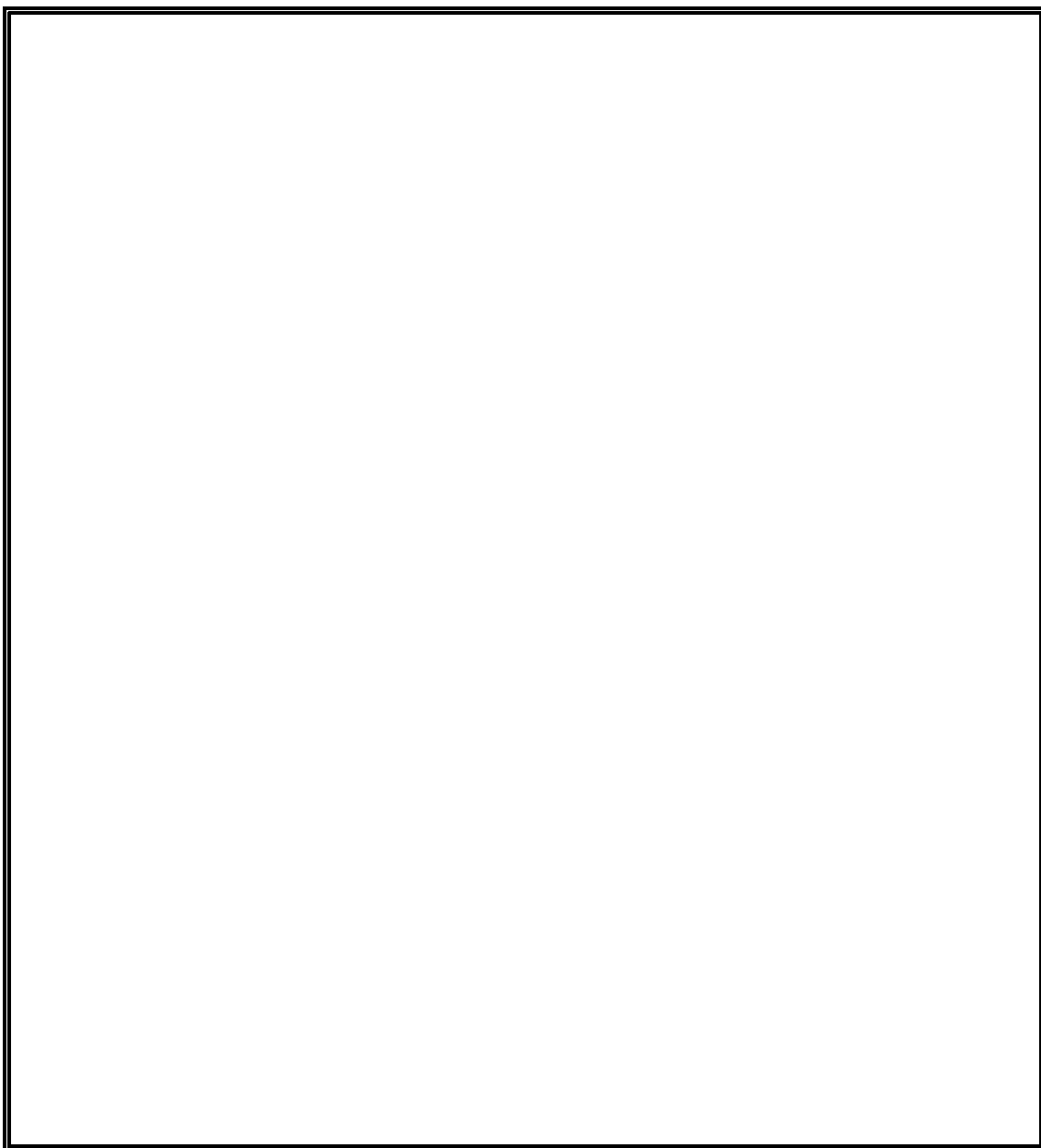
The various levels of women's participation in the political process is neatly captured by Figure 4 below.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Figure 4**

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<sup>45</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p39.





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### 3 WHY SHOULD THERE BE A GREATER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ?

In September 1989 the Division for the Advancement of Women (of the UN Commission on the Status of women) organised an Expert Group Meeting in Vienna on Equality in Political Participation and Decision Making. This Group put forward five basic arguments for women's increased participation in the political process.<sup>47</sup>

In summary these are:

*Democracy and egalitarianism:* women constitute at least half of any population and should be represented proportionally. The recognition that women's rights to full citizenship must be reflected in their effective participation in the various levels of political life.

There is no uniform view however on what form this "representation" should take. Is it necessary for women to be represented proportionally simply because they are half the population ? or because women parliamentarians are integral to ensuring issues which concern women in the community at large will be addressed ? Support can be found for both arguments across the political spectrum and between men and women.

Those who believe that the numerical factor is more important do not see themselves representing any one view over another and do not think that women's interests can only be represented by women. Others are of the opinion however that women in politics are obliged to represent women almost as a special interest group, given that they, as women, have a better understanding of issues which affect women and that they can bring a different, female point of view on more general issues to the debate.

Rosemary Whip examined this issue as part of a larger study on Australian women parliamentarians elected between 1921 and 1981.<sup>48</sup> The major findings from her investigation were:

- Less than half (42%) of the women parliamentarians in this study perceived their role as representing women as a special interest group rather than as an individual citizens.
- However this perception has changed over time. Only 34% of the women elected prior to 1977 saw their role in this way, compared with 55% of those elected between 1977 and 1981.
- This increase has been greater among women elected to Federal Parliament than among those elected to State Parliaments. This was not always the case.

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<sup>47</sup> This information comes from a book based on the material prepared for the Expert Group Meeting. *Women in Politics and Decision Making in the Late Twentieth Century: a United Nations Study*, United Nations Office at Vienna, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Netherlands, 1992, pxii.

<sup>48</sup> Rosemary Whip, 'Representing Women: Australian Female Parliamentarians on the Horns of a Dilemma', *Women & Politics*, Vol 11(3), 1991, p4.

Prior to 1977 the proportion of women in State Parliaments who saw their role as representing women was slightly higher than that of women in Federal Parliament (36% to 29%). The situation was reversed however between 1977 and 1981. 71% of women elected to Federal Parliament during this period saw their role as representing women as a special interest group compared with only 50% of those elected to State Parliaments.

- A considerably higher proportion (83%) saw some concern for women as part of their parliamentary role. This proportion was high both among women who entered Parliament prior to 1977 (84%) and among those who entered between 1977 and 1981 (82%).
- Indications of concern took three forms: 22% spoke only of a general concern for women; 48% said that they took an interest in women's issues and 43% saw their role as providing "another point of view". (There was some overlap between these last two groups.)

It would appear that support for the view that women parliamentarians should act "for women" is not as great as it was in the 80s and that most current women (and men) parliamentarians see representation of the electorate as equally, if not more important, than representation of gender-specific issues.<sup>49</sup>

*Legitimacy:* women's under-representation can be dangerous for the legitimacy of the democratic system since it distances elected representatives from their electorate and more particularly from the women among their electors.

*Differences in interests:* women are conditioned to have different social roles, functions and values. It is reasonable to believe that women are more aware of their own needs and are therefore better able to press for them.

*Changing politics:* women politicians, if there are enough of them, can change the focus of politics by broadening the agenda to include issues such as child care, domestic violence, women's health etc.

*Efficient use of human resources:* women comprise half the world's pool of potential talent and ability. In short, without the full participation of women in decision making, the political process will be less effective than it can, and should be, to the detriment of society as a whole.

These arguments were referred to recently by Senator Kernot in a motion put to the Senate noting the 50th anniversary of women entering the Federal Parliament.<sup>50</sup>

Two other reasons given in the Coopers and Lybrand Report for why there should be a greater representation of women are:

- a male-dominated decision-making body may deliver different outcomes for women and men;

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<sup>49</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p36.

<sup>50</sup> Senate Parliamentary Debates, 30 September 1993, pp 1569-1570.

- women have the potential to improve politics.<sup>51</sup>

While it is often felt that the mere presence of women will enhance the way in which the parliamentary process is perceived, this expectation can however be a double-edged sword for successful women candidates. A point often made by women politicians themselves: 'I have never wanted to be a member of God's police and I don't think its fair to ask other women to, in a sense, raise the standard for the whole of the community' - Dr Carmen Lawrence and 'There is an expectation in the public that women politicians are going to do it better than men ... there is an expectation that the women are not going to be as bad as the men in the worst aspects of the political stereotype, and they are almost expected to sprout wings and be angels' - Kathy Sullivan.<sup>52</sup>

Harari notes in her article that: 'Women politicians are expected to be both tough and tender, to be strong enough to play by the rules yet never dare become involved in muckraking or mud-slinging. In many cases this proves to be an unachievable mixture'.<sup>53</sup>

Another dilemma for women parliamentarians is the attention they receive.

Because there are so few women, there is a tendency for the spotlight and the blowtorch to be applied to them, per head of parliamentarian, more than applies to men ... there is often a certain amount of I-told-you-so glee when women turn out to be less than perfect ... Women are still regarded as being representative of the whole female half of the human race. So when they do something wrong or mediocre, they say "What's the point of having women there ?"<sup>54</sup>

It would appear from various surveys that there is community support for increasing the number of women parliamentarians. In a Saulwick poll conducted in late October 1994,<sup>55</sup> 1000 people were asked:

- would Parliaments' ability to make good laws be improved (not be improved) if they included more women ?
- would the behaviour of parliamentarians be improved (not be improved) if they included more women ?
- is the Labor party decision to introduce a quota a good (not a good) idea ?

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<sup>51</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p10.

<sup>52</sup> Fiona Harari, 'Women in Retreat', *The Australian*, 22 April 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, quote attributed to Janine Haines, the former leader of the Australian Democrats.

<sup>55</sup> Anne Davies, 'Most voters want more women MPs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November 1994.

The results showed a majority believed that the quality of law making and standards of behaviour would lift. (The law making question was supported by 71% of women and just under 54% of men. The behaviour question was supported by nearly 75% of women and 62% of men). More than 60% of women thought quotas were a good idea, while more men (48%) opposed the introduction of a quota system. 65% of Labor voters supported the quota system, compared with 45% of Democrat voters and 41% of Coalition voters.

*Breach of international obligations:* Countries, such as Australia, which are signatories to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, may be in breach of their international law obligations if they do not increase the number of women in parliament. Three New Zealand women, including a former parliamentarian, Marilyn Waring, plan to petition the United Nations Human Rights Committee on this point.<sup>56</sup> They will be relying on a test case (*Andrews v Law Society of British Columbia*) in which the Canadian Supreme Court found that due to their inequality, women are being discriminated against. However before the United Nations Human Rights Commission can be petitioned, it is necessary to exhaust all domestic remedies. To this end, the women were first asking the New Zealand Parliament to redress the gender imbalance in proposed amendments to the New Zealand *Electoral Act*.

In *Three Masquerades: Essays on equality, work and human rights*,<sup>57</sup> Waring provides an account of how the matter progressed: the petition was tabled in the New Zealand Parliament in September 1994 in time for the 23 November meeting of the Electoral Law Committee. In June 1995 when Ms Waring inquired as to what progress had been made, she was informed that the Committee intended to make a decision on the petition when it had finished its consideration of the Electoral Reform Bill. Consideration of the Bill was done in October 1995. In December 1995, in response to a question asked in Parliament on the matter, the Committee Chairman stated that the Committee would give the petition further consideration in the new year. In the new year, the Committee referred the petition to the government for 'most favourable consideration'. Waring points out that 'while this is the 'highest recommendation a petition can obtain, it is a non-debatable motion'. On 21 May 1996 the government provided a response via the Minister of Justice, which read:

The Government agrees that the greater representation of women in the House of Representatives is highly desirable. One of the advantages ascribed by the Royal Commission on the Electoral System to an MMP electoral system was that political parties would have an incentive to select party lists that fairly represented the electorate. Section 26 of the Electoral Act 1993 provides for the appointment of a select committee in 2000 to review various aspects of the electoral system including the provisions of the Act dealing with Maori representation. The House of Representatives might consider inviting this select committee to also examine the extent to which party lists

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<sup>56</sup> Debra Jopson, 'Woman's place is in the House: NZ case', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Marilyn Waring, Auckland University Press, 1996, pp132-142.

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have resulted in the better representation of women in the House and what changes, if any, to the electoral system might appropriately be made to further enhance the representation of women. For more immediate attention to be given to the issue, the House of Representatives might also consider inviting the select committee charged with reviewing the conduct of the 1996 General Election to examine the extent to which party lists have resulted in the better representation of women in the House.<sup>58</sup>

Waring concludes this section by stating: 'the government has not heard the last of the petitioners. And we have now, formally exhausted all our domestic legislation'.<sup>59</sup>

The outcome of this matter, if it proceeds to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, could have a number of implications for Australia. The High Court's decision in the *Teoh* case may also need to be examined. In this case the Court held that although a treaty or convention ratified by Australia had not yet been implemented through legislation, ratification itself could be of significance for Australian law.

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<sup>58</sup> Waring, *op.cit.*, p142.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4 HOW CAN A GREATER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BE ACHIEVED ?

It has been estimated that at the rate of progress achieved between 1977 and 1993 in the Federal arena, it would take until the year 2053 to achieve equal numbers of men and women in the Federal Parliament, if no intervention occurred.<sup>60</sup> Some of the ways in which this process can be artificially hastened are:

##### **The introduction of a quota system for women**

The original proposal put forward at the National Labor Women's Conference held in April 1994 was for the Party to guarantee that women would make up a minimum of 40% of parliamentarians in State and Federal Parliaments after the next two rounds of elections. At the ALP National Conference held later that year, agreement was reached that women would be preselected to 35% of winnable seats by 2002. While this definitely is an advance on the present situation, it would have been more so if the decision had been to preselect 35% of women in safe seats. The decision by the ALP was met with mixed reactions by women, as well as men, from both the Labor side of politics and the non-Labor side.

##### *Arguments for*

Those in favour of the proposal rely on the following arguments:

- the length of time it would take to achieve a more proportionate representation without intervention.
- "appointment by merit" fails when applied to the test. In the words of Jim Carlton: "The so-called "merit" ... to get into Parliament and remain there is merit as defined in a system designed entirely according to male criteria for parliamentary representation."<sup>61</sup> Dr Carmen Lawrence has also been quoted as saying that the merit principle had often been "absolutely irrelevant" in the past. "It is about time serving, factional queuing ... or the fact that someone had a particular position in the union movement."<sup>62</sup>
- quota systems are used in a number of countries already and have not had a detrimental effect. Some examples of these are:
  - Canada's Labour Party, the New Democratic Party, has adopted the 50-50 strategy following the lead of several Scandinavian countries;

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<sup>60</sup> Jim Carlton in his article 'Women in Parliament', in *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration*, 'Women, organisations and economic policies', Joint publication of the Royal Institute of Public Administration Australia and the Affirmative Action Agency Canberra at page 13. The former Prime Minister, Mr Keating, also referred to this time frame in his speech opening the Conference on Women, Power and the 21st Century, held in Melbourne on 3 December 1993.

<sup>61</sup> Jim Carlton, *op.cit.*, p16.

<sup>62</sup> Dr Carmen Lawrence quoted by Irina Dunn in 'Postscript - Women in the House'. This paper was originally presented at the second Women into Politics Workshop on 22 August 1993. The collection of papers given at that Workshop entitled 'Aspirations and Obstacles, 1994, p33.

- the British Labour Party set the same target in October 1993. Part of its strategy to achieve this is the reservation of certain safe seats for women candidates. The policy required the regions to draw up women only short lists in half their seats where a sitting Labour MP would be retiring, and in half the winnable marginal seats. In the Final Report of a Task Force of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group, it is noted that:

Although there have been 35 all-women selections already, this policy has caused considerable controversy, resulting in a male would-be candidate taking the party to an industrial relations tribunal, alleging breach of the *Sex Discrimination Act*. It is not intended to continue the policy after the next general election.<sup>63</sup>

The industrial relations tribunal ultimately found that the policy constituted discrimination on the grounds of sex and as such was illegal. No challenge to the decision was made.<sup>64</sup>

- at the March 1994 Italian elections, parties were required to ensure that at least 30% of their candidates were women.<sup>65</sup> However, in September 1995, the Italian Constitutional Court declared anti-constitutional the provisions contained in the electoral laws reserving quotas to a specific sex. In the opinion of the Court, sex and other differences should be irrelevant when selecting candidates for election and selection should always comply with the absolute principle of equality.<sup>66</sup>
- An Australian example of such a quota system is that introduced by the ACTU, which decided at its Congress held in August 1993 to ensure that 25% of the ACTU Executive positions would be filled by women, and that this figure would rise to 50% by 1999.<sup>67</sup>

### *Arguments against*

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<sup>63</sup> 'Blair prepares to drop all-women short lists', *The Independent*, 26 July 1995 cited in the Final Report of a Task Force of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group, March 1996, pp19-20.

<sup>64</sup> Piers Ackerman, 'ALP should heed UK's gender case', *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 January 1996.

<sup>65</sup> Kate Legge, op.cit., 5 February 1994.

<sup>66</sup> *Bulletin of Legal Developments*, Issue No 1, 22 January 1996, p2.

<sup>67</sup> Sheryle Bagwell, 'Libs, ACTU act affirmatively', *Financial Review*, 1 September 1993.

Those against the proposal say that:

- it is a way of engineering outcomes.
- people should be chosen on merit not on gender (or any other specified criteria such as race, religion etc).
- there is risk that women preselected in this way will be seen as "token appointments".

This view was expressed by a number of high profile women from both the private and public sectors, who voiced their disapproval of the quota system at the Women in the Workplace Conference held in Sydney in October last year.<sup>68</sup> Another potential problem with this system is the risk of "putting a woman in a job simply to comply with a quota system may in practice see an inappropriate person get the job".<sup>69</sup> There is also a risk that if a woman is selected merely because she is a woman and she fails, the whole idea of selecting more women will be discredited. (There was support however amongst these women for the introduction of targets, which are indicative as opposed to quotas, which are mandatory).

- it is counter-productive to treat men and women differently.

The question has also been raised as to whether such a quota system breaches anti-discrimination principles and legislation. A number of lawyers specialising in discrimination law have said that the quota system appears to discriminate against men on the basis of their sex. If this is the case, unsuccessful male candidates may be able to claim damages if the legislation is not amended or appropriate enabling legislation introduced. However a number of other lawyers specialising in the field, disagree. Their view is that anti-discrimination legislation does not make it unlawful for a political party to discriminate on the grounds of sex.<sup>70</sup>

### Weighted votes

According to a newspaper article in 1994, a proposal had been put forward by the Labor Right, which involved a weighting of votes cast in favour of a woman, in any seat throughout the State, to be used in preselection contests. However, the weighted votes would only apply to those cast by the Administrative Committee. As the Administrative Committee was not represented in branch preselections, this would mean amending the rules to allow a certain level of representation by the Administrative Committee and eliminating the practice of 100% rank and file ballots in branch preselections. The Left was reported as not being in favour of the proposal as it could be seen as taking away the only chance of the rank and file to have its

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<sup>68</sup> Fiona Carruthers, 'Female high fliers vote against quota', *The Australian*, 18 October 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Ann Forward, Director of the Commonwealth Merit Protection and Review Agency, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Adrian Bradley, 'Female MPs quota plan may backfire', *The Australian*, 17 September 1994.



say.<sup>71</sup>

In 1995 there was cross-factional support for a rule to weight preselection votes by 20% in favour of women contesting seats where the incumbent Labor MP is out of the running through redistribution, death, retirement or defeat in the early rounds of preselection voting. However, the Left wanted the advantage to be given to women in all State Labor preselections, not just those where the sitting MP was retiring. This view was not endorsed by the Right, which considered that such a proposal would go to far and not be acceptable to the majority of party members. This issue was put to the State Conference on 30 September 1995.<sup>72</sup> The new system of preselection was supported by the Conference insofar as vacant seats were concerned. It rejected a Left motion to extend this to all seats, which would have threatened sitting MPs. The new system means a woman candidate's vote will be multiplied by 1.2 when she is up against a man in a preselection. Not everyone was in favour of such a change. Dr Lawrence was reported as opposing any weighting formula for women and Hon M Burgmann MLC as saying 'the motion that went through was tokenistic and will do very little to put more women in Parliament'.<sup>73</sup> And even those who welcomed the move felt that a 20% weighting would not achieve much and that the weighting should have been 33%, and that the system should apply to all seats not just those where a member was retiring.<sup>74</sup>

### Reserved seats

A system of reserved seats means that a certain number of seats in the Parliament are earmarked for a particular group which might otherwise be unrepresented or under-represented. Only candidates belonging to that group can compete for these seats. A number of countries have adopted this system in relation to women: Pakistan (20 of the 237 seats), the United Republic of Tanzania (15 of 244 seats in the National Assembly) and, in the past, Bangladesh (30 of the 330 seats) and Egypt (31 of the 360 seats).<sup>75</sup>

A suggestion made by the Minister for Trade, Senator McMullan, in August 1994, was in keeping with this concept. He said party preselection rules should be changed so the newly formed seat of Fraser in the ACT could be contested by women only. This view was met with both praise and criticism.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gabrielle Chan, 'Affirmative action may drift on raft of reforms', *The Australian*, 9 June 1994.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Sharp and David Humphries, 'ALP set to give female candidates a head start', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September 1995.

<sup>73</sup> Mark Coultan, Nathan Vass and Jodie Brough, 'Vote move not enough say women', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October 1995.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Figures from 'The participation of women in the political and parliamentary decision-making process' prepared by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1989, and cited in *Women in Politics and Decision Making in the Late Twentieth Century: a United Nations Study*, op.cit., at pp43-44.

<sup>76</sup> 'Women only poll floated', *Telegraph Mirror*, 2 August 1994.

## Direct appointment

Another method to guarantee the representation of women is by direct appointment to Parliament. In the Inter-Parliamentary Survey of the 150 existing national Parliaments in 1991, 6 countries were identified as using this system.<sup>77</sup> These are: Dominica, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Saint Lucia and Uganda.<sup>78</sup>

## The 'Carlton proposal'

In mid-1993 while still a member of the House of Representatives, the Liberal MP Jim Carlton put forward a radical proposal for achieving a greater representation of women. He suggested that the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* be amended to allow voters to elect equal numbers of men and women to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. To avoid simply doubling the number of politicians, he proposed that the number of electorates be halved. At election time the voters would be given two lists of candidates - one for the male candidates and another for the female. The voters would fill out a separate ballot paper for each group and the winning candidate in each list would jointly represent the electorate. In this way the House of Representatives would be made up of equal numbers of men and women. A similar procedure would be used in the Senate.<sup>79</sup>

Generally this proposal was not well received. Given that it would require many standing male parliamentarians to relinquish their seats, it is not difficult to understand why men did not embrace the idea. While many women also found this unacceptable, their point of view was split more along party lines. Non-Liberal women rejected the proposal as unrealistic and Liberal women rejected it on the grounds that women should succeed on merit, not by quota.<sup>80</sup>

In more recent times similar proposals have been put: the Australian Women's Party has a policy which includes changing the Constitution so that voters would elect one male and one female candidate in each seat. To avoid adding to the number of parliamentarians, seats would be clustered; and the Women Into Politics group has also asked the Federal Parliament's Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to investigate two-member electorates, with a male and female MP apiece.<sup>81</sup>

**More general measures:** Other more general measures which may be of assistance include:

*Changes to the Parliamentary environment:* Changes to both the Parliamentary

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<sup>77</sup> Irina Dunn, op.cit., p30.

<sup>78</sup> Countries listed in 'Women, Elections and Parliament', a paper prepared by Consie Larmour of the Parliamentary Research Service for the JSCEM in 1994 at p16.

<sup>79</sup> Jim Carlton, op.cit., at p15.

<sup>80</sup> Consie Larmour, op.cit., p17.

<sup>81</sup> Debra Jopson, 'Verdict on women's party: it won't work', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 1995.

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premises and procedures would be of assistance to women - specifically the provision of child care and family facilities in the building.<sup>82</sup> These issues were recently addressed by the South Australian Joint Committee on Women in Parliament in its Interim Report.<sup>83</sup> The Committee was concerned to ensure that any suggestions made regarding the physical environment of Parliament House could be implemented, if approved, during renovations currently underway. The main suggestions concerned the provision of child care and a family room, where parliamentarians might spend time with their children and family, and where the children might watch TV or complete their homework. The aim of such proposals is to arrive at a better balance between parliamentary and family life. The timing of sitting days and the practice of late night sittings, areas constantly raised as being barriers to increased participation by women in Parliament, were also being examined by the South Australian Parliamentary Committee. Certain changes along these lines were introduced by the former Coalition government in the 50th New South Wales Parliament.<sup>84</sup>

There were five recommendations made in the South Australian Joint Committee Interim Report. These were:

- 1 Parliament investigate with other organisations (such as the Casino, Adelaide College of TAFE, which also have later working hours) the feasibility of joint child care facilities;
- 2 During the current refurbishment of Parliament House, urgent consideration be given to the allocation of space within the parliamentary building for a room or suite of rooms in which Members could meet with their families;
- 3 Strategic planning should also take place to ensure that adequate consideration is given to the future needs of members and their families;
- 4 The system of the days of sitting, and the sitting hours be changed to make them more suitable for Members with family responsibilities. Due consideration should be given to school holidays in the organisation of sitting days, and late night sittings should be avoided; and
- 5 Recommendations 1 and 2 be referred to the Joint Parliamentary Services Committee and Recommendation 4 be referred to the Standing Orders Committee of each House to explore how they can best be implemented and to report back to its respective House.

In the conclusion to the Joint Committee's Final Report which issued in May 1996, the Chair of the Committee stated:

The Committee is dismayed to find that although these

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<sup>82</sup> While child care may also be an important issue for male MPs, it is still more likely that women will have the responsibility for young children.

<sup>83</sup> Interim Report of the South Australian Joint Committee on Women in Parliament, Parliament of South Australia, 5 April 1995.

<sup>84</sup> The former Premier, Mr John Fahey, Media Release, 'New Sitting Hours to Benefit Women and Families', 15 September 1994.

recommendations were made over a year ago, no action appears to have yet been taken. The Committee can only infer from this lack of response that both the position of women in the State Parliament and their needs, are today accorded as low a priority as ever. The Committee recommends once again that the action specified in the Recommendations of the Interim Report be taken.<sup>85</sup>

*Funding:* As noted earlier raising funds can present an obstacle for women. To overcome this difficulty, special funds for women candidates have been set up in a number of countries. In Canada, the Progressive Conservative and Liberal Parties established funds to provide training programmes and to give financial support directly to women to help pay expenses such as child care and housekeeping.<sup>86</sup> In the United States there is a fund called Emily's List (Early Money is Like Yeast - it raises dough), which has 33,159 members who last year gave more than \$11 million to Democratic female candidates who are pro-choice. This fund has helped put five women into the Senate and 33 in the House of Representatives, but as pointed out by Kingston and Clark in their article,<sup>87</sup> there is still some way to go. Of the 100 Senators, only eight are women (five Democrats and 3 Republicans). Of the 435 members of the House of Representatives, 48 are women (17 Republicans and 31 Democrats). Another American fund is RENEW (Republican Network to Elect Women), which backs only Republican women. With over 100 new women being elected at the 1994 State and congressional elections, the number of Republican women was increased by almost 70%. There is also an Emily's List in the UK.

A similar proposal has been made by Victorian Labor women led by Joan Kirner. The proposal to set up a new body to raise funds for female aspirants to political office was accepted in principle by the Labor Party's national executive in late 1995. The philosophy behind the fund was that it would be: "an arms-length trust run by women from all factions without interference from the party. It would select potential candidates and give them financial and other support to win preselections and then elections."<sup>88</sup> The organisation, Emily's List Australia, became operational in November 1996, is independent of the national executive and will be run by a national committee of 14.<sup>89</sup>

It has also been suggested that the Government could assist in increasing the political representation of women by emulating a measure implemented by the Dutch Government in the 1980s. This involved funding special positions in the political parties to co-ordinate and monitor equal opportunity programmes put in place by the

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<sup>85</sup> Final Report of the Joint Committee on Women in Parliament, Parliament of South Australia, May 1996, pp26-27.

<sup>86</sup> Task Force Interim Report of the 6th Meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group, op.cit., at p70.

<sup>87</sup> Margo Kingston and Pilita Clark, 'Make or break', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 1995.

<sup>88</sup> Margo Kingston, 'New group for ALP women', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 1995.

<sup>89</sup> Jodie Brough, 'Labor women set up power network', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November 1996.

parties.<sup>90</sup> The rationale behind this proposal is that regular monitoring and reporting is essential if equal opportunity programmes are to be effective. As the political parties may not have additional resources available to allocate to a specific task such as this, limited-term funding by the Government may be beneficial. Dr Sawyer suggests that:

the work of the co-ordinators could include issues relating to equal access to the political process for those with family responsibilities and raising media awareness of gender-bias in political reporting.<sup>91</sup>

*Encouraging women to participate:* Another strategy adopted by the political parties is to encourage a greater number of women to put themselves forward. In 1994 the then leader of the Coalition, Dr John Hewson, set up the National Liberal Women's Forum to attract, train and lobby for women candidates. According to Chris McDiven, President of the Liberal Party's Federal women's committee this body is working well and now has 125 women in its programme.<sup>92</sup> The ALP has Status of Women Committees to look at ways of increasing women's participation within the party and as candidates for office.

Information kits have also been made available. Last year the Liberal Party released a document entitled 'Take Your Seats' which was prepared to "encourage and assist women who wish to stand for selection ... It offers tips for campaigning, presentation, speech writing, preparation, public speaking techniques, the things to avoid and those to highlight".<sup>93</sup> In March 1995 the Office of the Status of Women released a multi-party document entitled *Every woman's guide to getting into politics*.<sup>94</sup>

The effort being made by the major political parties to encourage women to participate more in the political process is relatively new. To date much of this work has been done by women's organisations. In 1992, 16 diverse Australian women's organisations<sup>95</sup> formed a coalition "Women into Politics". Its charter is to encourage more women to seek public office and to lobby for changes to practice,

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<sup>90</sup> Dr Marion Sawyer, Associate Professor in Politics, University of Canberra in a paper entitled 'Representation of Women in Decision-Making', 10 December 1994 provided by the JSCEM.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Rochelle Tubb, 'Provan seeks Liberal nod', *Sun-Herald*, 7 May 1995.

<sup>93</sup> *Take Your Seats* prepared by the NSW Liberal Women's Council, 1994, p1.

<sup>94</sup> Kate Tulley, op.cit.

<sup>95</sup> The organisations are: Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women (NSW Division); Australian Federation of University Women (NSW) Inc; Constructive Women; NSW EEO Practitioners Association; Medical Women's Society of NSW; National Foundation for Australian Women (NSW); Soroptimist International (Region of NSW); Women Engineers; Women and Management Inc; Women in Education (NSW Branch); Women in Film and Television (NSW) Inc; Women in Science Enquiry Network Inc; Women Lawyers Association; Women's Electoral Lobby Inc (NSW); Young Women's Christian Association.

structure and culture relating to women's participation.<sup>96</sup> A similar organisation, the 300 Group, exists in the United Kingdom. This is a non-party affiliated organisation with a network of local branches, which conducts training at all levels of political development with the declared aim of achieving 50% female representation in the British Parliament by the year 2000.<sup>97</sup>

Strategies for removing the barriers made by the Task Force of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group in their Final Report<sup>98</sup> is attached at **Appendix B**. The Task Force, formed at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group 5th meeting in Cyprus in 1993, was asked to write a report exploring the barriers preventing women's full participation in Parliament. The Interim Report which was presented to the 6th meeting of the Group, was then circulated to all Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Branches and other parliamentary and women's organizations throughout the Commonwealth to ensure an opportunity for direct input into the document was provided. Following this consultative process, the Report was edited and expanded in light of the suggestions received. The Final Report was presented to the 7th meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Groups held in Colombo in 1995.<sup>99</sup>

## 5 WHAT ARE THE POSITIONS OF THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES ?

The 1994 Coopers and Lybrand Report found that federally the two major parties had the same level of female representation (15%) and that this was a long way behind the Democrats (43%) and New Zealand's Labour Party, where women made up 33% of parliamentarians.<sup>100</sup> Following the 1996 federal election a noticeable divide between the representation of women in the two major parties has become apparent. The national swing to the Coalition saw an increase in female Coalition representatives and a decrease in female ALP parliamentarians. Women now make up 5.8% of ALP parliamentarians (4 in the House of Representatives and 9 in the Senate) compared with Liberal and National Party women who make up 11.6% of Coalition parliamentarians (18 in the House of Representatives and 8 in the Senate). In New South Wales women make up 11.3% of ALP Parliamentarians (9 in the Legislative Assembly and 7 in the Legislative Council) and Liberal and National Party women make up 7% of Coalition parliamentarians (5 in the Legislative Assembly and 5 in the Legislative Council).

In 1994 it was estimated that if the ALP were to meet its 2002 target it had seven years to identify and nominate 54 additional electable women, and if the Coalition wanted to match the ALP's promise, then it would have to find 61 new recruits by

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<sup>96</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p21.

<sup>97</sup> Final Report of the Joint Committee on Women in Parliament, Parliament of South Australia, May 1996, p17.

<sup>98</sup> Appendix II to the Task Force Final Report of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group, March 1996, pp33-40.

<sup>99</sup> 'Bridging the gap', *The Parliamentarian*, LXXVII(1), January 1996, pp67-69.

<sup>100</sup> Margo Kingston, op.cit., 7 October 1994.

2002. If both parties achieved these figures, 115 winnable seats would have been made newly available to women in the intervening eight year period.<sup>101</sup>

### Australian Labor Party

Apart from the quota for 2002, other measures the ALP has in place to improve the representation of women include:

- applying an affirmative action principle in favour of women in all elections other than pre-selections, for three or more party positions, to ensure that at least one third of the positions are filled by women.<sup>102</sup> (This principle is not used exclusively by the ALP);
- having in place Status of Women Committees;
- At the 1993 NSW State Conference the Status of Women Committee put a resolution that in the event of any elected member resigning from their seat, that member was to be replaced by a pre-selected woman candidate. Although this resolution was not carried, it was agreed that if a female candidate resigned she should be replaced by a female.<sup>103</sup>

### Liberal Party

The quota system is not supported in principle by the Liberal Party. In 1994 the then Leader of the Federal Liberal Party, Alexander Downer, said that the Liberal Party would match or exceed Labor's quota of 35% women in winnable seats by the year 2002. This would be achieved, however, by encouraging more women to participate in programmes to educate and train potential candidates for Parliament.<sup>104</sup> Women on the Coalition side of politics eschew the quota system and say they expect to win half the seats on merit.<sup>105</sup>

Most branches of the Liberal Party have in place a requirement that a certain portion of office bearers, delegates and selectors are women. They actively seek and recruit women candidates, provide guidance, support, training schemes for preselection interviews, information kits such as *Take Your Seats* and establish mentor schemes involving existing or past women members. Some States have a current policy to seek out equal numbers of men and women in any preselection contest.<sup>106</sup>

There is a Women's Council which meets monthly and has delegates to the State

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<sup>101</sup> Frank Devine, 'Quota principle courts posterity', *The Australian*, 13 October 1994.

<sup>102</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p23.

<sup>103</sup> Kaye Loder, op.cit., p13.

<sup>104</sup> Louise Dodson, 'We'll match Labor on women MPs - Downer', *Financial Review*, 28 October 1994.

<sup>105</sup> Frank Devine, op.cit.

<sup>106</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p23.

Council and there are minimum requirements for representation of women on State Council and, in particular, party positions.

In an address to a Liberal Women's Forum in Brisbane in 1995, the New South Wales Deputy Leader of the Opposition said 'greater female representation in politics was a matter of life and death for the Liberal Party' and that 'the goal for the Liberal Party must be around 50% of all seats in Australian parliaments held by women within three NSW state elections'.<sup>107</sup> Suggestions as to how the number of women parliamentarians could be increased included:

- a strong commitment from NSW State Council to ensure more women enter politics at every level;
- a strategy to achieve greater parliamentary representation for women within a clear time frame;
- active searching for and training of women to stand for preselection throughout the State;
- a candidates review panel based on the Victorian model which processes candidates for their suitability; and
- State Executive to take a strategic look at nominating women in particular seats to ensure that we meet our target of 45% to 55% in 12 years. This would include restricted pre-selections.<sup>108</sup>

Press coverage at the time would seem to indicate that these proposals met with a somewhat hostile reaction.<sup>109</sup> When the proposals were put to the NSW State Council in November 1995 they were defeated, although a resolution was adopted supporting the goal of having more women in Parliament and directing the party's State Council to find ways of lifting women's representation.<sup>110</sup>

A number of reasons besides the massive swing against the former Labor government have been given by those within the Liberal party for the success of Coalition women at the 1996 federal election. Judi Moylan, the Liberal Party's spokesperson on women's affairs, is reported to have said that 'the victories of Liberal women were

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<sup>107</sup> Hon R Phillips MP, Media Release, 'Liberals must preselect more women immediately', 23 October 1995.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> 'Lib push for 50% female MPs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1995; 'Top Liberals get heated over women MPs quota', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1995; 'Women MPs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1995; 'The lost women of the Liberal Party', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 October 1995; 'Push for more women MPs gains pace', and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 October 1995.

<sup>110</sup> Bernard Lagan, 'More women MPs but no quotas, party decides', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1995.



part of a carefully calculated campaign strategy'<sup>111</sup> and according to Chris McDiven, head of the Liberal Party's women's section, 'the Liberal Women's Forum had been working quietly to recruit and prepare female candidates to run for public office'.<sup>112</sup>

## National Party

In the 70s there was an affirmative action strategy introduced into the National Party Constitution in relation to membership of the Central Council. While it did not require that one of the existing positions be given to a woman, two new positions were created and it was specified that one should go to a woman.

In 1992 a women's committee of the National Party was successful in bringing forward through to the Federal Council a specific Women's Policy and at the 1993 NSW Conference a special seminar devoted to women's issues was held.

At the Party's national conference in 1994, the Federal Deputy Leader, John Anderson, said that the National Party should set a target to increase the number of women in Parliament. But this did not mean setting quotas for women, an approach which Mr Anderson described as "demeaning and degrading because it could mean people were chosen on gender instead of merit".<sup>113</sup> A similar sentiment had been earlier expressed by a NSW National MLC, who warned that the National Party would face electoral doom if it did not match the ALP's plan to target more women parliamentarians.<sup>114</sup>

A special session on women in politics was held during the NSW National Party Annual Conference in 1995. The need for the National Party to retain its relevance through greater female representation prompted a 12 month review of practices, procedures, party structure and political culture by the National Party's Women's Committee. This Committee produced a Discussion Paper which was tabled at the State Conference.<sup>115</sup> This Paper proposed that the National Party should:

- create a register of potential female candidates for Federal and State preselection;
- conduct an annual weekend training seminar in Sydney which would provide prospective female candidates with formal and intensive training in media, presentation, preselection and networking skills;
- create a formal mentoring program for Members of Parliament to assist

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<sup>111</sup> D Phillips, 'Women in Australian and American Politics: Some Contemporary Comparisons', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 73 (2), 1996, pp4-11 at p5.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Brad Crouch, 'Nationals call for women as MPs', *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 September 1994.

<sup>114</sup> Hon Jennifer Gardiner MLC, who was the Party's (first woman) General Secretary until 1991 quoted in Irina Dunn's paper, op.cit., p32.

<sup>115</sup> Toni Allan, 'Nationals fail to lure women', *Telegraph Mirror*, 19 June 1995.

women;

- invite each Electorate Council to select at least one woman from the electorate for training and provide assistance to enable that woman to attend the training seminar in Sydney;
- invite each Electorate Council Chair to submit a written report on an annual basis outlining action taken consistently with the aim of increasing the participation of women in the political process;
- invite each Electorate Council to encourage and include at least two women in a field of pre-selection candidates;
- where few opportunities exist for preselecting women in safe seats, the National Party needs to look at preselecting more women for the Legislative Council and the Senate, while identifying electorates where a vacancy may arise in the near future;
- ensure from each of the Federal Electorate Councils, at least one of the Central Council delegates is a woman; and
- when in government, National Party women should be given consideration for positions within the political sphere.<sup>116</sup>

At the March 1996 election, the first female National Party representative, De-Anne Kelly, was voted into the Federal Parliament. Following the resignation of the Hon W Machin in August 1996, there is now only one female National Party representative in the New South Wales Parliament, the Hon J Gardiner, who sits in the Legislative Council.

The smaller parties, such as the Australian Democrats and the Greens, see their relative newness and their open decision making processes as key reasons for the higher representation of women.<sup>117</sup>

### **Australian Democrats**

Three out of five Party Presidents have been women as have many State Presidents. One of the reasons given for the greater representation of women in the Australian Democrats is the method of preselection. The preselection for candidates (and Leaders) is done by a postal vote of all party members in the electorate (Senate candidates are selected in a vote of all Democrat members in the relevant State). House of Representatives candidates are chosen in a ballot of all members in their respective electorates. This system is described by the Party as "living proof that equality of opportunity in politics is achievable".<sup>118</sup> Natasha Stott-Despoja, an

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<sup>116</sup> Kellie Penfold, 'Mentoring favoured in plan to revamp Nats' gender agenda', *The Land*, 29 June 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p17.

<sup>118</sup> Coopers and Lybrand Report, op.cit., p17.

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Australian Democrat Senator from South Australia, is the youngest woman to have been elected to the Federal Parliament.<sup>119</sup> There is now only one Australian Democrat representative in the New South Wales Parliament, Hon Liz Kirkby MLC.

### Greens

According to the Coopers and Lybrand Report the Greens see gender balance as an indicator of the "health" of the party. They appear to maintain a fairly equal representation, without having to take specific measures.<sup>120</sup> Following the March 1996 election, there is now only one female Greens Party representative in the Senate, D Margetts. There are currently no women Green Party parliamentarians in the NSW Parliament.

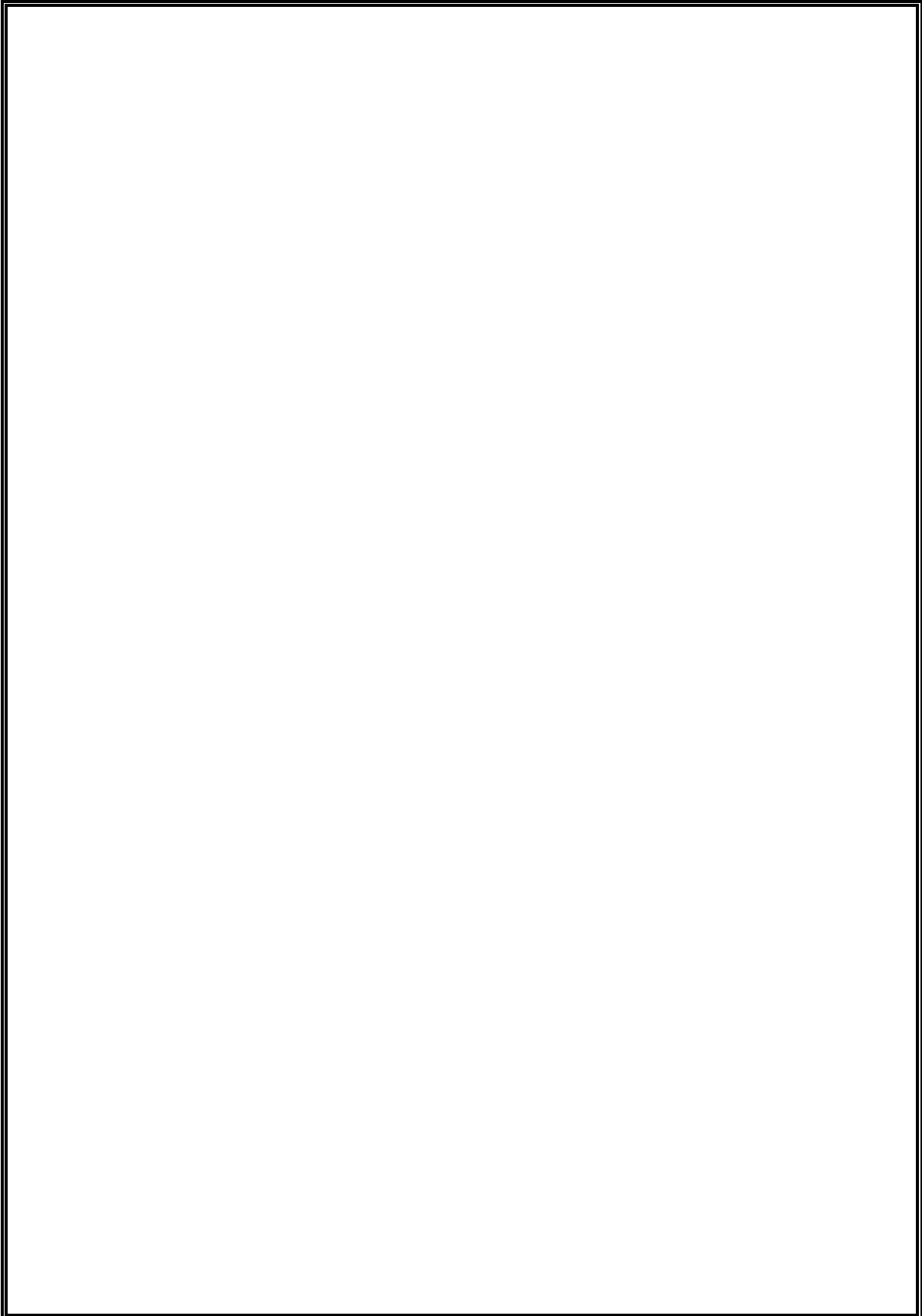
The representation of women on a party basis is shown in Figure 5, which compares the situation in NSW before and after the March 1995 election and as at January 1997.

### *Figure 5*

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<sup>119</sup> According to D Black in *Women Parliamentarians in Australia 1921-1996*, Western Australian Parliamentary History Project, Perth, 1996, p89, Natasha Stott Despoja was 26 years and 2 months when she was elected.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.



6 HOW DOES THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE COMPARE TO THAT OF OTHER COUNTRIES ?

Given that Australia was one of the earliest countries in which women gained the right to vote and to stand for Federal Parliament, progress has been slow. In the Inter-Parliamentary Union studies carried out in 1991 and 1993, women made up 11% and 10.1% respectively of the world's parliamentarians. (For comparative purposes, only the single or lower chamber of each country's national Parliament was examined in these studies). Accordingly in Australia women parliamentarians made up 6.7% of the House of Representatives at 30 June 1991 and 8.2% at 30 June 1993. It should be pointed out however that if both Houses of Australia's Federal Parliament had been examined at 30 June 1993 it would have shown women's representation to be 13.45% and when the Coopers and Lybrand Report was written in 1994, there were 841 Federal and State parliamentarians in Australia, 132 (16%) of whom were women.<sup>121</sup>

Following the 1996 federal election, women now make up 15.5% of the House of Representatives (23 out of 148 parliamentarians) and 30% of the Senate (23 out of 76 senators). Overall the representation of women in both Houses of the federal Parliament is 20.5%. Interestingly, the current representation of women in the New South Wales Parliament also stands at 20.5% (29 out of 141 parliamentarians).

Based on the 1993 Inter-Parliamentary Union figures however, Australia was ranked 35th out of 60 countries, just behind El Salvador (8.3%) and the Syrian Arab Republic (8.4%) and a long way behind the top four countries Finland (39%), Norway (35.8%), Sweden (33.5%), and Denmark (33%). Canada had 13.2%, the USA 10.8% and the United Kingdom 9.2%. Women were not represented in the lower House of a number of countries, some of which were Antigua, Jordan, Kuwait, Papua New Guinea and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>122</sup>

According to more recent Inter-Parliamentary figures:<sup>123</sup>

- in mid-1995 the average proportion of women in Parliament rose to 11.3% but dropped to 10.4% in 1996;
- Australia was ranked 49th (9.5%) still just behind the Syrian Arab Republic (9.6%) and a long way behind the Nordic countries which continued to elect the most women to parliament - Sweden 40.4%, Norway 39.4%, Finland 33.5% and Denmark 33%;
- China, which has the largest parliament in the world with close to 3,000 MPs, has twice the world average with 21% of women MPs. Canada had 18%, the United States had 10.9% and the United Kingdom was equal with Australia on 9.5%; and
- women were not represented in the Assemblies of 12 countries: Bhutan;

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<sup>121</sup> Coopers and Lybrand, *op.cit.*, p5.

<sup>122</sup> These figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union Studies presented in the Research Note by Consie Larmour, *op.cit.*

<sup>123</sup> 'IPU data reveal a decreasing number of women in world's Parliaments', Press Release of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 16 September 1996.

Comoros; Djibouti; Federated States of Micronesia; Kiribati; Kuwait; Mauritania; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Saint Lucia; Saint Kitts and Nevis and the United Arab Emirates.

The results of a survey undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on women in political parties; electoral systems and procedures affecting women's chances to become elected representatives; and positions of leadership held by women in Parliament will be presented in February 1997.<sup>124</sup>

Assessing the global data gathered by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Expert Group Meeting convened by the UN Commission on the Status of Women concluded in 1992 that:

... the representation of women in Parliament, although increasingly slowly, is still low ... If progress were to continue at the present rate, it would be well into the 21st century before even the 1995 targets (30% set by the Economic and Social Council of the UN) were met.<sup>125</sup>

A Plan of Action aimed at reducing present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life around the world was adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in March 1994 (see **Appendix C**). This Plan addresses issues such as the conditions necessary for women to participate actively in political life; the legal basis for equality of men and women; and action necessary to promote women's 'political awareness'. The evaluation of the implementation of the Plan is to be undertaken by the Parity Working Group to be established within the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on a five yearly basis.<sup>126</sup>

Looking at the achievements of the Scandinavian countries, the question has to be asked as to why they are more successful. Some of the reasons put forward include:

- the use of electoral systems which are based on proportional representation (which favours the inclusion of women and minority groups) rather than single member electorates;
- the lack of long established male dominated political parties; and
- the application (as early as the 1950s) of affirmative action policies, such as the use of quota systems.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> 'IPU data reveal a decreasing number of women in world's Parliaments', Press Release of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 16 September 1996.

<sup>125</sup> *Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century: A United Nations Study*, op.cit., p18.

<sup>126</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life', adopted in Paris in 1994. Located at the Inter-Parliamentary Union website: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/planactn.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> Consie Larmour op.cit., p12.

It is interesting to note that Finland, the country with the highest proportion of female parliamentarians, has achieved this without using quotas. Reasons given by Finnish female parliamentarians for this are:

- economic necessity meant that more Finnish women entered the workforce than occurred in more affluent countries, such as the United States, resulting in a better educated female workforce; and
- a strong belief that housework and the care of children are tasks to be shared between partners, where possible. This is backed up by a strong government commitment to child care and other essential social services.<sup>128</sup>

In the conclusion to a collection of essays on women's political / public participation in twenty "industrial" or "advanced industrial" countries (Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, France, Spain, West Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, the USSR, Japan and eight Eastern Europe countries), Lovenduski and Hills<sup>129</sup> make a number of observations, many of which could be said to apply to the position in Australia.

These include the following:

- in none of the countries under consideration does women's active political participation take place in the proportions one would expect if the translation from economic to political activities were free from family constraints;
- it was difficult to draw conclusions about processes of candidate selection (and how these may exclude women) but there is no State in which parties select women candidates to stand for election to national legislative office in proportion to their membership of the population - or (except in State socialist societies) in proportion to their membership of political parties.
- scrutiny of national electoral systems suggests that parties in simple plurality systems tend to nominate women for marginal or unwinnable seats and parties in systems of proportional representation often place women at less favourable positions on party lists.
- women consistently appear to do marginally better in systems of proportional representation than in those based on simple plurality.
- it is likely that a large part of the immediate explanation for low numbers of women in national office rests rather with the reluctance of political parties to promote women than with the mechanics of the electoral system.
- nowhere does women's representation at parliamentary level lead to similar representation in the executive policy making organs.

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<sup>128</sup> Margaret Fitzherbert, 'Tote that kid, pass that Bill', *The Australian*, 6 October 1994.

<sup>129</sup> Lovenduski J and Hills J (eds), *The Politics of the Second Electorate: Women and Public Participation* Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981 cited in the paper prepared by Shelley McInnis, op.cit., at p67.

## CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the above that in the Australian context, the representation of women in politics and Parliament has slowly increased and that concerted efforts are now being made to encourage and facilitate the entry of more women. It is recognized that there are many contributing factors as to why women have been represented in fairly low numbers to date. These range from women choosing not to put themselves forward; to financial and social barriers, such as balancing home and family responsibilities to structural barriers such as the lack of support of political parties for women candidates in safe seats.

Political parties and the community at large now seem to accept that women should be present in greater numbers. Some of the reasons given for this view include: the fact that women make up half the population and should therefore be represented proportionally; women make up half the pool of potential talent and ability available in the community and therefore it is a more efficient use of resources; women bring different skills and approaches which can contribute to the overall political debate; women will be able to broaden the political agenda by dealing with issues which may otherwise have not been examined; women need women to represent their interests best or because it is believed that the political process itself would benefit from the presence of more women.

While it is encouraging to note that acceptance of, and support for, greater representation of women has been publicly voiced, it remains to be seen whether actions will be taken which match the rhetoric to date. At the end of the day, as the Expert Group Meeting convened by the UN Division of the Advancement of Women stated:

Equality in political participation and decision-making is one of the major priorities for advancement of women into the 1990s. Without success in this area, other areas of advancement of women will be put at risk. Equity strategies directed at increasing the number of women in decision-making positions have to challenge, simultaneously, outdated ideas of women's place, worth and potential by improving the general position of women in society, and removing their generally lower social status and the low value placed on the work they perform.<sup>130</sup>

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*Women in Politics and Decision Making in the Late Twentieth Century: a United Nations Study*, op.cit., p118.



# ***APPENDIX A***

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# ***APPENDIX B***

Final Report of a Task Force of the Commonwealth Women  
Parliamentarians Group, Appendix II  
Strategies for removing the barriers, March 1996

# ***APPENDIX C***

Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of  
Men and Women in Political Life prepared by the  
Inter-Parliamentary Union