



# National Council of Women of Australia Newsletter June 2009



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the winter edition of NCWA Newsletter. Finally the rains have arrived. We have certainly received a lot of rain in South Australia Hope all of you received your fair share too.

The Governor General of Australia Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Patron of NCWA has accepted our invitation to open the NCWA Triennial Conference and give the keynote address. Early bird registration has closed but please still register. The theme is "Women and Environment" with a range of speakers: Professor Jennifer McKay, Director Centre for Comparative Water Policies & Law UniSA, Sophie Thompson From Gardening Australia, Leanne Liddle Aboriginal Care for Environment, and Ian Kowalick who will discuss the water situation in South Australia. The two historians who are completing the history of NCWA will speak at the conference dinner. Two receptions will be held – one at Government House and the other at Adelaide Town Hall. Currently 68 members have registered, please register and support NCWA. Look forward to meeting all of you in Adelaide in September 2009

NCWA was invited to talk to the Review of Australian Future Tax System Review Panel about NCWA submission on 3 June 2009. At the teleconference Bridget Faye Adviser Economics and I raised the following: increase in single rate of pension, age pension age and simplification of pensioner concession cards. We recommended that

the first \$5,000 income from interest be tax free for retirees, taxation be used to encourage healthy living and eating habits, taxation on Not-for-profit Organisations be reviewed to allow tax exemptions to legitimate NFP organizations and retiree volunteers be given some tax concessions in recognition of their contributions to the economy. The impact of land tax on affordable housing was also raised. My visit to Paris was most productive. The ICW-CIF Board met for five days and General Assembly matters were finalized. I was on the panel that interviewed two women for the position of Assistant Secretary-General. Veronique Chandlee has been appointed ICW-CIF Assistant Secretary-General. The registration forms for ICW-CIF General Assembly in Johannesburg have been circulated to all Councils We will have a respectable representation from Australia. NCWA has not submitted any resolutions for GA but NCWA Board has agreed to second the resolution from NCWNZ on a call to stop sexualisation of children in advertisements etc. ICW has decided to continue with Project Five – O despite the fact that there are now only two organizations left in the partnership - ICW and BPW. They are approaching International Women Lawyers Organisation to join them.

It is with great sadness that I inform members of NCWA of the demise of ICW-CIF Secretary-General. Radosveta Bruzaund on 22 May 2009 in Paris, after being ill for about 6 months. Those of you who have had met her or had dealings with her know her dedication in her service to the ideals,

vision and mission of ICW-CIF. On behalf of NCWA, I have sent condolences to her family.

I also announce the passing of Helvi Sipila ICW Vice President in 1950s and Life Member. She was a remarkable lady who encouraged and mentored ICW and ECICW members. She will remain the symbol of the struggle for women's rights.

The discussions on the National Women's Alliance have continued. The current Secretariat arrangement has been extended to December 2009. Stay tuned for further developments!

Donations for NCWA Virtual Morning Tea now stand at \$1,205 with large donations from NCWNSW, NCW Geelong, NCWACT and Ukrainian Women's Council Noble Park Vic. The donation form is in this Newsletter please support it so that NCWA can bring at least a couple of thousand dollars donation to ICW General Assembly in South Africa. Congratulations to the following members who have been recognized in the Queens Birthday Honour Awards:

- Kathleen Mazzella OAM. For services to the community through raising awareness of gynecological health issues. Kath is a long term member of NCWWA and founder of GAIN
- Jean Thomson OAM President of Australian Church Women and Life Member of NCWACT

Also congratulations to Judith Parker on her investiture as a Dame in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem Knights Hospitalier honouring her for her services to women and human rights.

Go well

*Hean Bee Wee.*

#### The Wellbeing of Australia's Children

The following statement was made to the Parliament on 17 June by Hon Jenny Macklin MP Minister for Housing and Families.

17 June 2009

Today the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released its comprehensive report on children's wellbeing – A Picture of Australia's Children 2009.

The positive news is that there has been a decline in child mortality rates, mostly due to a fall in deaths through injury. There are also favourable trends in some risk and

protective factors, such as an increase in immunisation coverage, decline in teenage births and a reduction in smoking rates among older children. However, on a number of other fronts, the picture is sobering.

The number of children subject to child abuse and neglect remains unacceptably high. Far too many children are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or are victims of assault. The report also shows that outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are far worse than for non Indigenous children across a broad range of indicators. The mortality rate for Indigenous children is more than twice that of other Australian children. They are five times more likely to be born to teenage mothers and have low birth weight. As they grow up, they are 24 times more likely to be in juvenile justice supervision.

It is the right of every Australian child to have a safe, healthy and jappy childhood.

This is what drives the Australian

Government's child-centred family policy.

The best interests of children are a national priority – from the day they are born. If children are to have the best start in life, they need the time and space to bond with their primary care giver. This is absolutely vital for the emotional, cognitive and physical development that is the foundation of lifelong resilience.

Putting the best interests of Australian babies first, the Australian Government has taken the landmark decision to commit \$731 million over five years to Australia's first comprehensive, statutory Paid Parental Leave scheme.

Paid Parental Leave will be available to some 148,000 mothers and primary carers each year so they can spend time with their children in those critical early months. And to provide ongoing support for families, we have introduced significant reforms to keep our children safe and well.

Working collaboratively with the States and Territories, the Australian Government has reached agreement on the development of a national framework to address child abuse and neglect. We are investing \$63 million over four years to establish the first National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

The National Framework represents an unprecedented level of cooperation and commitment between all levels of government and non-government organisations to protect our children.

This includes developing ambitious National Standards for Out-of-Home Care so children who can't be cared for by their parents receive the quality care and support that they need.

As part of the National Framework we are also:

- Implementing national workforce development projects to
- improve the skills and capability of services working with families and children.
- Improving information sharing and data consistency so that vulnerable children and their families do not fall between the cracks.
- Establishing a National Research Agenda for Child Protection.

We are establishing up to eight Communities for Children Plus sites across Australia. Building on the successful Communities for Children model, Communities for Children Plus will provide intensive early intervention services to an additional 1,200 children and families over four years.

We want to work with State and Territory Governments, local communities and families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

We are also committed to making sure income support provided to families is spent in the best interests of children.

In Western Australia, the Australian Government has initiated a trial using income management in child protection cases. In partnership with the State Government, local child protection officers can now refer cases to Centrelink where parents and children would benefit from income management.

Voluntary income management is also operating for individuals and families in these trial locations.

Early indicators are very positive. Families are purchasing more of the goods and services essential to improving their children's health and wellbeing. They are being supported by money management services to help get them back on track.

In Cape York, under the Family Responsibilities Commission Model, and in prescribed communities in the Northern Territory, income management is also having positive results.

The Government understands that non-government organisations working in the field are often best placed to build community resilience.

Today I have announced 50 small-scale, innovative community-based projects across each state and territory with an additional \$3.1 million in Australian Government funding.

We know that supporting children in their early years can make a significant difference to their learning outcomes and establishes the foundation for social and emotional wellbeing. That is why, through our National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children we are providing \$36.6 million over four years to give more vulnerable children access to quality child care through take-up of the Special Child Care Benefit. This special benefit covers the full cost of child care for children at serious risk of abuse or neglect, and enables these children to access care and development in a safe and supportive environment.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data released today also shows that the prevalence of severe disability in children has significantly increased from 1.6 per cent in 1981 to 4.3 per cent in 2003. This obviously places great strain on family carers.

Last night, legislation was passed in the Senate to deliver long-overdue reforms to the complex and overly-restrictive eligibility requirements for financial support for people caring for children with severe disability or medical conditions.

Over the years, the restrictive eligibility requirements for Carer Payment (child) meant carers were denied appropriate financial support. It is so restrictive that, when the Review inquired into the effectiveness and fairness of the payment in 2007, only 3,500 families across Australia were benefiting.

With the Government's reforms - which take into account the level of care required rather than a narrow set of medical and behavioural criteria - we expect an additional 19,000 families will have access to Carer Payment (child) from 1 July 2009. To better meet these needs of children and their parents in local communities, the Government is bringing together our wide range of existing children's, parenting and families' programs into an integrated new Family Support Program.

The Family Support Program is made up of three core service streams:

Family and Parenting Services – early intervention and prevention services for families to strengthen relationships,

develop skills and support parents and children navigating life's transitions; Community and Family Partnerships – more intensive and coordinated support targeted at significantly disadvantaged communities and children at-risk and their families; and Family Law Services – assistance to families to manage the process and impacts of separation in the best interests of children. Underpinning these is the Government's recognition that early intervention is essential to build long-term capacity and resilience in our children and families. We are committed to intervening to prevent a crisis before it happens rather than trying to rebuild broken lives after abuse neglect, family breakdown or learning and health problems have occurred.

The Australian Government is determined to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian children.

To meet our ambitious close the gap targets, COAG has endorsed the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Under this agreement, and with joint investment of \$293 million, 36 Child and Family Centres will be established.

These Child and Family Centres will co-locate the range of maternal and child health, parenting, child care, early learning and development services in the one location, making these important services easier for parents and their children to access.

Many of the 36 Children and Family Centres will be established in priority locations established under the Government's Remote Service Delivery National Partnership, including all four Northern Territory remote centres.

Over the last 18 months the Government has made significant reforms to support children and families. Our continuing commitment to reform will focus on issues including the reduction of violence against women and children, housing and homelessness, disability and mental health. I will also work closely with my colleagues in the Parliament in the crucial areas of health, early childhood care and education. The Australian Government is committed to demonstrating national leadership on these vital issues putting the wellbeing and best interests of children at the heart of all we do.

## **IMPROVED SUPPORT FOR TRAFFICKING VICTIMS**

The Australian Government has announced changes to Australia's anti-people trafficking strategy to provide improved support for victims.

The changes, announced at the second meeting of the National Roundtable on People Trafficking in Canberra, will simplify the framework, enable a wider range of victims to access support and improve services to victims and their families.

The changes to the Government's *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* and the *People Trafficking Visa Framework* recognise the particular vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking and provide a more flexible framework to support victims and their families.

The Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said he was pleased to be introducing the changes to the *People Trafficking Visa Framework*, which have been developed following consultations with a range of stakeholders. "These changes will simplify the framework and, importantly, provide victims and their immediate family members with greater certainty about their immigration status," Senator Evans said.

Minister for the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek, said the changes would enable a wider range of trafficking victims to access support services.

"The expansion of the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program*, along with the Government's appointment of the Red Cross to case manage the Program, will greatly improve assistance to victims," Ms Plibersek said.

Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor said the Government was committed to combating all forms of people trafficking, including trafficking for sexual servitude and labour exploitation. Most victims of trafficking identified in Australia have been women working in the sex industry.

"The changes the Government is announcing today will improve the support available for victims and their families, who have often suffered greatly as a result of the crime, and who are critical to bring offenders to justice," Mr O'Connor said.

The *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* has provided assistance to 131 people since its inception in January 2004.

Changes to the anti trafficking strategy will include:

- extending the initial stage of the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* from 30 to 45 days, and making it available to identified victims irrespective of whether they are willing to assist police. This will provide all victims with an opportunity to recover and seek advice about their future options.
- providing up to 90 days assistance for victims who are willing but not able to assist police, due to factors such as trauma. Where the victims do not hold a valid visa they can be granted a second Bridging F visa.
- access to the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* will be available to identified victims who hold any kind of valid visa so victims do not have to relinquish existing visas in order to receive support.
- providing up to 20 days transitional support so victims assisting law enforcement can consider their future options, seek legal advice, arrange travel and find support networks after involvement in the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program*.
- removing the temporary visa stage in the Witness Protection (Trafficking) visa process, and starting the process before the completion of a prosecution. This will reduce the pathway to a permanent visa for eligible victims by at least two years.
- reducing the threshold for a Witness Protection (Trafficking) Certificate from having made a "significant contribution" to making "a contribution".
- enabling immediate family members who are outside Australia to be included in an application for a Witness Protection (Trafficking) visa.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN**

Women Building Sustainable Futures  
Conference Public Day at the University of  
Sydney on Saturday 28th November 2009  
As part of the 34th Triennial Conference for  
Women Building Sustainable Futures

Conference, the Australian Federation of University Women is holding a Public Day to increase awareness that sustainability of physical and social resources is crucial to the future of all Australians. Attend the Public Day and hear distinguished speakers talk about sustaining your future!

Topics include:

The impact of climate change on Australian life and landscape.

How the built environment can contribute to sustainability.

The challenges facing public training providers in up skilling the population.

How a Bill of Rights may contribute to a sustainable community.

Visit <http://www.afuw.org.au> to register now to be involved in this exciting event.

*From Patricia Karvelas in The Australian  
June 2, 2009*

## **Review of Equal Opportunity Laws**

A decline in women in leadership roles and the ongoing pay gap between male and female full-time earnings has prompted the Rudd Government to review its laws on equal opportunity.

Amid fears things are getting worse for women, Minister for the Status of Women Tanya Plibersek has announced a review of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency and its underlying legislation.

Ms Plibersek said the review would examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency and the legislation in promoting equal opportunity for working women.

"Over the last decade, the EOWA has worked with thousands of large businesses across the country to improve women's opportunities in the workplace," she said. "At the same time, though, we have seen a decline in women in executive leadership roles."

Ms Plibersek said the pay gap between male and female full-time earnings was now 17.2 per cent and many parents were struggling to balance their work and family responsibilities.

"The review will investigate what's working and where we may need a new approach."

She said the Government was keen to promote public discussion regarding these issues and to hear from organisations and individuals.

"There will be broad community consultation with employers, employees, unions, women's advocacy groups and members of the public," Ms Plibersek said. She said the legislation needs to keep pace with the economic, social and legislative changes that have occurred since the last inquiry in 1998.

The review will begin with the release of an issues paper that will signal the start of the consultation process. It will take several months to complete.

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick has encouraged individuals and organisations to participate in the review. She said while women have more than equal educational outcomes compared to men, the vast majority of Australians living on low incomes and social security were women.

She said in ASX200 companies, women hold only 8.3 per cent of board directorships, only four chief executive officer positions and only 5.9 per cent of senior line manager roles.

#### *From NCW NSW report to the June Board meeting*

The year 2010 is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic meeting of women in Beijing where the Platform for Action was formulated. As in Beijing +5 and Beijing +10, there will be a Beijing +15 initiative, with information to be forwarded and presented to the February/March CSW meeting in New York. The theme is Beijing + 15 : Working towards Equality". One single caravan will be held in each capital city, and NCW NSW will be involved in the organization of the Sydney caravan. In addition there is to be an Online Survey for those unable to attend a caravan meeting. NSW sees this as being of great importance. There have been measurable improvements resulting from the +10 deliberations, with many of the issues having been addressed.

*Doreen Todd President NCW NSW*

Other states might like to watch for news of "caravans" in their cities and the opportunities to become involved.

#### *And from NCW VIC Report*

On the 7 May 2009 NCWV held a seminar titled, '*Human Rights - a Health Issue*'. There were four excellent speakers and the

occasion was well attended. It was a great pleasure to welcome our Patron, Mrs Jan De Kretser, who attended in a private capacity as the topic is of professional interest to her.

The first presenter was Liz Bishop from Monash University, Dept. of Medicine and Human Ethics. Her topic was titled '*Feminist Critiques of Human Rights*'. Liz said laws relating to human rights can be changed and are open to interpretation. She pointed out examples of the use of the words, 'man' and 'brotherhood' and linked these to the CEDAW statement relating to women. With regard to the implementation of human rights laws, this will not occur until significant numbers of women of diverse opinion are appointed to all judicial and decision making type positions including committees.

Rachel Ball, a lawyer from the Victorian Human Rights Law Resource Centre Ltd, spoke on '*Outside Classrooms and Courtrooms: The Good News on Human Rights*'. Rachel outlined some stories to illustrate how the Human Rights Charter is used to achieve positive outcomes for individuals based on commonsense decision making, facilitating access to relevant services, constructive change in an organization and the need to address discrimination and exclusion.

Researcher Joy Free represented Women's Health West situated in the Western Region of Melbourne. Joy spoke about three key areas. Women's Health Risks; Human Rights Violations; Collective Human Rights. To illustrate the first two areas Joy presented life stories of two women subjected to violence in their birth families and marriages. Collective Human Rights was depicted by the experience of a recently arrived young, non English speaking refugee woman with severe restrictions on visa work, income and without Medicare. This is the circumstance of many refugees.

Rose Durey, Policy Officer for Women's Health Victoria spoke on their work on health promotion, information and advocacy. They have undertaken extensive consultations for example in law and civil liberties related to the current National Human Rights Consultation. They have developed submissions based on nine areas such as 'Are Human Rights Sufficiently protected in Australia?', 'Which Human Rights should be protected?', 'The Right to Health'. Rose also left a copy of 'Guidelines

for making a submission', an excellent 'how to' document. NCWV will be making a submission.

Great questions were put to the panel and discussion continued over lunch. These are outstanding young women speakers doing highly significant work.

*Mary Allinson Acting President NCWV*

### **Finally, a UN agency for women'**

Lesley Abdela in Britain's "Guardian" Newspaper 27 May 2009.

Many say the UN system has failed the world's 3 billion-plus women – but a new 'super-agency' may bring welcome change

\* This autumn the UN general assembly will vote yes or no to a new 'super-agency for women'; US\$1bn is being discussed as the starter annual budget. More than 300 NGOs have united under the acronym Gear (Gender Equality Architecture Reform) to push for governments and the UN secretary general to set up the new super-agency.

\* The UN sets global standards for human rights, but has no single agency with the resources and clout to work globally to improve the lives of women. As a result, the UN system has badly and unforgivably let down the world's 3 billion-plus women. In 2006 a UN high-level panel set up to recommend reforms in the wake of the 2005 world summit gave the UN nil points for services to women. The panel found the way the UN system works for women "incoherent, fragmented, and under-resourced"

\* Despite generations of international agreements on women's equality, responsibility for improving the lives of the world's women is spread thinner than Marmite across four poorly co-ordinated UN entities – Unifem, DAW, Osagi, and Instraw. Their senior staff are not part of the UN's main decision-making fora. All have minuscule budgets, little power or influence in the UN system and virtually no operational capacity on the ground. Unifem, the largest of the four, has 47 staff and a budget of \$129m to serve the world's three and a half billion women

\* Over the decades important advances have been made for women, but governments and the UN have failed overall to implement the commitments to women's rights they made in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW)

the UN Beijing Platform for Action, UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women in peace and conflict, and in agreements from many UN world conferences, including those on human rights, population and development, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, the millennium summit and millennium goals

(Read full article on

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/may/27/un-super-agency-women>)

### **Commission makes recommendation for an Australian Human Rights Act**

Tuesday, 16 June 2009

The Australian Human Rights Commission has lodged its submission to the National Human Rights Consultation, formalising its key recommendation that the Australian Parliament should enact a national Human Rights Act.

Commission President, Catherine Branson QC said, "Australia needs a system of government which makes sure that all people, no matter who they are, what they do, or where they live, have a safety net to protect their fundamental human rights, and a Human Rights Act would assist achievement of this aim".

President Branson said a Human Rights Act would work to prevent human rights problems before they occur because:

- \* Parliament would be asked to consider human rights when making new laws;
  - \* the Australian Government would be required to respect human rights when developing policy, making decisions and delivering services;
  - \* federal courts and tribunals would have to take human rights into account when interpreting laws;
  - \* if a federal court found that a law was inconsistent with human rights, Parliament would be notified and required to respond; and
  - \* individuals whose human rights were breached would be able to seek remedies.
- In over two decades of experience consulting with people in Australia about their human rights concerns, Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes said the Commission has clearly heard that people care about their fundamental human rights and think that there should be better protection of these rights.

## **Soroptimists – Restoring Dignity**

Do read the newsletter from the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa (the Hospital by the River) which is available from the website [www.fistulatrust.org](http://www.fistulatrust.org)

It tells of how the money donated through the Soroptimist International President's Appeal has been spent. They have built a new café and trained ex-patients to cook and work in it, and have purchased a much needed four wheel drive vehicle. All the improvements will go towards improving the lives of the patients at the hospital and furthering the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin.

The stories are very touching and a wonderful tribute to the work of Dr Hamlin. Tribute is also paid to Margaret Lobo, Soroptimist International President. I was privileged to hear Margaret speak at the Victorian Region conference recently and she showed more photographs of the hospital and the patients and explained about the wonderful work being done there.

*Margaret Smith  
National Representative  
Soroptimist Australia Inc*

## **Contact Information for NCWA**

President: Hean Bee Wee

[hbwee@bigpond.net.au](mailto:hbwee@bigpond.net.au)

Vice President Elizabeth Steeper Sampson

[esteeper@aol.com](mailto:esteeper@comcast.net)

Vice President: Janet Davidson

[janetdavidsonjp@hotmail.com](mailto:janetdavidsonjp@hotmail.com)

Secretary: Pat Booth

[pb75179@bigpond.net.au](mailto:pb75179@bigpond.net.au)

Treasurer: Robyn Venus

[Robyn.Venus@hinckspartners.com.au](mailto:Robyn.Venus@hinckspartners.com.au)

Co-ordinator of Committees

Jan Kinloch [jan@pecs.com.au](mailto:jan@pecs.com.au)

Director of Communications

and Newsletter Editor: Margaret Smith

[lilylangtry@webone.com.au](mailto:lilylangtry@webone.com.au)

NCWA office is at 39-41 Geils Court Deakin  
ACT 2600

[www.ncwa.org.au](http://www.ncwa.org.au)

Phone 02 6285 2337

Contact: [info@ncwa.org.au](mailto:info@ncwa.org.au)