

# National Council of Women of Australia Report

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## Background

**National Councils of Women** were established in all States of Australia between 1896 and 1910— New South Wales in 1896, Tasmania in 1899, Victoria and South Australia in 1902, Queensland in 1905 and Western Australia in 1911. The National Council of Women of Australia (**NCWA**) was formed in 1931. The NCWA is an umbrella organisation with which the seven State and Territory National Councils of Women are affiliated. It is non party political, non sectarian, volunteer organisation and open to all women.

NCWA is affiliated with the International Council of Women (**ICW**), which was established in 1888. The NCWA is also a member of the Asia-Pacific Regional Council of ICW.

The broad world-wide 'Council idea' had been the brainchild of two American women leaders, suffragist Susan B. Anthony and fellow activist May Wright Sewall. In June 1887, Anthony issued an international call to 'all women of light and learning, to all associations of women in trades, professions and reforms, as well as to those advocating political rights', to congregate together on 25 March 1888 at a conference hosted by the National Woman Suffrage Association in Washington DC to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the American Women's Equal Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls in 1848. The ideal, to form an international women's movement that went beyond political rights and reflected all the interests of women engaged in public work, was summed up by Sewall as the 'Council Idea'. Because the Council was conceived as an umbrella structure, existing women's groups of all kinds could gather under its canopy at national and international levels to discuss matters of common interest, to gather information and to learn from each other in order to promote peace and general wellbeing. Thus the gathering in 1888 saw the birth of both the International Council of Women and the first National Council of Women, appropriately in the United States. The ICW's American founders took advantage of the Chicago World exhibition in 1893 to organise the largest and most representative gathering of women yet held anywhere in the world to start planning the structure of the envisaged permanent forum 'where all the great questions that concern humanity shall be discussed from the woman's point of view'.

**Margaret Windeyer**, a NSW Commissioner to the Chicago World exhibition, brought the idea back to Australia and formed the first Council in Sydney in 1896.

In the wake of the Great War, the ICW became one of the principal channels through which women's interests were expressed at the League of Nations. After World War II, it was granted **United Nations** general consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The ICW has 63 National Councils of Women as members. The ICW saw their international contacts as a common goal of achieving understanding between nations. The global network of the ICW is the symbol of the intercultural dialogue which is considered nowadays as a fundamental milestone for peace and human security.

Given the 'Council idea' which also applies in Australia, the NCWA has been able to claim to speak on behalf of its constituents at State, National and International levels of government, though this was not without challenge from newer, generally more radical groupings. The Council has, however, had more staying power than any of its rivals and, for most of its existence, can be accurately described as the peak body representing the great majority of women's groups in this country: groups whose activities focused not only on religion, morality, health, child welfare, education and philanthropy, but also on peace, women's economic and political rights, media representations, and legal reform in the interests of justice for women.

The number of affiliated organisations enables NCWA leaders to claim they represent the views of over a million Australian women. Thus, the feminist face the NCWA has presented has necessarily been moderate with an emphasis on information, education and co-operation rather than on activism, agitation and opposition. Although the Councils have always identified as moderate and mainstream, stressing especially the interests of home and family, membership of the ICW committed them to a growing list of policies that reflected a broad liberal equal rights feminist agenda and inevitably involved them in lobbying on issues such as equal pay, equality within marriage, equal representation on all decision-making bodies and equal access to all occupations and professions.



## Uniting National Councils of Women Worldwide in Global Action for .....

**I**nternational peace and justice

**C**apacity building for women as decision-makers

**W**omen's human rights and rights for all people

*“ICW was there when women leaders decided to declare the year, 1975 as the International Year of Women. ICW has been there to firmly establish the value of gender equality as a central norm of international law. Through the United Nations Decade for Women and four world conferences including the Beijing Conference of 1995, ICW was always at the center of the global women's movement improving the lives of women all over the world. We will continue to build on that tradition, while trying to make a great leap around the triennial theme of “Transforming Society through Women's Empowerment”.*

*Let us unite our efforts to promote the political, economic and social empowerment of women through which we can transform society. Women should be represented equally in politics, on the boards of companies, and decision making positions of society, and stronger measures should be taken in each society to eliminate trafficking and violence against women. We will develop and provide leadership training programs for women of the world so that we women could be the transformation that we envision in the world. Transforming a society starts from transforming women, through women's empowerment.*

*We want a world where inequality based on gender is absent from every country, and from the relationships among countries. We want a peaceful world without the threat of nuclear weapons. We want a transparent society without corruption. We want human rights to the highest attainable standard of health and the dignity of all human beings. We want sustainable development and access to clean energy. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. We want to eliminate gender pay gap and discrimination against women in work place. We want an international community concerned with the rights of asylum seeking women and children. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships. They can be achieved together through the self-empowerment of women.*

*Let us be the transformation that we wish to see in the world. And let us empower the ICW. Let us develop and expand stronger networks. Let us be united for our vision for transforming society through women's empowerment. As the gender that bears, gives birth to, and nurtures life, women can transform the society through nurturing and caring women's leadership. We will support more women to advance into politics and economic activities, and eliminate obstacles against women's empowerment. ”*

**Dr Kim Jung Sook ICW President 2015-2018**

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### **ICW Mission Statement...**

To unite National Councils of Women's non-governmental organizations from all parts of the world for action to improve the status of women and the well-being of society

### **The International Council of Women promotes...**

- ❖ Equal rights and responsibilities for women and men
- ❖ Peace and understanding through international co-operation, negotiation and reconciliation
- ❖ The fuller integration of women as decision-makers in peace-making and peace building
- ❖ Human rights for all people
- ❖ The elimination of all forms of discrimination
- ❖ Sustainable development

- ❖ Communication and networking worldwide

## **The International Council of Women takes action through...**

- ❖ Seminars and workshops to build skills
- ❖ Development of its regional councils: ECICW (European Center); Regional Council of the Americas; Regional Council of Africa; APRC (Asia-Pacific Regional Council)
- ❖ Voices of ICW permanent representatives at meetings of UN agencies in New York, Vienna, Geneva, Rome, Paris and Nairobi
- ❖ Advocacy annually at the UN Commission on the Status of Women
- ❖ Training on CEDAW reporting (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women)



## The NCWA

The Objectives of the NCWA are focussed on humanitarian and educational areas of concern, seeking to raise the awareness of women and girls to their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to encourage the participation of women in all aspects of community life. The NCWA work with and across all sectors to identify and bring about change to ensure that there is equity and security for all in Australia. Many of the gains made for gender equality require constant monitoring and implementation across all sectors of Australian life.

The NCWA advocates, informs and educates women and girls as to their rights and responsibilities and holds celebrations to acknowledge women across all fields of endeavour. Their current activities include support for:

- ❖ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance and White Ribbon Day
- ❖ National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN)
- ❖ Coalition for Working Women (CWW)
- ❖ Defence Reserves Support Council

The NCWA is a company limited by guarantee. The Board consists of a President, two Vice-Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, and Coordinator of Standing Committees plus the Presidents of each State or Territory Council, or their nominees. They meet by teleconference every 2 months.



## NCW NSW 1896 - 2015

The NCW NSW has 44 member organisations and 40 individual members. Their motto is: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Their Mission is: Promoting the Advancement of Women and Children. Their Patron is Mrs Linda Hurley, wife of the current Governor General of New South Wales. It will celebrate its 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year in 2016.

The Executive (President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer) is supported by a number of Standing Committees on areas of interest including:

- ❖ Status of Women e.g. safe housing; safe care of refugee children; working together for equality and the status of women; Rights and Responsibilities Report by the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Tim Wilson
- ❖ Communication e.g. the National Curriculum and the funding and staffing of schools in NSW
- ❖ Arts, Music, Letters e.g. Educational Transformations – the power of arts in providing additional benefits of improved school attendance and sense of well being
- ❖ Social Issues e.g. ageing; domestic violence; the growing relevance of grandparenting in modern families
- ❖ General Wellbeing e.g. nutrition, new food labelling laws
- ❖ Sustainable Development e.g. rural and urban women and their issues; research into gender and pay equality.

The Executive Committee meets monthly. Recommendations are taken to the General Council Meetings held on the last Thursday of every month. Guest speakers are invited to inform and educate affiliated organisations on current issues. Examples over the last 12 months include:

- ❖ Susanna Matters – Women of the Future – the plight of young women in Kenya
- ❖ Michaela Kupcakova – Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation – awareness campaign
- ❖ Pauline Markwell – Women's Plans Foundation – family planning in Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos
- ❖ Gemma Rygate, Centre for Volunteers – volunteerism strengthens people, organisations and communities
- ❖ Dr Janice Withnall – Medical Women's Society – research into alcohol related dementia
- ❖ Dr Anne Sheehan – Soroptimist International – homelessness and affordable housing

Regular Annual Events over the last 12 months included:

- ❖ Foundation Day Lunch. August. Affiliated organisations nominate a person for an award to recognise their work to advance the status of women.
- ❖ The Marie Bashir Peace Awards. August. Tertiary students nominated by principals of schools in NSW of a female student who has made a significant contribution to harmony or social justice, displaying leadership in fostering harmonious relationships and peace.
- ❖ Celebrate Being an Australian Lunch and Australia Day Awards. January. Awards to post-graduate students to assist and encourage them to pursue study in their chosen area of interest.
- ❖ International Women's Day. 8 March. Australian National Committee for UN Women's Breakfast
- ❖ Jean Arnett Memorial Lunch. May. A joint effort by the NCW NSW and Australian Business and Professional Women to recognise ladies in their 90<sup>th</sup> year or older who have made a substantial contribution to their communities.