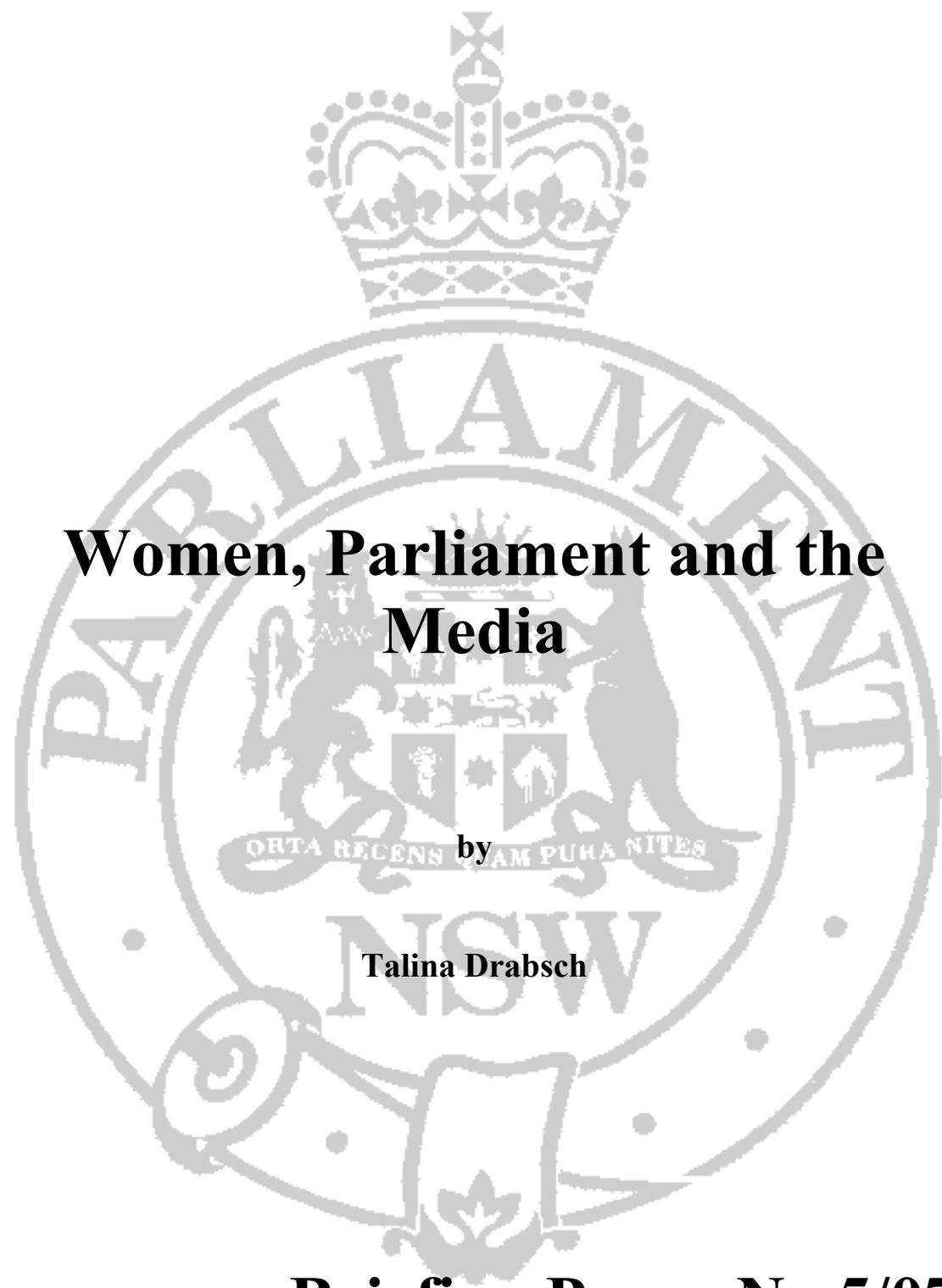


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**Women, Parliament and the
Media**

by

Talina Drabsch

Briefing Paper No 5/07

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Women, Parliament and the Media

by

Talina Drabsch

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of women parliamentarians in Australia is gradually increasing; almost one-third of all parliamentarians in Australia are women. Whilst there is still a need for improvement before the numbers balance, it is clear that women politicians have become a regular feature of the political scene. This paper is concerned with the subject of women parliamentarians – those women who seek to engage in the political process by working within its primary institution. Some women do this by becoming members of political parties, and are represented in parties occupying various positions on the political spectrum. Other women choose to not become involved in political parties but nonetheless seek to participate in parliament as Independent members.

A timeline of the major developments and milestones in the participation of women in the NSW and Federal parliaments is included in section two (pp 3-6). Section three (pp 7-13) of this paper provides a current statistical overview of women in parliaments in NSW, Australia and globally. The results of the recent NSW State Election are incorporated into this analysis.

The way women parliamentarians are portrayed by the media is discussed in section four (pp 14-21). It notes that whilst women parliamentarians are less of a novelty than in the past, there are still many who argue that the sort of coverage women receive differs to men. Section four discusses some of the reasons for this, with examples drawn from recent coverage of Julia Gillard, Pru Goward, Maxine McKew and Carmel Tebbutt. It is not suggested that all sections of the media treat women politicians differently, nor is it argued that reports of male politicians never consider their appearance or personal life. However, this section considers some of the factors that provoke interest in some women parliamentarians. It also highlights the multi-faceted nature of many women's identities.

Section five (pp 22-34) outlines the various strategies employed by the major political parties in Australia to increase the number of women in parliament. This section particularly focuses on the different attitudes to the use of quotas and the controversy surrounding their use. The 2007 NSW State Election is analysed in terms of the number of women preselected as candidates, the relative safety of seats they were preselected for, and the extent to which women candidates were successful. The different approaches of the political parties are subsequently highlighted.

Finally, section six (pp 35-40) discusses whether women parliamentarians actually make a difference to the conduct of parliament. It draws attention to the arguments of some commentators that 'critical acts' by women parliamentarians are of much greater consequence than a 'critical mass' of women, in other words, there is a difference between substantive representation as opposed to merely descriptive representation. The passage of the Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486) Bill 2006 ('the RU 486 Bill) through the Federal Parliament in February 2006 was notable as four women senators from different parties drove the process. The RU486 Bill is discussed as an example of what may be achieved when women from various parties choose to work together, and circumstances permit such action to be taken.

1 INTRODUCTION

Women participate in politics in various ways. Some take an active interest, joining political parties or other organisations, and/or serving on community committees, councils, or in parliaments. Some participate as members of lobby groups. Others limit their participation to the polling booth. The attention and importance given to gender also varies. For some women, their identity as a feminist informs the way they participate in politics. For others, their interests as women are less important than more general issues.

This paper is concerned with women parliamentarians.¹ It discusses the way they are portrayed in the media and whether a shift has occurred from a focus on women as political novelties, with much interest devoted to their appearance, family life and housekeeping skills, to women politicians being taken more seriously and treated in largely the same manner as their male colleagues. This paper also compares the different ways political parties have responded to the unequal participation of women in parliament, notably their attitude to the use of quotas. It examines the barriers that hinder women's entry into politics, especially in the context of the 2007 NSW election. How many women were preselected? Were they preselected to marginal or safe seats? How many were successful in their bid for election?

According to Brennan and Chappell, women who are politically active fall into one of the following three categories:²

1. **Insiders** – women parliamentarians who represent the interests of their respective party and display little intention to engage with and represent women's issues.
2. **Outsiders** – Women involved in politics but outside the main political institutions.
3. **Outsiders within** – The women parliamentarians who retain their feminist stance within parliament.

This paper focuses on those women who would be deemed 'insiders' and 'outsiders within', as it considers the role and participation of women parliamentarians. Brennan and Chappell's categorisation is perhaps less clear when applied to female Independent members of parliament regardless of whether or not they see themselves as feminists. Women Independents have chosen to work within the established political system, but

¹ This paper updates *Women in Parliament: The Current Situation* by Talina Drabsch, NSW Parliamentary Library Briefing Paper No 9/03. Whilst some of the issues canvassed are similar to the previous paper, there are some differences and the earlier briefing paper should be consulted by those wanting greater detail on: the barriers that hinder the participation of women in parliament; the various arguments in support of greater numbers of women parliamentarians; and the numerous strategies that have been developed to advance the proportion of women politicians. The earlier paper also had a greater focus on overseas developments.

² Brennan D and Chappell L, 'Introduction: Gender and NSW politics', in Brennan D and Chappell L (eds) *"no fit place for women"? Women in New South Wales Politics, 1856-2006*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006, p 9.

remain outsiders as political parties generally dominate that process. Vromen et al thus see women Independents as ‘doubly outsiders’ as a result of the combination of gender and their participation in parliament being outside the main vehicles – the political parties.³

Women parliamentarians are a minority in every jurisdiction of Australia and constitute less than one-third of all parliamentarians in Australia.⁴ This is despite women in Australia being the first in the world to receive both the right to vote and stand for election. However, the proportion of women parliamentarians varies dramatically from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, party to party, and from upper house to lower house. Of all jurisdictions in Australia, NSW has the second lowest proportion of women parliamentarians when both houses are combined. Party membership also makes a distinct difference to the proportion of women parliamentarians, with the ALP generally having a much higher proportion of women than the Coalition.

Whilst women may be starting to constitute larger numbers of parliamentarians than ever before, this is not always reflected in the more powerful positions, such as party leadership, membership of Cabinet, and the more senior ministerial portfolios. As the proportion of women parliamentarians has improved, there may subsequently be a shift in focus from increasing the number of women in parliament to encouraging greater representation of women in the more powerful decision-making roles.

³ Vromen A, Gauja A and Smith R, ‘Transforming parliament? Independent and minor party women in NSW politics’, in Brennan D and Chappell L (eds) *“no fit place for women”? Women in New South Wales Politics, 1856-2006*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006, p 132.

⁴ Wilson J, ‘Composition of Australian Parliaments by Party and Gender, as at 18 December 2006’, www.aph.gov.au

2 TIMELINE

As the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth began, Australia was a pioneer for the rights of women, being the first country to grant women both the right to vote and to stand for election to its national parliament, having done so in 1902.⁵ In 1894, South Australia was the first State in Australia to give women the right to vote and stand for parliament. It was also the first parliament in the world to permit women to stand for election. Women in NSW were provided with the right to vote in 1902 but it was not until 1918 that women could stand for election to the Legislative Assembly and 1926 for the Legislative Council. Millicent Preston Stanley of the United Australia Party was the first woman to be elected to NSW Parliament in 1925. Much has changed since then and women parliamentarians are now a common occurrence. The following timeline marks some of the major events and advances toward the more equal participation of women in parliament.

The following timeline is reproduced and updated from *Women in Parliament: The Current Situation* by Talina Drabsch, NSW Parliamentary Library Briefing Paper No 9/03 and particularly focuses on the major events for women in NSW politics.

1894	South Australia (SA), 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 (NSW) 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	NSW 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 NSW Parliament, where she gained a seat in the Legislative Assembly.
1926	The NSW <i>Constitution (Amendment) Act</i> establishes the right of women to sit in the Legislative Council.
1931	Catherine Green (ALP) and Ellen Webster (ALP), first women members of the NSW Legislative Council.
1939	Mary Quirk (ALP), elected to the seat of Balmain in the NSW 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

⁵ Whilst New Zealand had given women the right to vote in 1893, it was not until 1919 that women had the right to stand for election. Nonetheless, a woman was elected to the New Zealand Parliament a number of years before women entered the Australian Parliament. Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney were the first women to enter the Australian Parliament in 1943 whereas the first woman was elected to the New Zealand Parliament in 1933.

	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 NSW Legislative Assembly. She was the first woman Alderman in NSW (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. 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 NSW Legislative Council.
1966	Dame Annabelle Rankin, the first woman Federal Minister.
1973	Mary Meillon, first Liberal woman elected to the NSW 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. Elisabeth Kirkby (Australian Democrats) first woman from a non-major party elected to the NSW Legislative Council. Franca Arena (ALP), the first woman from a non-English speaking background elected to the NSW Parliament (Legislative Council). Shirley McKerrow becomes the Federal President of the National Party, the first woman president of any political party.
1983	Jeanette McHugh (ALP), the first woman from NSW 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 NSW (Minister for Natural Resources 1984-86).

1985	Wendy Machin, first National party woman elected to the NSW 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 NSW to be elected to the Senate.
1988	Three women from a non-major party elected to the NSW 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 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.
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 <i>Weekend Australian</i> April 8-9. Senator Margaret Reid (Liberal party – ACT), was elected Deputy-President in May. She was the first woman presiding officer in the Senate.
1996	The March election resulted in the highest number (23 – 15.5%) 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.
1997	Meg Lees becomes the fourth female leader of the Australian Democrats, following Janine Haines, Janet Powell and Cheryl Kernot.

1998	<p>Following the October election for Federal Parliament, the number of women in the House of Representatives increased from 22 to 33 (22.3%).</p> <p>Virginia Chadwick (Lib) elected as first female President of the Legislative Council.</p> <p>Kerry Chikarovski becomes leader of the NSW Liberal Party, the first woman to lead a major political party in NSW.</p>
2000	<p>Women lead the Opposition in NSW (Kerry Chikarovski), Tasmania and the Northern Territory.</p>
2001	<p>Natasha Stott-Despoja becomes the fifth female leader of the Australian Democrats.</p> <p>Marie Bashir becomes the first woman to be appointed Governor of NSW.</p> <p>Following the federal election in November, the number of women in the House of Representatives increased to 38 (25.3%).</p>
2002	<p>Jenny Macklin is elected as Deputy Leader of the ALP – first woman to hold such a position in either of the two major parties.</p> <p>The ALP increases its affirmative action target to 40% by 2012 at the National Rules Conference in October 2002.</p>
2003	<p>Linda Burney (ALP) becomes the first Indigenous Australian to be elected to the Parliament of NSW.</p>
2004	<p>Carmen Lawrence becomes the first female National President of the Australian Labor Party after being elected in 2003. She is also the first President to be directly elected by party members.</p> <p>Lyn Allison becomes the sixth female leader of the Australian Democrats.</p> <p>Following the federal election in October, the number of women in the House of Representatives fell slightly to 37 (24.7%).</p>
2005	<p>Chris McDiven becomes the first female Federal President of the Liberal Party.</p>
2006	<p>In February, the Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486) Bill 2006 ('the RU486 Bill') is passed by the Federal Parliament. The Bill was supported by four women senators from a cross-section of parties: Lyn Allison (Democrat), Claire Moore (Labor), Fiona Nash (Nationals) and Judith Troeth (Liberal).</p> <p>Linda Burney is selected as a future Federal President of the Australian Labor Party. She is to serve her term in 2009.</p>
2007	<p>Linda Burney (ALP) becomes the first Indigenous Australian to serve as a Minister in the NSW Government. She is appointed as Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth and Minister for Volunteering.</p> <p>Kristina Keneally (ALP) is appointed as the Minister for Ageing and the Minister for Disabilities. She becomes the first US-born NSW Cabinet Minister.</p> <p>Jillian Skinner (LIB) becomes Deputy Leader of the NSW Liberal Party.</p>

3 STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

The proportion of women parliamentarians differs markedly between the various jurisdictions in Australia. The following table notes the proportion of women in the Lower House of Parliament for each jurisdiction in Australia as at April 2007.

Parliament	Number of female	Number of male	Percentage female
Commonwealth	37	113	24.7%
New South Wales	26	67	28.0%
Victoria	26	62	29.5%
Queensland	30	59	33.7%
Western Australia	13	44	22.8%
South Australia	17	30	36.2%
Tasmania	7	18	28.0%
Australian Capital Territory	6	11	35.3%
Northern Territory	10	15	40.0%

In terms of the lower houses of the various parliaments in Australia, NSW has one of the lower proportions of women members, ahead of only the Commonwealth and Western Australia. The Northern Territory and South Australia have the greatest proportion of women members at 40% and 36% respectively.

The following table compares the percentage of women in the Upper House of Parliament for each jurisdiction in Australia as at April 2007 (there is no Upper House in Queensland, the ACT or Northern Territory). The table shows that the proportion of women in the NSW Legislative Council is less than that of the upper houses in Western Australia, Tasmania and the Commonwealth, but greater than in Victoria and South Australia.

Parliament	Number of female	Number of male	Percentage female
Commonwealth	26	48	35.1%
New South Wales	13	29	31.0%
Victoria	12	28	30.0%
Western Australia	14	20	41.2%
South Australia	6	16	27.3%
Tasmania	6	9	40.0%

Prior to the 2007 State Election, NSW had the lowest proportion of women parliamentarians for both Houses combined of all jurisdictions in Australia, including the Federal Parliament. Only 37 of the 135 NSW members of parliament were women (27.4%).⁶ The number of women improved slightly with the results of the 2007 NSW Election, with 39 out of the 135 NSW members of parliament now women (29%). Consequently, the Commonwealth Parliament currently has the smallest proportion of women members when both Houses are combined. The Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory enjoy the greatest representation at 40% and 35.3% respectively.

Party membership can have a dramatic influence on the likelihood of a parliamentarian

⁶ Wilson J, 'Composition of Australian Parliaments by Party and Gender, as at 18 December 2006', www.apf.gov.au

being a woman. 37% of all Labor parliamentarians in Australia are women, compared to 22% of Liberal members and 15% of Nationals.⁷ Parliamentary representation is much more balanced in the Australian Democrats and Greens with 60% and 53% respectively of their parliamentarians throughout Australia being women.

3.1 NSW Parliament

There are currently 26 women in the NSW Legislative Assembly, constituting 28% of all members of the Lower House. This is an increase of one woman in the NSW Legislative Assembly following the 2007 NSW Election. The proportion is higher in the Legislative Council with 31% of its members being women (13 out of 42). The 2007 NSW Election thus led to an increase of one woman in the NSW Legislative Council as well. The following table lists the current women members of NSW Parliament.

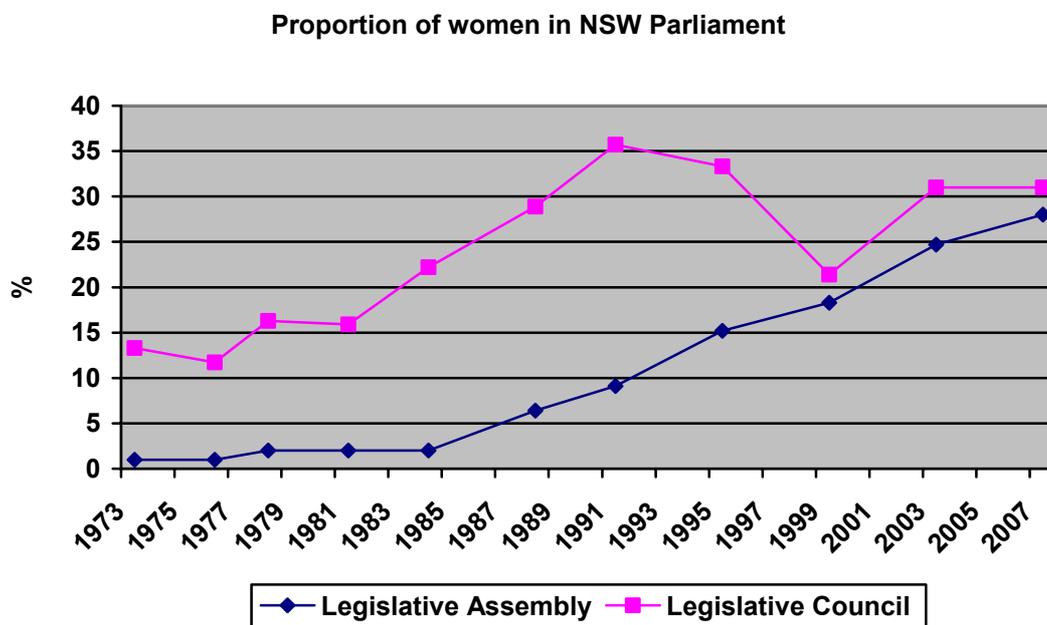
	Name	Electorate	Political Party
	Legislative Assembly		
1	Marie Andrews	Gosford	ALP
2	Diane Beamer	Mulgoa	ALP
3	Gladys Berejiklian	Willoughby	LIB
4	Linda Burney	Canterbury	ALP
5	Cherie Burton	Kogarah	ALP
6	Angela D'Amore	Drummoyne	ALP
7	Dawn Fardell	Dubbo	IND
8	Verity Firth	Balmain	ALP
9	Tanya Gadiel	Parramatta	ALP
10	Pru Goward	Goulburn	LIB
11	Shelley Hancock	South Coast	LIB
12	Noreen Hay	Wollongong	ALP
13	Katrina Hodgkinson	Burrinjuck	NAT
14	Judy Hopwood	Hornsby	LIB
15	Sonia Hornery	Wallsend	ALP
16	Virginia Judge	Strathfield	ALP
17	Kristina Keneally	Heffron	ALP
18	Jodi McKay	Newcastle	ALP
19	Lylea McMahan	Shellharbour	ALP
20	Reba Meagher	Cabramatta	ALP
21	Alison Megarrity	Menai	ALP
22	Clover Moore	Sydney	IND
23	Karyn Paluzzano	Penrith	ALP
24	Barbara Perry	Auburn	ALP
25	Jillian Skinner	North Shore	LIB
26	Carmel Tebbutt	Marrickville	ALP
	Legislative Council		
1	Catherine Cusack		LIB
2	Amanda Fazio		ALP
3	Marie Ficarra		LIB
4	Jenny Gardiner		NAT
5	Kayee Griffin		ALP
6	Sylvia Hale		GRN
7	Robyn Parker		LIB

7

Ibid.

8	Melinda Pavey	NAT
9	Lee Rhiannon	GRN
10	Christine Robertson	ALP
11	Penny Sharpe	ALP
12	Lynda Voltz	ALP
13	Helen Westwood	ALP

The chart below maps the proportion of women in both Houses of the NSW Parliament at the start of the first session for each parliament since 1973. It illustrates that whilst there has generally been a steady increase in the percentage of women in the Legislative Assembly, the proportion of women in the Legislative Council has ebbed and flowed over time. However, for a majority of that period, the percentage of women in the Upper House of NSW has far exceeded that of the Lower. Nonetheless, the gap between the Houses is quickly closing.



3.1.1 Ministerial and office holders

Five of the 22 Ministers in the NSW Cabinet are women Members of Parliament. They are:

- **Linda Burney MP** – Minister for Fair Trading; Minister for Youth; Minister for Volunteering.
- **Verity Firth MP** – Minister for Women; Minister for Science and Medical Research; Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer); Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change Environment and Water (Environment).
- **Kristina Keneally MP** – Minister for Ageing; Minister for Disability Services.
- **Reba Meagher MP** – Minister for Health.

- **Barbara Perry MP** – Minister for Juvenile Justice; Minister for Western Sydney; Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship.

Only Reba Meagher has previously served as a Minister. Both Carmel Tebbutt, the former Minister for Education and Training, and Cherie Burton, the former Minister for Housing and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) announced their return to the backbench by citing a need for more time for family responsibilities. Sandra Nori, the former Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women, retired from NSW politics prior to the 2007 Election.

There are also five women (out of 22) in the Shadow Ministry:

- **Jillian Skinner MP** – Deputy Leader of the Opposition; Shadow Minister for Health; Shadow Minister for Science and Medical Research; Shadow Minister for Arts.
- **Katrina Hodgkinson MP** – Shadow Minister for Community Services.
- **Gladys Berejiklian MP** – Shadow Minister for Transport; Shadow Minister for Citizenship.
- **Catherine Cusack MLC** – Shadow Minister for Fair Trading; Shadow Minister for Volunteering.
- **Pru Goward MP** – Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Environment; Shadow Minister for Women.

3.2 Parliament of Australia

In 1943, Dame Enid Lyons became the first woman elected to the House of Representatives and Dorothy Tangney became the first woman elected to the Senate that same year. The Senate has always had a greater proportion of women members. In the early 1980s, the proportion of women in the Senate passed 20% for the first time but it took another fifteen years (the late 1990s) before the House of Representatives achieved the same level of representation. There are currently 26 women Senators (out of 74) and 37 women Members of the House of Representatives (out of 150) in the Federal Parliament.

The following table lists the various ministerial or shadow ministerial posts held by women parliamentarians.

Location	Name	Title
Cabinet	Helen Coonan	Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
	Julie Bishop	Minister for Education, Science and Training Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues
Outer Ministry	Fran Bailey	Minister for Small Business and Tourism
	Sharman Stone	Minister for Workforce Participation
Shadow Ministry	Julia Gillard	Deputy Leader of the Opposition Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations Shadow Minister for Social Inclusion
	Kate Lundy	Shadow Minister for Local Government Shadow Minister for Sport, Recreation and Health Promotion
	Jenny Macklin	Shadow Minister for Families and Community Services Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation
	Jan McLucas	Shadow Minister for Ageing, Disabilities and Carers
	Tanya Plibersek	Shadow Minister for Human Services, Housing, Youth and Women
	Nicola Roxon	Shadow Minister for Health
	Penny Wong	Shadow Minister for Public Administration and Accountability Shadow Minister for Corporate Governance and Responsibility Shadow Minister for Workforce Participation

Two of the 18 members of Cabinet are women – Helen Coonan and Julie Bishop. There are an additional two women Ministers in the Outer Ministry – Fran Bailey and Sharman Stone. Accordingly, four out of the 30 Federal Ministers are women. One of the two Assistant Ministers is a woman – Teresa Gambaro (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship). Two of the 10 Parliamentary Secretaries are women (De-Anne Kelly and Sussan Ley). There were a record number of women (three) in Federal Cabinet prior to the departure of Amanda Vanstone on 30 January 2007.

There are a greater number of women in the Shadow Ministry with seven Shadow Ministers being women (out of 30). They include Julia Gillard, Kate Lundy, Jenny Macklin, Jan McLucas, Tanya Plibersek, Nicola Roxon, and Penny Wong. Four of the Shadow Parliamentary Secretaries are women – Jennie George, Catherine King, Kirsten Livermore and Ursula Stephens.

3.3 Global

As at 28 February 2007, 17% of parliamentarians throughout the world were women.⁸ The Nordic countries are renowned for high levels of female representation in their national parliaments, with the regional proportion currently 41%. However, the last few years have started to see a shift away from the dominance of this region with countries like Rwanda and Costa Rica moving into the top five (up from 22nd and 7th respectively in 2003). The following table sets out the current global positions of national parliaments, ranked by the proportion of women parliamentarians in the Lower/Single House.

Rank	Country	Percentage
1	Rwanda	48.8
2	Sweden	47.3
3	Finland	42.0
4	Costa Rica	38.6
5	Norway	37.9
6	Denmark	36.9
7	Netherlands	36.7
8	Cuba	36.0
“	Spain	36.0
9	Argentina	35.0
10	Mozambique	34.8
11	Belgium	34.7
12	Iceland	33.3
13	South Africa	32.8
14	Austria	32.2
“	New Zealand	32.2
15	Germany	31.6
16	Burundi	30.5
17	United Republic of Tanzania	30.4
18	Uganda	29.8
19	Seychelles	29.4
20	Peru	29.2
21	Belarus	29.1
22	Guyana	29.0
23	Andorra	28.6
24	The FYR of Macedonia	28.3
25	Afghanistan	27.3
“	Vietnam	27.3
26	Namibia	26.9
27	Grenada	26.7
28	Iraq	25.5
“	Suriname	25.5
29	Timor-Leste	25.3
30	Lao People's Democratic Republic	25.2
31	Ecuador	25.0
“	Switzerland	25.0
32	Lithuania	24.8
33	Australia	24.7

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union www.ipu.org Accessed 28/3/07.

34	Singapore	24.5
35	Liechtenstein	24.0

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union www.ipu.org Accessed 13/4/07.

Australia is currently ranked 33rd in the world with 25% of members of the House of Representatives being women. This is Australia's lowest ever ranking having fallen from 23rd position in 2003.⁹ New Zealand is currently in 14th place, with almost one-third of the members of its national parliament being women. Whilst the number of women parliamentarians in Australia is not high, there are more women in our national parliament than in a number of other western democracies. For example, Canada is in 49th place with 21%, the United Kingdom is ranked 54th with 20% and the United States is in 70th place with women constituting just 16% of the US House of Representatives.

⁹ Maddison S and Partridge E, *How well does Australian democracy serve Australian women?*, Democratic Audit of Australia, Australian National University, 2007, p 65.

4 PORTRAYAL BY THE MEDIA

There are many views regarding why it is important to have women in parliament and why their portrayal by the media matters. Arguments range from the utility of women parliamentarians serving as role models to improving the general status of women in society. The potential of the media to act as an ‘image-setting instrument and as a tool to be used more effectively by women candidates’ has been acknowledged by the UN Commission on the Status of Women.¹⁰ Campbell and Wolbrecht, discussing female politicians in the United States, stress that the presence of women politicians increases the likelihood of girls being interested in politics.¹¹ However, they highlight that this is not due to a belief about whether or not politics is an appropriate forum for women but rather that visible women candidates sponsor conversations between parents and their daughters about politics. They conclude that:

The presence of visible female role models apparently transforms political socialization for girls by making politics a more likely topic of conversation in their homes.... A highly visible woman politician in the future... has the potential to generate significant interest in political activity among adolescent girls with possibly long-term effects on the political engagement of women.¹²

This suggests that the potential repercussions of the way women politicians are portrayed in the media are significant.

Media portrayal of women politicians has changed throughout the years as it has become more acceptable for women, including married women, to have careers and to occupy positions of power. Their novelty value has decreased as women parliamentarians have become increasingly common. However, it is really only in the last 20 years that the media has started to focus less on the personal and more on the public and policy stance of women in parliament.

Nonetheless, some commentators are concerned that media coverage of women politicians still differs to that of male politicians.¹³ Various reports demonstrate that there has not been a total shift from the traditional focus on their appearance and style, as well as details of their personal lives – marital status, childcare arrangements, etc.¹⁴

¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women, *Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action 1996-2005*, UN Division for the Advancement of Women, New York, 2006, p 29.

¹¹ Campbell D and Wolbrecht C, ‘See Jane run: women politicians as role models for adolescents’, *The Journal of Politics*, 68(2) May 2006, p 233.

¹² Campbell and Wolbrecht, above n 11, pp 244-245.

¹³ See, for example, Ustinoff J, ‘The many faces of political Eve: Representations of Queensland women parliamentarians in the media’, *Queensland Review*, 12(2) November 2005, pp 81-85.

¹⁴ Rayner M, ‘A pound of flesh: women, politics and power in the new millennium’, *Australian*

In *Media Tarts*, Julia Baird discusses the various frames that have generally been applied by the media to women politicians in Australia.¹⁵ She believes that women parliamentarians have frequently been placed into one of the following five moulds:

1. The steel sheila.
2. The housewife.
3. The mother.
4. The feminist.
5. The covergirl.

Baird argues that these frames have resulted in the following caricatures of prominent women politicians:

Joan Kirner was a fat whinger. Cheryl Kernot was a self-obsessed whore. Meg Lees was an ageing headmistress with the personality of a laxative. Natasha Stott Despoja was a vapid yuppie princess. Carmen Lawrence was a murderer. Amanda Vanstone was the charge nurse from hell. Bronwyn Bishop was a rottweiler with lipstick.¹⁶

However, male politicians are not immune from media attention to their personal lives either. Indeed, deliberate attention may be drawn to the wife and family of a male politician as this may soften his image.¹⁷ For example, substantial attention has been drawn to Kevin Rudd's family since he became Leader of the ALP in December 2006. Some women politicians also effectively employ this tactic. For instance, Hillary Clinton announced in late January 2007 that she intended to campaign to be the Democrat candidate in the 2008 US presidential election. Much discussion has surrounded whether Hillary Clinton or Condoleezza Rice, the current US Secretary of State, could be the first female US president. However, Senator Clinton has stressed that she is basing her campaign on merit rather than her gender. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that it is important to demonstrate that women are capable of serving at the highest levels of government.¹⁸ A section of her campaign website 'Hillary for President' www.hillaryclinton.com is dedicated to information on her as 'mother and advocate'. Sherwell has noted that Senator Clinton has

Feminist Studies, 18(41) July 2003, p 137.

¹⁵ Baird J, *Media Tarts: How the Australian Press Frames Female Politicians*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2004.

¹⁶ Baird, above n 15, p 1.

¹⁷ Fitzherbert M, 'The politics of political mothers and wives', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 57(1) March 2005, p 39.

¹⁸ 'Let the conversation begin', live webcast, 22/1/07 www.hillaryclinton.com

started to repeatedly refer to her role as a mother, making references to her daughter and husband as her closest advisers, as well as re-releasing her book on raising children, *It Takes a Village*.¹⁹ He argues that this is part of a strategy to cultivate an image that is more compassionate than one of a ‘cold and calculating political operator’.

In any event, research has shown that the proportion of coverage devoted to the personal can differ significantly according to the gender of the politician involved. Ustinoff discusses the findings of a study by Jenkins that found 68% of media attention on male politicians focused on their public life and 32% on their private whereas the split for women was 54% to 46%.²⁰ She argues that:

As part of that gender imbalance in coverage, the media continue in their attempts to link women with their traditional view of woman as wife and homemaker, while simultaneously placing greater concentration on women’s private relationships, sexual lives and appearance.²¹

4.1 Examples of recent media portrayal of women politicians

4.1.1 Julia Gillard

When Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard announced that they would lead the ALP into the next election, a sizeable number of newspaper articles referred to Julia Gillard’s new hairstyle to the point that such coverage became an item of comment in itself.²² Reports included such lines as:

- ‘Julia Gillard was sporting a new hairstyle yesterday to go with her new job of deputy Labor leader.’²³
- ‘On what should have been one of the proudest days of Gillard’s political career, she bungled it with a less than flattering haircut and a frumpy ‘80s tapestry print jacket.’²⁴

¹⁹ Sherwell P, ‘Clinton the mother plays her Chelsea card’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29/1/07.

²⁰ Ustinoff J, ‘The many faces of political Eve: Representations of Queensland women parliamentarians in the media’, *Queensland Review*, 12(2) November 2005, p 98.

²¹ Ustinoff, above n 20, p 98.

²² Some articles published on Julia Gillard at the time of the leadership handover include: ‘Spotlight on the redhead’, *The Courier Mail*, 15/12/06; ‘Julia: I’m not here for a haircut’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7/12/06, p 3; ‘Julia Gillard’s man’, *Herald Sun*, 5/12/06; ‘Image better right than left’, Anita Quigley Blog: Daily Telegraph website, 5/12/06, www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph; ‘All tressed up, Gillard gets ready for the party’, *The Age*, 5/12/06. An amusing response to such coverage is an article by Matt Price, ‘Hairstyle over substance in question time’, *The Australian*, 7/12/06 which focused on the appearance of the men when discussing the events of question time in Federal Parliament.

²³ ‘Julia Gillard’s man’, *Herald Sun*, 5/12/06.

²⁴ ‘Image better right than left’, Anita Quigley Blog: Daily Telegraph website, 5/12/06,

- 'Julia Gillard, Labor's new deputy leader has a great man – and stylist – behind her.... Mr Mathieson also prepared Ms Gillard by giving the famous flame-coloured locks a blow-wave.'²⁵

In a feature on Gillard at the time of the leadership change, Juanita Phillips was quick to play on and address this coverage by noting the stereotypical questions regarding Gillard:

Not that it matters, of course, but no, she won't be getting a makeover for this year's election campaign. She won't be renovating her kitchen, either, although her critics will be relieved to know she did put some fruit in the bowl over the summer break. She did not get engaged to her boyfriend over Christmas. And she's not getting a stylist to advise her on how to dress like Hillary Clinton during the election campaign. As long as she looks neat and professional, she doesn't believe she needs to spend any more time thinking about her appearance than John Howard does.²⁶

The existence of an intense focus on her personal life is acknowledged by Gillard. According to Phillips:

The national debate about her [Gillard's] appearance, her marital status, even her kitchen (criticised for being 'unnaturally spotless' with an empty fruit-bowl), has become, as Gillard puts it, 'the stuff of comedy'. She'll put up with it if it gets people interested in the serious issues.²⁷

Julia Gillard has referred elsewhere to the novelty factor surrounding women politicians and the subsequent need to strive for a situation where women parliamentarians are so commonplace that it does not provoke comment.²⁸ Federal MP Julie Bishop, who suggests that the time is ripe for a change in reporting, echoes these sentiments:

I am waiting for the day when commentary about politicians focuses on their abilities, their beliefs, the strategies that they put forward, the policies that they believe in rather than the fact that they are a woman or indeed a man and I think we need to get away from that novelty factor female politicians seem to attract because as I've pointed out, there are many women in parliament now.²⁹

www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph

²⁵ 'All tressed up, Gillard gets ready for the party', *The Age*, 5/12/06.

²⁶ Phillips J, 'Julia Gillard', *The Bulletin*, 23/1/07, p 14.

²⁷ Ibid, p 14.

²⁸ Gillard J, 'Lower House', *Reform*, Issue 83, Spring 2003, p 34.

²⁹ Interview with Julia Baird, 'Australia's newest female Member of Cabinet', *Sunday Profile: ABC Radio*, 16/4/06.

4.1.2 Pru Goward

Pru Goward, the Liberal member for Goulburn, received a substantial amount of media attention prior to and during the 2007 NSW State Election period. The type of coverage was mixed in its treatment of her. Most referred to Goward's substantial career achievements but a sizeable amount of attention was nonetheless directed to aspects of her personal life. For example, whilst one article discussed a number of the policy matters concerning the electorate of Goulburn, that was only after spending the first part of the article noting the involvement of Goward's socialite daughter, Kate Fischer, in the door knocking of the electorate and the excitement this had provoked.³⁰ An eight page article on Goward in the *Sydney Morning Herald* introduced Goward in the following way:

Pru Goward, former journalist, academic, bureaucrat, federal sex discrimination commissioner and now hopeful politician, is posing for photographs. The 54 year old is comfortable in front of the camera, even in the jacket she insists on wearing, despite the heat – to “hide my arms”, she explains. Such a candid and disarming display of vulnerability is instantly endearing, as is the rest of her ensemble – unscuffed RM William boots and a floppy sunhat that won't stay on in the wind.³¹

4.1.3 Maxine McKew

The media is not always predictable in its treatment of women politicians. It was confirmed in February 2007 that Maxine McKew, a high profile former journalist for the ABC and *The Bulletin*, would be standing as the ALP candidate for the federal electorate of Bennelong against the Prime Minister, John Howard, later this year. Coverage of the announcement generally focused on her lengthy and high profile career as a respected journalist, with little reference made to her appearance and personal life.³² Much was also made of the challenge her preselection would present to Prime Minister Howard. Media commentary tended to centre on the wisdom of endorsing 'celebrity candidates' rather than McKew's gender.

Nonetheless, a recent feature on McKew in *Sunday Life* in *The Sun-Herald* did refer at one point to her being known as 'the sexiest woman on television':

When we meet for coffee, she's surprisingly small and delicate in person, with fine blonde hair and rather pale tawny eyes. She smiles often and has that skill of immediately conveying warmth and intimacy without being flirtatious, making her the kind of woman that other women want to be and that men find instantly

³⁰ 'Glamour in a parched electorate', *Sunday Telegraph*, 25/2/07, p 18.

³¹ 'The woman most likely', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22/2/07.

³² Examples include: 'Look who's taking on the PM in Bennelong', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26/2/07, p 1; 'Howard steels himself for fight with McKew', *The Australian*, 26/2/07; 'Howard should be worried: analyst', *The Australian*, 26/2/07; 'McKew catches PM off balance', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26/2/07; 'Stirrings, rumblings in PM's realm', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27/2/07, p 5; Piers Akerman, 'Voters sacrificed to ALP cult of celebrity', *Daily Telegraph*, 27/2/07, p 17; Laurie Oakes, 'Swinging into action', *The Bulletin*, 6/3/07, p 14.

charming.³³

The matter of McKew not having any children was also discussed. There are likely to be differing interpretations about what amount of attention to the personal is appropriate in a feature magazine article. Some might argue that information on a politician's appearance and family situation is never relevant. Others would say that it is merely part of presenting the 'whole' person and enables readers to relate to the subject.

4.1.4 *Carmel Tebbutt*

There has recently been some media commentary regarding the balancing act performed by politicians, especially women parliamentarians, who are parents. Carmel Tebbutt's decision to stand aside as NSW Minister for Education and Training in order to have more time for her family served as a catalyst for the latest round in this debate. Indeed, the NSW Government lost two of its Ministers (the other being Cherie Burton) for this reason.

The reaction to Tebbutt's decision to step down was mixed.³⁴ Some applauded her apparent dedication to the wellbeing of her son. Others were critical of the message this sent to other women, notably the idea that one could not have it all, that women were in many instances still forced to choose between a career and being a mother.

4.2 Why such interest?

Whilst there is no doubt that media reports of women politicians have become more even-handed with fewer references to their housemaking skills or lack thereof, some believe a difference may still be detected. Julia Baird acknowledges the change in media coverage of women politicians but argues that it nevertheless remains distinctive on the basis of gender:

Stereotyping and trivialising of women occurs far less overtly in 2004 than it did in the 1970s and 1980s, although it is still clearly identifiable. The tags and clichés are an irritant, but not necessarily damaging. What is most lethal for many female politicians is not the disdain of the press, but the excitement and fervour about possible female leaders, and women who have the potential to penetrate or change in some way the blokey political culture so many voters are tired of witnessing.³⁵

Baird suggests that this manifested itself in recent times in the media treatment of Bronwyn Bishop, Carmen Lawrence, Cheryl Kernot and Natasha Stott Despoja. Perhaps some more recent examples would include Pru Goward and Julia Gillard, who have been suggested as potential leaders of the Liberal and Labor parties respectively. It could be argued that it is uncertain whether these differences are due to the personalities of the women involved, the leadership prospects they present, a bias in the media, or a combination of factors.

³³ Woodard A, 'The Max Factor', *The Sun-Herald – Sunday Life*, 8/4/07, p 15.

³⁴ See, for example: 'A working mother forced to choose', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28/3/07, p 14 and 'Having it all... but can we really', *Daily Telegraph*, 28/3/07, p 24.

³⁵ Baird, above n 15, p 231.

According to Baird:

It is easy to dissect and dismiss the individual experiences of women MPs, but when viewed collectively it is clear that a specific way of viewing women has frequently interfered with the way they are seen and the progress of their careers. The fact remains that the position of women is more tenuous and their grasp on power more slippery by virtue of their gender and the intense scrutiny – both sympathetic and hostile – of the media.³⁶

The research of Campbell and Wolbrecht appears to support the notion that gender can be highlighted when women seek certain roles for the first time. They have identified the following as factors that contribute to the gender of a politician becoming prominent:³⁷

- when a woman's candidacy is seen as unique or unusual, such as the first time a woman stands for or obtains a particular political office;
- when gender is central to the campaign or agenda; or
- when attention is otherwise drawn to women in politics.

They note how the drawing of attention in this way can send confusing messages:³⁸

1. Women are capable of being serious and credible politicians.
2. It is unusual for women to be serious and credible politicians.

Margaret Fitzherbert has argued that whilst media and political parties' treatment of female politicians has changed, a focus on the traditional roles of wife and mother can reassert itself when a woman politician seeks one of the valuable roles in politics – the safe seat or a leadership position.³⁹ She argues that this is what occurred when Julia Gillard first voiced her leadership ambitions, with reports subsequently suggesting that the electorate might have issues with her childless, single status, whether or not that is actually the situation. This theory could also explain the focus on the personal life of Pru Goward.

4.3 Multi-faceted identities

Some women politicians may be viewed as especially distinctive for a number of reasons other than their gender, including their religion or ethnicity. Whilst these characteristics also apply to male politicians, for the relevant women they may be treated as novel by the media on an additional level: the first being their gender, and secondly, their

³⁶ Baird, above n 15, p 7.

³⁷ Campbell and Wolbrecht, above n 11, p 235.

³⁸ Campbell and Wolbrecht, above n 11, p 235.

³⁹ Fitzherbert, above n 17, p 39.

religion/ethnicity/sexuality/disability etc. For example, an article published prior to the 2007 NSW election on Silma Ihram and Malikeh Michaels, the Democrats and Greens candidates respectively for the electorate of Auburn, focused on their Muslim religion.⁴⁰ This is despite Ms Ihram reportedly stating:

I have a very distinctive resolve not to run for any supposed or potential Muslim parties, not to be involved in Muslim politics and not to run in Lakemba, although I was asked to run there. I don't want to be seen as a Muslim candidate who's running for the Muslim community.⁴¹

In this situation, it was both the gender of the candidates as well as their religion that influenced the type of coverage they received.

Reports on Linda Burney, the member for the NSW electorate of Canterbury, frequently refer to her being the first Indigenous Australian elected to NSW Parliament. Whilst Ms Burney has been active in indigenous issues, having, amongst other things, been Director-General of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, she is wary of being limited to a role as an advocate for indigenous concerns. A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that she:

bristles at the all-too-common assumption that the only thing she understands or is worried about is Aboriginal issues. 'I think that's a really limiting view of Aboriginal people's participation in the broader community,' she says.⁴²

Burney has also reflected:

There's an assumption, especially in the media, that if you are Aboriginal, all you know is about issues regarding Aboriginality.... I pay a mortgage, I have kids who have been sick, I have sat in the emergency ward, I'm a woman, I'm a feminist, and I shop in the supermarket. As for being Aboriginal, it's a kind of extra privilege.⁴³

Women politicians are not a homogenous group. There are many aspects that constitute the identity of a person, and these may invoke a number of accountabilities. Just as many women parliamentarians object to being seen as solely representing and understanding 'women's interests', many of those politicians distinctive for other reasons, such as their religion or ethnicity, likewise battle against being limited to those areas.

⁴⁰ 'Messages familiar to voters everywhere', *Daily Telegraph*, 6/3/07, p 15.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Barrowclough N, 'The fire in Linda Burney', *Sydney Morning Herald – Good Weekend*, 16/12/06, p 26.

⁴³ 'Aboriginal MP made for the ministry', *The Australian*, 27/3/07, p 6.

5 STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE NUMBER OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Various arguments have been advanced throughout the years as to why there should be similar numbers of women and men parliamentarians. Marian Sawyer has summarised them as follows:⁴⁴

1. **Justice** – women should have an equal opportunity to participate and be represented in political institutions.
2. **Utility** – by opening parliament to women the pool of talent that may be drawn on is doubled. Women politicians may improve the electoral appeal of parties and their participation may improve the standards of behaviour in parliament.
3. **Symbolic** – women parliamentarians serve as role models for women outside parliament and can assist in improving their status in the community as well as demonstrating the different options available to women. Women members also ensure the legitimacy of the parliamentary institution as a broader section of society is represented.
4. **Representation of values, perspectives and experiences** – women members bring their own experience and style to parliament and may reduce the aggressive nature of parliamentary debate. They can also highlight the social impact of policies that may otherwise pass unnoticed.
5. **Representation of interests** – women parliamentarians share the concerns of women in the community and can accordingly voice these in parliament.

As Palmieri and Jabre note:

Ultimately, the need for women in politics remains unquestionable. What can be questioned is the existence and operation of a parliament without women: how can politics possibly be defined without women; how can decision-making bodies effectively address the needs of a society without the participation and involvement of half of its population?... Anything less can only amount to a democratic deficit.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sawyer M, 'The representation of women in Australia: meaning and make-believe', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55(1) January 2002, pp 5-18.

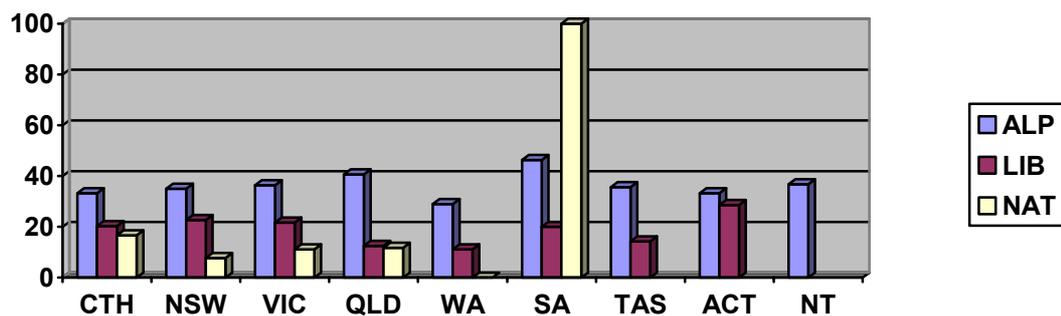
⁴⁵ Palmieri S and Jabre K, 'Promoting partnership between men and women in parliament: the experience of the Inter-Parliamentary Union', in Ballington J and Karam A (eds) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2005, p 229.

5.1 How have Australian political parties sought to increase the number of women in parliament?

Political parties may differ in terms of the barriers they present to women's representation. These obstacles may be due to the historical background of the party as well as its ideological stance. Accordingly, the type of measures, if any, adopted by the parties to improve the representation of women may differ. This section examines the various means employed by the ALP and Coalition parties, as well as The Greens.

The following graph illustrates the proportion of women members for each of the major political parties in the lower house of parliament for the various Australian jurisdictions. It indicates that the ALP generally has the greatest proportion of women members in each parliament (between 29% and 47%). In contrast, the proportion of members of the Liberal Party that are women varies from 11% to 29%. Excluding the unusual result for South Australia, the proportion of The Nationals that are women ranges from 0% to 17%.

Percentage of women members for each party in the lower house of parliament for each jurisdiction



None of the five Nationals members in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly are women, nor are there Nationals in the Tasmanian House of Assembly, the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.⁴⁶ The only Nationals member in South Australia is a woman, hence the highly unusual result of 100%. Members of the Country Liberal Party in the Australian Parliament and Northern Territory have not been included. Whilst the Country Liberal Party is associated with The Nationals and the Liberal Party, it remains independent of their control and direction and is accordingly not affected by their strategies for increasing the number of women parliamentarians.

5.1.1 Labor Party

Some of the historical barriers to the greater participation of women thought to exist in the

⁴⁶ The Nationals do not stand candidates in Tasmania, the ACT or Northern Territory. However, the Country Liberal Party which is affiliated with The Nationals stands candidates in the Northern Territory.

Labor Party include the dominance of trade unions, traditionally the domain of working class males (this is starting to change with the public sector now the most unionised part of the workforce), as well as the strong factional elements within the party that can serve to divide women ALP members.⁴⁷ In contrast to the Liberal Party, the ALP has been willing to embrace affirmative action measures to ensure that women are able to more fully participate in the activities of the party. This is evident in the rules of the Labor Party as expressed in its National Constitution which sets out its objective to have equal numbers of men and women at all levels in the Party and in public office. In order to achieve this objective, the ALP has adopted an affirmative action model which requires at least 40% of positions to be held by men and at least 40% by women (also known as the 40:40:20 rule). Accordingly, men must not hold more than 60% of positions. Similarly no more than 60% are to be held by women. Rule 10(c) of the ALP National Constitution 2004 states that this target is to apply to the preselection process from 2012 onwards. Prior to 2012, a target of 35% is to apply. The significant increase in the proportion of Labor women in parliament in recent years is thought to be due to the use of quotas by the ALP.⁴⁸ Some aspects of the debate surrounding the use of quotas are addressed in section 5.2 of this paper.

The ALP also uses other less controversial means to encourage more women into parliament, including through the provision of training, mentoring and networking opportunities, such as conducted by the NSW Women's Forum and National Labor Women's Network.

Women's Forum

The Women's Forum⁴⁹ was established in 1998 to focus on increasing the membership and involvement of women in the Labor Party in NSW. The Forum conducts training programs and social events, monitors affirmative action concerns and deals with the impact of policy on women. Its objectives are:

- to increase membership and involvement of women at all levels of the ALP through training and communications strategies;
- to be a communication channel for Labor women in NSW;
- to enhance the levels of representation in public office by ALP women;
- increase participation of women in public life;

⁴⁷ Sawyer, above n 44, p 10.

⁴⁸ Krook M, Lovenduski J and Squires J, 'Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand: Gender quotas in the context of citizenship models', in Dahlerup D (ed) *Women, Quotas and Politics*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p 206; McAllister I, 'Women's electoral representation in Australia', in Sawyer M, Tremblay M and Trimble L (eds) *Representing Women in Parliament: A comparative study*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p 43.

⁴⁹ NSW Labor, 'Women in the ALP', www.nswalp.com

- liaise with ALP policy committees to advise on policy issues; and
- to maximise the support of women for the ALP.

National Labor Women's Network

The National Labor Women's Network⁵⁰ was launched at the 1996 National ALP Conference and utilises a number of means to encourage women to participate in all levels of the ALP, namely through training, mentoring, political work experience and social networking events. The Network also advises on state and national policy issues. The role of the National Labor Women's Network, as stated in Rule 11 of the National Constitution of the ALP, is:

- i. to encourage women to join and participate in the Australian Labor Party;
- ii. to increase the numbers of women in the Party;
- iii. to maintain and expand e-communication between Labor women;
- iv. to devise and promote training programs to improve the skills, confidence and participation of Labor women throughout the ALP;
- v. to sponsor and expand the NLWN political work experience program;
- vi. to develop and promote women within branches and other structures of the ALP as well as to elected office;
- vii. to organise, in conjunction with the host State or Territory, the National Labor Women's Conferences;
- viii. to administer travel subsidy to the National Labor Women's Conferences;
- ix. to promote contact between the ALP and women's organisations in the community;
- x. to assist in the development of policy and ensure women participate in policy making; and
- xi. to nominate representatives to women's forums, including international women's forums.

According to Sawyer, the National Labor Women's Network was established by the ALP to neutralise EMILY's List (see below) and ensure party control over the participation of women.⁵¹

EMILY's List

EMILY's List⁵² was formed in 1996 and stands for Early Money is Like Yeast, in other words, early campaign money is one of the most effective means of supporting a candidate. EMILY's List provides support to endorsed women ALP candidates in the form of

⁵⁰ National Labor Women's Network <http://lwn.alp.org.au>

⁵¹ Sawyer M, 'A Matter of Simple Justice? Women and Parliamentary Representation', in Sawyer M and Zappala G (eds) *Speaking for the People*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2001, p 176.

⁵² EMILY's List Australia www.emilyslist.org.au

finances, training and mentoring. These candidates must be willing to support childcare, equal pay and be pro choice. The organisation thus seeks to encourage feminist women into parliament as well as hold them accountable.⁵³ It supported 15 ALP candidates in the 2007 NSW Election, four of whom were elected to parliament (Linda Burney, Verity Firth, Sonia Hornery and Carmel Tebbutt).⁵⁴

5.1.2 Liberal Party

Unlike the ALP, the Liberal Party does not support the use of quotas to improve the number of Liberal women in parliament. They prefer to encourage the participation of women by equipping them through training and in the provision of support by the NSW Liberal Women's Forum, the Women's Council and the Federal Women's Committee.

NSW Liberal Women's Forum

The Liberal Women's Forum was launched in June 1993 with each division of the Liberal Party forming its own branch. The NSW Liberal Women's Forum⁵⁵ aims to see more women in Parliament as a result of conducting networking and training sessions. It seeks to:

- raise the profile of women candidates in preselection;
- encourage women to join and be active in the Liberal Party; and
- assist women in establishing credibility and building a successful campaign for preselection.

Women's Council

The Women's Council is the peak body of women in the NSW Liberal Party and aims to increase the number of women in the Liberal Party, as well as encourage current members and highlight issues concerning women in the Liberal debate.

Federal Women's Committee

The Federal Women's Committee was established in 1945 and encourages women to seek preselection. It stresses the difference in its approach compared to the Labor Party:

Whilst the Liberal Party does not support the ALP's quota system, the Party is aware that women of merit can be overlooked in our preselections processes, often because they lack the support and mentoring system that is often behind successful

⁵³ Sawer, above n 44, p 11.

⁵⁴ Linda Burney and Carmel Tebbutt were endorsed by EMILY's List but did not seek financial support.

⁵⁵ Liberal Party of Australia (NSW Division), 'Liberal Women's Forum', www.nsw.liberal.org.au

candidates.⁵⁶

A representative from each Division of the Liberal Party is a member of the Committee which works with Government Ministers and the national party organisation.

5.1.3 *The Nationals*

Two delegates from each State division of The Nationals serve on the Women's Federal Council. The purpose of the Federal Council is to promote the interests and political concerns of women members. Research continues to be conducted into ways The Nationals can better support the entry of women into politics.⁵⁷

5.1.4 *NSW Greens*

The Greens are one of the few parties in which women are represented in equal numbers to men. This equality is embedded in its Constitution. Clause 1.4 of the Constitution of the Greens NSW states that:

In all the activities and appointments of The Greens NSW, attempts shall be made to ensure that there is at least 50 percent representation by women and by members from outside metropolitan Sydney and representation by minority and disadvantaged groups.

The NSW Greens has an affirmative action rule which applies to the NSW Legislative Council and Commonwealth Senate. Clause 11.12 of the Greens Constitution states:

The order in which candidates are placed on the electoral ticket shall be the order in which they are elected in the PR [proportional representation] count, with the following exceptions:

The top position on the ticket is decided by an optional preferential count, conducted prior to the PR count;

If it is not the case that at least every second position on the ticket, counting from the top, is filled by a woman, the most successful women candidates shall be promoted up the ticket until this gender distribution requirement is met.

5.2 Debate regarding the use of quotas

Quotas remain one of the more controversial measures for improving the number of women in parliament.⁵⁸ They are designed to assist potential women candidates to overcome some

⁵⁶ Liberal Party of Australia (NSW Division), 'Federal Women's Committee', www.nsw.liberal.org.au

⁵⁷ The Nationals, 'Women', www.nationals.org.au Accessed 27/3/07.

⁵⁸ There are various other strategies used to improve the participation of women including zipping, twinning, the provision of special funding to women, and adapting the parliamentary

of the perceived obstacles thought to hinder their participation. Throughout the world, there are generally two types of quotas that are used: constitutionally/legislatively mandated quotas and voluntary political party quotas. In 2005, more than 40 countries had amended their constitution or passed legislation introducing electoral quotas and another 50 countries had major political parties who had voluntarily adopted quotas regarding the nomination of electoral candidates.⁵⁹ The only quotas that exist in Australia are those adopted by some of the political parties.

Dahlerup has summarised the major arguments for and against the use of quotas.⁶⁰ These appear in the table below.

Arguments for	Arguments against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quotas do not discriminate but rather compensate for barriers that prevent the equal representation of women. ▪ Individual men are not discriminated against as quotas only limit the tendency of parties to nominate men as candidates. ▪ Their use ensures that a number of women are elected which can serve to relieve the pressure that would otherwise be on a small group of women representatives who might be seen as ‘token’. ▪ Women have a right to equal representation and their experience is a necessary contribution to a well-functioning democracy. ▪ Men cannot represent the interests of women. ▪ Quotas can be designed in such a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quotas are contrary to the idea of equal opportunity as women are given preference. ▪ Political representation should be about ideas and policies not social categories. ▪ Quotas imply that some politicians are elected on the basis of gender not merit. It may result in candidates with better qualifications missing out. ▪ Many women do not want to be elected solely on the basis of gender. ▪ The use of quotas can cause significant conflict within parties. ▪ Their use could lead to a demand for

environment. These and other measures were discussed in section five of *Women in Parliament: The Current Situation* by Talina Drabsch, NSW Parliamentary Library Briefing Paper No 9/03.

⁵⁹ Dahlerup D, ‘Increasing women’s political representation: new trends in gender quotas’, in Ballington J and Karam A (eds) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2005, p 145.

⁶⁰ Dahlerup, above n 59, p 143ff.

<p>way that they are gender neutral. For example, the ALP has adopted a 40:40:20 rule where neither gender can have less than 40% representation in the party. The number of male members is thus protected as well as ensuring female representation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A number of international conventions on gender equality set targets for the representation of women including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (see below). 	<p>quotas by other groups on the basis of ethnicity, religion, etc.</p>
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The *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* focuses on the human rights of women. Australia signed the Convention on 17 July 1980. The Convention, amongst other things, acknowledges the need for women to participate equally in political life and accepts that special measures may be required to achieve equality. Article 4 states:

1. Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.
2. Adoption by States Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.

The Convention also recognises that it is desirable that women have the right to hold public office on equal terms with men. Article 7 of the Convention is concerned with political and public life and states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- b. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the

implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

- c. To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

In accordance with the Convention, countries are to provide periodic reports on the implementation of its terms. The combined fourth and fifth periodic report of Australia noted that the Commonwealth Government was focusing on the under-representation of women in high-level decision-making, including the political system.⁶¹ The report stressed that women in Australia are appointed on the basis of merit and not as a result of quotas:

Generally, measures have not relied on prescription or compulsory quotas, but on identifying and promoting the considerable talent pool of Australian women. Australian women are selected on their merits to the highest levels and have not relied on special treatment strategies.⁶²

Quotas are not essential for the number of women in national parliaments to increase. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland have generally had the greatest proportion of women in their national parliaments compared to other countries. However, contrary to common belief, the start of the real rise in the number of women parliamentarians in these countries occurred prior to the adoption of quotas by political parties.⁶³ Dahlerup and Freidenvall have noted that when political parties in Scandinavia introduced quotas in the 1980s, women already constituted 20 to 30 per cent of parliamentarians.⁶⁴ Quotas were thus used to consolidate rather than increase the representation of women. The substantial improvement in the Nordic region over the last 30 years is thought to be due to sustained pressure by women's groups within the political parties themselves as well as a result of continued efforts by the women's movement more generally.

⁶¹ Australian Government, Commonwealth Office on the Status of Women, *Australia's Combined Fourth and Fifth Reports to the United Nations on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*, June 2003, p 14.

⁶² Commonwealth Office on the Status of Women, above n 61, p 35.

⁶³ Dahlerup, above n 59, p 147.

⁶⁴ Dahlerup D and Freidenvall L, 'Quotas as a "fast track" to equal political representation for women', Paper presented to the IPSA World Congress, Durban, South Africa, 29 June to 4 July 2003, p 2.

5.2.1 *Affirmative action in Australia*

One of the difficulties with implementing quotas in Australia is the use of single member constituencies for the NSW Legislative Assembly and the Australian House of Representatives. Multi-member constituencies can allow a number of male and female candidates to stand without the position of any particular person put at risk. Opposition to their use in systems with single member electorates may subsequently be greater as it may threaten the replacement of male incumbents with female candidates. The imposition of quotas in single member electorates can also substantially inhibit the freedom of political parties to select the candidate of their choice. Quotas are accordingly less likely to be supported in political systems dominated by political parties.

The different strategies employed by the major parties in Australia were noted earlier in section five. Members of the Liberal and Labor Parties have often differed significantly in their view of the use of quotas and other affirmative action measures to increase the representation of women in parliament. However, Brennan has highlighted how the approach of the two parties may not be as different as is often presented:

Liberal women have eschewed affirmative action measures, such as quotas designed to ensure that a given proportion of seats go to women. . . . It is true that the Liberal Party has set no quotas for women in the Parliamentary sphere. But it would be difficult to argue that Liberal Party women seeking preselection have not benefited from the fact that the Liberals have adopted stronger affirmative action measures than any other Australian political party.⁶⁵

In NSW, these measures include a requirement that women are to hold two of the four vice-presidential positions in the Liberal Party, and there must be two women country and two metropolitan delegates to the State Conference.⁶⁶ One of the two delegates from each electorate on the selection panels for the Legislative Council must be a woman. Brennan has argued elsewhere that ‘Measures that would today be described as affirmative action or positive discrimination were built in to the Liberal Party at its inception. Liberal women have had many more guaranteed opportunities within their party organisation than their Labor sisters’.⁶⁷ This argument is supported by both Don Harwin and Jenny Gardiner, members of the Liberal and National parties respectively, who note that:

the reserved positions support Deborah Brennan’s argument that while the Liberal Party has espoused ideological opposition to affirmative action methods such as quota systems to encourage women’s advancement, it has historically provided

⁶⁵ Brennan D, ‘Gender and political representation’ in Summers J, Woodward D and Parkin A (eds) *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*, 7th ed, Longman, Frenchs Forest, 2002, p 289.

⁶⁶ Brennan D, ‘Women in the “Mother Parliament”: inaugural impressions’, in Brennan D and Chappell L (eds) *‘no fit place for women’? Women in New South Wales Politics, 1856-2006*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006, p 30.

⁶⁷ Brennan, above n 66, p 29.

guaranteed opportunities for women. If not in name then certainly in substance, the Liberal Party from a very early stage adopted strategies to assist the internal representation and electoral outcomes of women.⁶⁸

A large number of women entered Federal Parliament for the first time following the 1996 election, the majority of whom belonged to the Liberal Party. This led some to praise the approach of the Liberal Party and state that, unlike Labor, quotas were not required to improve the proportion of women in parliament. However, the situation reversed in the 1998 election, with more of the successful female candidates for the House of Representatives representing Labor than Liberal. There are currently 33 ALP women in the Australian Parliament (out of a total of 88 ALP parliamentarians) compared to 22 Liberal women (out of 106 Liberal parliamentarians) and three Nationals women (out of a total of 16).⁶⁹ It would seem that the impact of affirmative action in the ALP is starting to be felt and has been an effective way of increasing the number of women in parliament. However, whether this is the best way to improve the participation of women remains a point of debate.

5.3 The 2007 NSW State Election

The NSW State Election held on 24 March 2007 provides a recent example for analysis regarding the extent to which the number of women in parliament has improved and some of the barriers that remain. An opportunity is available to consider the number of female candidates, the obstacles some may have faced in terms of preselection, and the extent to which they were successful in their bid for a place in NSW Parliament.

Matland has identified three obstacles that need to be overcome before women enter parliament.⁷⁰

1. Women need to select themselves as potential members of parliament.
2. Parties need to select women as candidates.
3. Voters need to elect the women candidates.

Political parties thus have a critical role in the process. They can encourage women to consider standing in an election, they largely control the preselection process and they can influence the way candidates are presented to the voting public. Karam concludes:

⁶⁸ Harwin D and Gardiner J, 'Women in the NSW Coalition parties', in Brennan D and Chappell L (eds) *'no fit place for women'? Women in New South Wales Politics, 1856-2006*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006, p 114.

⁶⁹ There are currently two vacancies in the Senate following the death of Senator Jeannie Ferris on 2 April 2007 and the resignation of Senator Santo Santoro on 11 April 2007.

⁷⁰ Matland R, 'Enhancing women's political participation: Legislative recruitment and electoral systems', in Ballington J and Karam A (eds) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2005, p 93.

As political parties are the gatekeepers to elected office, since they choose lists of candidates, they hold the key to the political advancement of women.... The stage at which party gatekeepers choose the candidates is the most crucial for getting women into legislatures, as their inclusion and placement on party lists is of vital importance for getting elected. So long as political parties remain highly gendered institutions, women's access to leadership positions will be impeded.⁷¹

According to Matland, the impact of affirmative action measures can thus be substantial:

The crucial point is that political parties have the power to compensate for the skewed nature of their pool of aspirants through the use of quotas or other party rules which can lead to greater gender equality. Because the eligibility pool is skewed, if the parties adopt gender-neutral nominating rules the consequence would be a pool of candidates skewed towards men.⁷²

One of the difficulties associated with the electoral system adopted for the lower houses of the NSW and Australian parliaments is the use of single member electorates. Parties may be reluctant to remove an incumbent male member from a safe seat so that a female candidate can stand in his place. Proportional representation is seen as a much better vehicle for improving the number of women parliamentarians as parties do not have to deny a place to an incumbent and/or male candidate in order to select a woman.⁷³ This seems to be the case in the NSW Legislative Council and Australian Senate which have traditionally had a much higher proportion of women compared to the lower houses. The gap is more pronounced in the Australian Senate where 35% of its members are women (as at 13 April 2007) compared to 25% in the House of Representatives. The gap is narrower in NSW where 31% of the Legislative Council members are women, compared to 28% in the Legislative Assembly. However, it is only in the last 10 years that the gap has really started to close. For example, 33% of Legislative Council members in May 1996 were women compared to only 16% of members of the Legislative Assembly.

The preselection process plays a crucial role in the number of women elected to parliament. Unless women are preselected as candidates, little is able to change. A common complaint has been the difference in the way proposed women candidates are questioned in the preselection process compared to men.⁷⁴ For example, Chris McDiven, Federal President of the Liberal Party, has highlighted how in almost every selection committee in which she has participated for the Liberal Party the female candidate is generally asked questions on

⁷¹ Karam A, 'Conclusions', in Ballington J and Karam A (eds) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2005, p 251.

⁷² Matland, above n 70, p 97.

⁷³ Matland, above n 70, p 105.

⁷⁴ Henderson A, *Getting Even: Women MPs on Life, Power and Politics*, Harper Collins, Pymble, 1999.

personal matters as well as health, education, the environment, and family and women's issues. On the other hand, male candidates are asked to discuss finance, the economy and current affairs.⁷⁵

There were 537 candidates for the Legislative Assembly in the 2007 NSW election, of whom approximately 30% were women. Of the major parties, the ALP overwhelmingly fielded the largest number of women candidates, 37 out of 93 (40%). 17% of the Coalition candidates were women (13 out of 73 Liberal candidates and 3 out of 20 Nationals candidates). The Greens had the highest proportion of women candidates for any party (44 out of 93 or 53%) followed by the Democrats at 46%.

Another factor that influences the number of women in parliament is the relative safety of the seat for which a female candidate is preselected. If women are mainly preselected for seats that are safely held by an opposing party, it can be very difficult for the number of women parliamentarians to increase. It can also enable political parties to appear as supportive of women in terms of numbers but not necessarily when it comes to placing candidates in winnable positions. In the 2007 NSW election, ALP women were preselected for 10 of the 38 seats deemed to be very safe Labor seats. Another 5 ALP women were preselected for safe Labor seats, out of the 14 safe Labor seats available. Accordingly, 29% of very safe or safe Labor seats had female ALP candidates.

In contrast, only 14% of very safe or safe Coalition seats had women candidates representing the Coalition. This might be a result of there being far fewer relatively safe seats available (21 compared to 52 for the ALP). A Nationals woman was preselected for one of the six very safe Nationals seats and there were no female Nationals candidates for the three safe Nationals seats. Only one Liberal woman was preselected for one of the seven seats deemed to be very safe Liberal seats, and one Liberal woman was the candidate for a safe Liberal seat, out of the five available.

26 women were eventually elected as members of the NSW Legislative Assembly with the result that there is now one more woman than just before the 2007 election. Women thus constitute 28% of members of the Legislative Assembly. 18 women represent the ALP, five were elected on behalf of the Liberal Party, one from The Nationals, and there are two women Independents.

Elections for half of the seats in the Legislative Council were held on the same day as those for the Lower House. In contrast to the Legislative Assembly, proportional representation is used to elect MLCs, with members elected to represent the entire State. Some would argue that this facilitates the greater representation of women as it allows some of the advantages thought to accompany multi-member electorates. Of the 21 members elected, seven were women (33.3%). Accordingly, the number of women in the Legislative Council currently stands at 13 out of 42 (31%).

⁷⁵ McDiven C, 'Into parliament she must go – women in politics', *Sydney Papers*, 11(1) Summer 1999, pp 11-16.

6 DO WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There has been much debate in recent years over the sort of impact made by larger numbers of women in parliament. Do women behave differently to men in parliament? What proportion of parliamentarians need to be women before a difference is noticeable? Is a greater presence of women sufficient? Numerous political scientists have discussed the concept of critical mass, the notion that once women constitute a certain proportion of parliamentarians (usually 30%) the institution will adapt to the presence of women to the extent that the feminisation of parliament occurs. However, Sarah Childs has highlighted how the notion of critical mass can fixate on number counting and ignore the influence of other factors determining the impact of women parliamentarians such as party membership and how different women perceive their gender. Accordingly, 'critical acts' may be of greater importance than 'critical mass'.⁷⁶

Commentators have differed over whether the presence of women in parliament affects the way proceedings are conducted and the types of issues raised. A number of studies have considered the extent to which women parliamentarians seek to represent so-called 'women's issues', noting the frequency with which matters of childcare, paid maternity leave, etc are raised.⁷⁷ Some commentators argue that the presence of greater numbers of women in parliament encourages more consensual decision-making. Others object to the perceived stereotyping inherent in such a belief. However, studies have found that women members of parliament generally believe they have a different style of politics, notably one that is less adversarial.⁷⁸

A number of scholars stress that there is not a simple link between the number of women in a parliament and the level of attention given to 'women's issues'.⁷⁹ Sawyer has emphasised the distinction between 'standing for' and 'acting for', highlighting that the presence of women can serve as an alibi for policies that are not 'women-friendly'.⁸⁰ For example, Sawyer notes that the increase in the number of women in the federal parliament following the 1996 election coincided with cuts to the Office of the Status of Women, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and child care funding. Similarly, Maddison and Partridge have stressed that 'Higher numbers of women in parliament do not necessarily result in laws and policies that promote gender equality, nor are parliaments

⁷⁶ Childs S, 'A feminised style of politics? Women MPs in the House of Commons', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6(1) February 2004, pp 4-5.

⁷⁷ For example, Sawyer M, " 'When women support women...' EMILY's List and the substantive representation of women in Australia', Paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Adelaide, 29 September to 1 October 2004; Sawyer, above n 44, p 8.

⁷⁸ Childs, above n 76, p 14.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Brennan, above n 65, p 292.

⁸⁰ Sawyer M, " 'When women support women...' EMILY's List and the substantive representation of women in Australia', Paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Adelaide, 29 September to 1 October 2004, p 2.

dominated by men inherently incapable of taking women's interests into account'. However, they go on to state that 'It is certainly the case that equal representation is *more likely* to result in a better representation of the diversity of the electorate, and to enable issues of importance to women to be addressed'.⁸¹

In Australia, party allegiance may generally be of greater relevance than gender as political parties and tight party discipline dominate the Australian political system. Tremblay has said that party membership can influence the extent to which women parliamentarians see themselves as representing women, with members of the Liberal Party and the Nationals being less likely to view themselves as representing women than members of the ALP and the Democrats.⁸² Within the political parties, factional loyalties may also be of greater importance than any feminist sympathies. Consequently, these loyalties can divide women within a party. On the other hand, the existence of women caucuses, such as within the parliamentary ALP, have been found to contribute to the substantive as opposed to merely descriptive representation of women.⁸³

As members of parliament generally vote along party lines, individual members may have less freedom to adopt a position in keeping with their specific ideology. An exception is the opportunity provided by conscience votes. However, conscience votes in the Australian Parliament are relatively rare and are usually reserved for what are seen as 'moral issues' such as euthanasia and stem cell research. Section 6.1 discusses the passage of the RU486 Bill through the Australian Parliament in February 2006. It is particularly noteworthy as four women from different parties supported the Bill. It provides an interesting example of what can happen when conscience votes are permitted and party loyalties are subsequently lessened. Collective action by women parliamentarians is not unknown in the NSW Parliament either. On 17 October 1991, 13 of the 15 women members of the Legislative Council walked out in protest of the Second Reading debate for the Procurement of Miscarriage Limitation Bill, an anti-abortion bill.⁸⁴ These women belonged to a number of political parties.

Another perceived obstacle in the Australian political system is the existence of single member electorates in the lower houses of the parliaments of Australia and NSW. Women parliamentarians elected in this way may have a greater sense of representing a geographical region as opposed to women per se.⁸⁵ According to Tremblay, women parliamentarians elected to multimember divisions on the basis of proportional representation feel a greater freedom to represent a particular interest group than those who are elected as the sole representative of a particular district. She argues:

⁸¹ Maddison, above n 9, p 56.

⁸² Tremblay M, 'Women's representational role in Australia and Canada: The impact of political context', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 38(2) July 2003, p 226.

⁸³ Tremblay, above n 82, p 226.

⁸⁴ Brennan, above n 66, p 16.

⁸⁵ Tremblay, above n 82, pp 215-238.

The electoral system is more than a screening device that determines who will be elected and how; it colours perceptions of the role of political representation. The single-member majority system fosters ‘general’ representation in that one person represents the entire electoral division, whereas the proportional system with multimember divisions has a group of parliamentarians for a given division, the members of which may represent the different interests that exist in that electorate. Women elected under a proportional system would be freer to represent women than would women elected under a majority system.⁸⁶

It is argued that a political system based on single member electorates hinders the ability of women parliamentarians to work on a consensual basis, as the opposing groups of government and opposition dominate parliament.⁸⁷ Committees are thought to provide a better forum for consensus decision-making.

In any event, women parliamentarians hold many views and have varying experiences – there is no single ‘women’s voice’ in parliament. A woman’s identity can be influenced by many factors other than gender including religion and ethnicity. This has led some women parliamentarians to be described as having ‘dual accountabilities’ (see section 4.6).

Nonetheless, despite the diversity of women in politics, studies have continued to find that women do influence the course of events in parliament – in their policy priorities, attitudes and the way in which they participate.⁸⁸ Tremblay has found that a ‘gender-based mandate’ does exist, that is, the majority of women parliamentarians feel they have some responsibility to represent women.⁸⁹ However, this responsibility is tempered by the political system in which they operate – by factional loyalties, party ideology, and the electoral system.

In summary, Maddison and Partridge have suggested that the following factors can inhibit the influence of women parliamentarians:⁹⁰

- the lack of a critical mass of women who are also able to enforce change;
- women often represent less safe seats and are thus not as secure and confident in advocating change;
- an absence of women from key positions such as ministerial posts;

⁸⁶ Tremblay, above n 82, p 221.

⁸⁷ Sawer M, Tremblay M and Trimble L, ‘Introduction: Patterns and practice in the parliamentary representation of women’, in Sawer M, Tremblay M and Trimble L (eds), *Representing Women in Parliament*, Routledge, London, 2006, p 5.

⁸⁸ Brennan, above n 66, p 16.

⁸⁹ Tremblay, above n 82, pp 215 and 221.

⁹⁰ Maddison and Partridge, above n 9, p 77.

- the entrenched male culture of parliament;
- work and family issues including a lack of childcare and parliamentary sitting hours. For example, Carmel Tebbutt, former NSW Minister for Education and Training, recently announced that she would not be renominating for a position in the Iemma Ministry in order to spend more time with her young son. Senator Natasha Stott Despoja cited similar reasons for her decision to retire from the Australian Senate at the next election;
- the adversarial nature of debate can deter women;
- the ‘boy’s club’ atmosphere; and
- high levels of political partisanship can prevent female solidarity.

6.1 Case study: the RU486 Bill

A recent example of collective action by women parliamentarians is the passage of the RU486 Bill through the Australian Parliament in February 2006. It is noteworthy as it was introduced as a private member’s bill in the Senate and supported by four women Senators from various parties, namely, Senator Lyn Allison (Australian Democrats), Senator Claire Moore (ALP), Senator Fiona Nash (The Nationals), and Senator Judith Troeth (Liberal). These senators were accordingly linked by gender rather than party membership,⁹¹ an unusual situation in Australian politics. Indeed this was the first time that four members from different parties had co-sponsored a private senator’s bill.⁹² It serves as an interesting case study of the difference that can be made by women parliamentarians.

The Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486) Bill 2006 (‘the RU486 Bill’) sought to remove ministerial control of the approval process of certain abortifacients, notably RU486 (mifepristone), commonly known as the abortion pill. The particularly controversial aspect of RU486 centred on the ability to use it for medical as opposed to surgical abortions.⁹³ A 1996 amendment to the *Therapeutic Goods Act* had prevented its importation to Australia by providing the Minister for Health with the power to authorise its importation or registration as opposed to the Secretary of the Department of Health. Abortifacients were thus placed in a category known as ‘restricted goods’ – these require ministerial approval before the goods could be evaluated, registered, listed or imported. RU486 was one of only eight drugs that fell within this category (the others being alprostadiol, carboprost, dinoprost, dinoprostone, gemeprost, misoprostol, prostaglandins and vaccines against human chorionic gonadotrophin). The Therapeutic Goods Administration had sole responsibility for the regulation of all other medications.

⁹¹ This link was made clear by Senator Claire Moore, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 97.

⁹² Senator Fiona Nash, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 88.

⁹³ For information on the debate surrounding RU486 see section 6.4 of *Abortion and the Law in New South Wales* by Talina Drabsch, NSW Parliamentary Library Briefing Paper No 9/05.

Consequently, the necessary approval of the Federal Minister for Health was an unusual requirement.

One of the main issues to emerge regarding these arrangements was who should be the appropriate authority to evaluate the risk associated with RU486 and thus decide whether it is appropriate for use in Australia.⁹⁴ The intent of the RU486 Bill was to remove responsibility for approval of RU486 from the Minister for Health and Ageing and transfer it to the Therapeutic Goods Administration. According to the Explanatory Memoranda, 'The amendments to the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 in this Bill will bring the approval process for medications such as RU486 into line with the evidence-based assessment used for all other medicines in Australia'.

Members of Parliament stressed that the primary concern of the RU486 Bill was the drug approval process in Australia.⁹⁵ Others argued that because of the controversial nature of the medical procedures facilitated by this drug, namely abortion, the issues involved were much more complex.⁹⁶ Consequently, whilst ostensibly about the drug approval process in Australia, the core issue was largely perceived as abortion, and thus a 'women's issue'. Senator Penny Wong noted that:

It is unusual in this place to have such a thing [cross-party sponsorship] occur, and it is good that there are occasions when our different political beliefs and our membership of different political parties do not prevent us from pressing an issue that we regard as important for the benefit of women in Australia.⁹⁷

A conscience vote was permitted and some of the restrictions of party allegiance were accordingly removed. The Bill passed through the Senate with 45 in favour and 28 against the Bill. There was no Division in the House of Representatives with the Bill carried on the voices.

As conscience votes are rare, the implications of the passage of the RU486 Bill and the various events leading up to it are not certain. It is unknown how frequently an issue would arise that would spur a number of women from various parties to work together to pass relevant legislation. Nonetheless, the passage of the RU486 Bill serves as an important demonstration of the difference that can be made by women in parliament and it may serve to encourage similar actions in future. Indeed, there have been reports that following the success of the RU486 Bill women MPs are planning to meet regularly to discuss such issues as child care, paid maternity leave and reproductive rights in developing countries.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Buckmaster L, *RU486 for Australia?*, Parliamentary Library Research Note No 19, 2005-06, p 1.

⁹⁵ For example, Senator Fiona Nash, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, pp 89-90; Senator the Hon John Faulkner, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 123.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Senator Gary Humphries, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 101; Senator the Hon Nick Minchin, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 108.

⁹⁷ Senator Penny Wong, *CPD(Senate)*, 8/2/06, p 150.

⁹⁸ 'Win gives scope for parliamentary sisterhood', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18/2/06, p 6.

These events demonstrate that whilst some features of parliaments of the Westminster tradition may hinder the ability of women to work together on a consensual basis, these obstacles are surmountable.

7 CONCLUSION

The number of women parliamentarians in Australia generally continues to increase. However, the percentage of women parliamentarians in the Australian House of Representatives has not improved at the same rate as the proportion in the lower houses of some other parliaments throughout the world. Australia's global ranking recently fell for the first time to its current place of 33rd; four years ago, Australia was ranked 23rd. A much greater increase is still required before there are equal numbers of men and women parliamentarians in Australia.

This paper has explored the difference made by women once they are in parliament. The passage of the RU486 Bill through the Federal Parliament in early 2006 illustrated the impact that can be made by women when they are united by a common cause, and circumstances allow this issue to be of greater significance than party loyalty. It will be interesting to observe whether women parliamentarians are subsequently more likely to work together on certain issues.

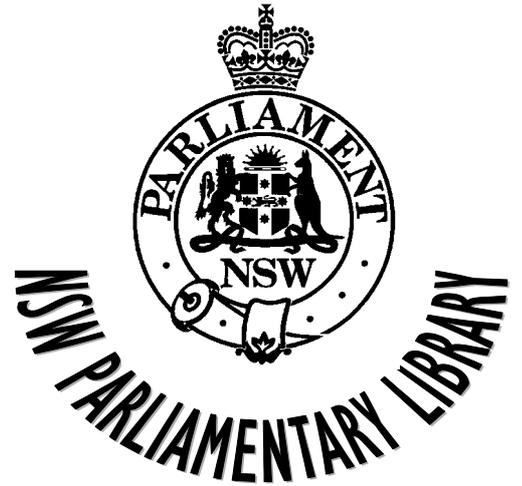
Political parties continue to dominate the parliamentary system in Australia and are thus an important consideration when developing strategies to increase the number of women in parliament. Of the major political parties, the ALP overwhelmingly has the greatest proportion of women in parliament, attributed by many to the ALP's use of affirmative action. However, the use of quotas remains highly controversial with the Coalition parties quick to claim better results can be obtained by other means such as mentoring and the conduct of training and networking sessions.

As women become an ever more regular feature of parliament, their novelty value is likely to decrease. Many argue that whilst the treatment of women politicians by the media has improved it nonetheless remains distinctive in the attention still given to the appearance and personal life of some women. However, whether this difference is due to a bias in some sections of the media, the personalities of certain women politicians, or some other factor, remains a matter of debate. According to Baird:

Most women MPs today find the media fairly reasonable and professional, although they are acutely conscious of the dangers of too much media attention, or 'the Natasha factor'. The average female politician struggles more with *invisibility* than with the excessive attention or curiosity shown by the press towards the novel political women in the 1970s. The one in real danger is the exceptional woman politician: novel by dint of her talent and popular appeal, which is usually translated into celebrity power.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Baird, above n 15, p 240.

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