

Australian Federation of University Women

A Voice for Graduate Women



Newsletter

ABN: 93 656 106

863

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Y15762-15

www.afuw.org.au

July 2007

A New Communications System for AFUW

Welcome to the second of our new national Newsletters, which follows the Council Meeting of June 30th. The third Newsletter will follow the October Council meeting and the single 2007 issue of *Graduate Women* will be with by the end of the year.

Notes from the President's Events Diary

1 April: A discussion of election issues for women at the Melbourne AGM of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL).

13 April: WomenSpeak's Melbourne Focus Group on Benefits to the Community of Women's NGOs. Reports from Lesley Cala and Ivy Edwards of focus groups they attended in Perth and Sydney meant that we had good coverage for AFUW input to this Office for Women project.

9 May: Women and Work Choices Roundtable, organized by WomenSpeak, S4W, YWCA and the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW). This meeting was part of the preparation for the Women and Work Choices Report launched at the Face-to-Face meetings of the women's NGO consortia and the Office for Women.

24 May: Inspiring moments from the young women speakers at the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women Coalition Forum on Women Entrepreneurs.

2-4 June: Started Saturday with the joyous occasion of the AFUW-Vic Scholarship Presentations; then made a rapid transit to the Face-to-Face Meeting of the ** members of the WomenSpeak consortium that preceded two days of meetings involving the other consortia and staff from the Office for Women (see more on this below).

26 June: To Adelaide for the Annual Dinner and Bursary Presentation of AFUW-SA. A lively well-attended evening. Guest speaker, Professor Caroline McMillen of the University of South Australia, spoke with wit and energy of the career challenges facing women scientists in 'On Having a Lab of One's Own', using the echo of Virginia Woolf's classic 'A Room of One's Own' to underline her demonstration that the fields of opportunity are not quite level yet for women in the academy.

In Prospect: Looking forward to visiting AFUW-WA in Perth for 3 days later in July to launch the second volume of my edition of *The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore*, and to join Hilary Silbert and AFUW-WA members in their Campus Circuit initiative. This visit will be to Notre Dame University in Fremantle.

The June Meeting of the Consortia and the Office for Women: A Short Historical Introduction

It's now some years since the federal government decided to systematize its dealings with women's NGOs by organizing them into groups gathered under the 'umbrellas' of three of the largest organizations: the National Council of Women (NCWA), Business and Professional Women (BPWA) and the YWCA. These three became Secretariats, contracted to receive and administer government funding on behalf of three consortia respectively named the Australian Women's Coalition, Security4Women and the WomenSpeak Network—a more recent addition being the Rural Women's Network, with the CWA as Secretariat. The role of the consortia is to provide the Government with information and advice on policy matters relating to women. An annual meeting brings all four together for discussion and interchange of ideas and involves consultation with staff of the Office for Women and possibly the Minister, although Julie Bishop was not present at the 2007 meeting

AFUW initially belonged to all three original consortia, but this proved unsustainable and we are now affiliated to Security4Women and WomenSpeak, with Dalma Jacobs (CIR) and Mikele Barrett-Woodbridge (AFUW-SA) representing us on the former and on the latter May Kentish (AFUW-Vic) and myself.

Recently there has been something of a groundswell of dissatisfaction. One reason for this was a perceived downgrading of commitment to women in things like the change of name of the overseeing governmental body from the Office for the Status of Women to the Office for Women (OfW) and its removal from the Department of the Prime Minister to the Department of Family, Community and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA). Another reason was the feeling that the work undertaken by the organizations was increasingly controlled and directed by the interests of the government rather than the interests of the women's groups involved. It was heartening therefore to see that the latter issue was raised in the session when representatives of all 4 consortia met with Julia Burns, Director of the Office since last year, and some of the OfW staff. Promises have been made about allowing more autonomous choice to the consortia on the policy matters they wish to pursue and about establishing a relation that looks more like a partnership. These may be put to the test if they are vigorous in pursuing the eleven recommendations for ensuring a better deal for women in the workplace that form the conclusion of *What Women Want: Consultations on Welfare to Work and Work Choices*, launched on the Saturday evening of the meeting. These begin with recommending annual reports on gender pay equity and end with the need for paid maternity and parental leave. More than 60 organizations contributed to the Report, which endorsed by AFUW at the recent Council Meeting.

You can access the complete Report at <http://www.nfaw.org/social/www/what-women-want>.

Advocacy

Advocacy for a universal system of paid Maternity and Parental Leave, as recommended in the Report mentioned above, is already under way, with a campaign that has drawn support from some unpredictable quarters, such as the magazine *Marie Claire* and the Council for Small Business. AFUW has given its official support to the campaign. Individuals as well as organizations are being urged to sign up, and should you wish, you can do so at <http://www.nfaw.org/social/maternity/support.html>

Some good news: It was pleasing to be able to congratulate the Government on final ratification of the UN Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that cover Children in Armed Conflict and the Sexual Exploitation of Children; also on its swift decision to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Attorney-General, Mr Ruddock has written to assure us that the process of ratification will be pursued as rapidly as possible, given the need to ensure that all Australian laws are compatible with the Convention.

The March Newsletter mentioned writing to the Foreign Minister over reports of maltreatment of Fijian women protesting against the military coup and urging that women be fully involved in the efforts of the UN High-Level Mission to broker a peaceful solution. It was good to hear from Femlink Pacific that women activists had been consulted by the Mission. Good, too, to hear of the release from prison of the two Iranian women arrested and held incommunicado for taking part in a peaceful demonstration for women's rights. We received a message of thanks from the organisers of the petition for their release that I signed on behalf of AFUW.

Less pleasing was a recent announcement that the Australian Defence Forces would have access to the so-called 'new model' self-destructing cluster bombs. Because cluster bombs that fail to explode act in effect as mini landmines they are extremely hazardous to civilian populations. This was a topic raised in the Secretariat Meeting by the discussion group on issues of violence against women and children, and consortia members were urged to take it up with the Government. A letter reminding the Government of its obligations under the Geneva Conventions has been sent to the Minister for Defence and the Prime Minister

Fellowships News

Tax deductibility breakthrough: AFUW's scholarship programs depend heavily on donations and the readiness of donors to contribute is often influenced by tax deductibility. We were therefore delighted when it was announced some time ago that at least some donations for educational purposes would be tax deductible, then astonished to find that a legal anomaly meant that while donations intended for undergraduate scholarships were eligible, those for postgraduate ones were not. In April we wrote to Mr. Costello asking for the removal of the anomaly and legislation has just been passed that does so. S/TAs are not yet, however, out of the woods, as they cannot offer this incentive to donors unless they have been authorized to do so by the Taxation Office. The solution seems to be to arrange for donations to be received through an already tax exempt body, as AFUW-Vic, for instance, has done in setting its Fund up within the Melbourne Community Foundation.

IFUW Fellowships and Grants: Want to broaden your research horizons? Apply for an IFUW 2008/2009 Award, as these must be taken up in 'a country other than that in which the applicant was educated or habitually resides'. Fellowships are intended to enhance the research or scholarship on which a postgraduate student is already engaged (applicants must have successfully completed a year of postgraduate study). They are for projects requiring eight to twelve months' work; Grants are for proposals requiring at least two months' work. They are for specialized training, independent research, or to assist in the completion of a postgraduate degree. Full details and application forms are available on the IFUW website at <http://www.ifuw.org/circulars/circular-2007-07.doc>

Note that you send your application to your NFA, not to IFUW – i.e. to AFUW Fellowships Convener, Gaynor Reeves (gay.reeves@bigpond.com). Each NFA can select up to three applications for forwarding to IFUW. **Applications must reach Gaynor by 30 September.**

News from the Council Meeting

The 2009 Triennial Conference and later: Council managed to detach itself from pondering IFUW Resolutions (see next item) for long enough to accept the proposal that the 2009 AFUW Triennial Conference should be held October 23–26 in Sydney and that its theme should be *Women Working for a Sustainable Society*, a theme reflecting the fact that sustainability will be the focus of the IFUW Programme for Action for its coming triennium.

A regular sequence for holding subsequent Conferences was also approved. This will see AFUW-Q as hosts in 2012, to be followed by Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and ACT.

Changing faces: Council passed with acclamation a vote of thank to Marion Jones and Hilary Silbert for their contribution to Council who will have completed their terms of office as Presidents of AFUW-Q and AFUW-WA before Council meets again in October.

IFUW Conference News

Much Council time was spent finalising AFUW's position on Conference Resolutions. For Policy Resolutions this was a matter of review, as we had already sent suggested amendments (and have heard post-Council that most of these have been accepted by the Resolutions Committee and the original proposers). So it was the Constitutional Amendments that demanded our attention. This produced a number of suggestions, and thanks to the hard work of Resolutions Convener, Rosemary Everett, we have been able to meet IFUW deadlines for submitting them. We are very much indebted to Rosemary for the prodigious effort she has put into this whole process – collating and clarifying all the responses that came in, first on the Policy Resolutions, then on the Constitutional Amendments and finally preparing the material for transmission in the

very demanding format required by IFUW. Thanks are also due to Dalma Jacobs, who handled the accreditation to IFUW of our voting delegates and alternates. As voting delegates we have Jennifer Strauss, Dalma Jacobs, Tricia Blombery, Marion Jones and Barbara Hale, with alternates being Jane Baker, May Kentish, Madeleine Laming, Kath Watson and Barbara Williams.

In the March Newsletter we mentioned the sponsorship provided by the Australian Catholic University for Nereda White to attend Conference. We are delighted and grateful that Curtin University has since then generously sponsored the attendance of Michelle Webb, so that the Triennial Conference Resolution to enable an Indigenous woman to participate in the IFUW Conference has been doubly honoured.

Know Your Organization: Standing Committees of AFUW Council

The Committees are a vital communications link between Council, the S/TAs and the membership generally. Within their special field of interest, they are intended to provide both information and inspiration to Council. That is, they have the reactive role of monitoring and reporting on outcomes of advocacy or of actions taken in pursuit of AFUW and IFUW Resolutions or the IFUW Program for Action, or providing information specifically requested by Council, but they are also expected to be proactive, to alert Council when policy needs to be developed or action taken, especially if this requires submissions to be made to the Federal Government, Ministerial Departments or statutory bodies such as HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission). There are 6 Committees: Education, Peace and Human Security and Status of Women are policy committees, while Fellowships, Membership and Resolutions are administrative ones. (The previous Environment Committee has been subsumed into Peace and Human Security, and Young Members into Membership). Each Committee is made up of a Convener, appointed by, and responsible to, Council and at least one Member nominated by each S/TA for ratification by Council

Members of the policy committees are expected to provide the Convener with information about local activities in relation to relevant AFUW and IFUW policies. They are also expected to utilize their expertise and their knowledge of events and opinions in their S/TAs in order to be proactive and to take the initiative in drawing the Convener's attention to any emerging need for advocacy or policy development in relation to the Committee's area of interest. S/TAs vary in the manner and extent of consultation that is expected of their nominees to Council committees: where it is considered appropriate, they may wish to use a title such as, for example, AFUW-WA Convener, Education.

Conveners of the policy Committees are expected to assist Council with

- information on activities (projects, advocacy, etc) undertaken in pursuit of AFUW or IFUW policy resolutions – especially, but not exclusively, those passed at the most recent triennial Conferences;
- advice on action that needs to be taken at national level in pursuit of existing policies or the formulation of new ones;
- contributions to the drafting of submissions and advocacy documents for the President to submit on behalf of AFUW;

Conveners' Reports are a standing item on Council Meeting Agendas, and Conveners participate in Council deliberations, although they have no voting rights under the present Constitution.

A more detailed version of this document – including material on the administrative committees – was endorsed at the Council Meeting of June 30th and can be found on the AFUW website (click on AFUW Today).

Next Newsletter

This will follow the October Council Meeting. If you have comments or queries about anything in this Newsletter or would like something included in the next, please contact me by email to jstr0036@bigpond.net.au or send hard copy to 2/12Tollington Ave, East Malvern 3145.

Jennifer Strauss, President, AFUW Inc
July 2007