

Australian Federation of Graduate Women

A Voice for Graduate Women



Newsletter

March 2011

World and local disasters

As this is the first AFGW newsletter since the floods, fires, cyclone and earthquakes I begin with a message of concern and sympathy to all those involved and to all our members affected themselves or with friends and family involved. We have also sent messages of support on behalf of AFGW to NZFGW in New Zealand and JAUW in Japan over the earthquakes and tsunami that have caused such devastation and loss of life.

Council

The first council meeting of the year was held on 26 February, for the first time a one day meeting held at the Stamford Hotel at Sydney airport enabling people from all but WA to avoid nights away from home. An assessment is being made of the personal and financial implications of this to Council members and to AFGW finances.

More importantly, the morning of this meeting was devoted to a workshop on Membership and Rebuilding AFGW Inc. ably facilitated by Kathy Mumford (CIR WA and IFUW-Connections Co-convener, past CIR AFUW, past President AFUW TAS) Kathryn Seymour (GWQ, past CIR AFUW, past member IFUW Membership committee, past young member coordinator AFUW SA) and Michelle Imison (AFGWNSW, Convener Young Members NSW, Convener Special Committee on Projects Development IFUW). A full report of the outcomes and progress from this workshop will be in the July *Graduate Women* but three top priorities for action were determined in each of three fields: -

- ***What does AFGW Have to Offer?***
- ***How do/can we market and promote ourselves more effectively?***
- ***How can AFGW create a positive atmosphere for growth?***

In total nine priorities will be topics for hard research and development work by Council and others co-opted to help, each Council member having elected for a preferred 'priority' and been challenged to enrol a new member by April 30th. I extend this challenge to ALL members to enrol a new member by June 30th. All Council members will have received a summary of the outcomes of the workshop in the last few days that can be shared with members in their STAs who are interested and who might like to volunteer to assist.

We have been talking for years about the declining membership. It was acknowledged in Mexico as the major challenge facing IFUW and now the time has come to stop wringing our hands and to start positive action that will mean hard work for everyone.

The Membership Committee of IFUW has designated Martine Cashell-Smith from New Zealand as the committee member with responsibility for our region.

2012 marks 90 years of AFGW and its precursors in Australia which should be a time of celebration not a time to watch the demise of an organization that is contributing over \$400,000 in scholarships and prizes each triennium, working through two of the six National Women's Alliances to influence the place of women in all fields of policy and government and at local level in so many ways to empower women through education.

Another important decision made by Council was to extend to AFGW-NT the 'special circumstances' provision for continuation as a separate STA until the end of this triennium despite its membership being less than 20. However, we do expect every effort to be made, in this time of concentration on membership, to raise the numbers to the statutory level and will maintain a watching brief, and regular reporting to Council about progress towards a membership of 20 will be essential.

The AFGW Local Arrangements Committee (LAC Committee) for the 2012 Triennial Conference in Brisbane under the chairmanship of Colleen Forrester was endorsed and the Conference theme of **Education, Women and Work** endorsed by Council with enthusiasm. The Conference and Council meetings will be at The Women's College, University of Queensland 22-25 November 2012.

Anxiety was expressed about the convener/committee system that seems to have broken down mainly due to a lack of conveners at State level or their failure to communicate with the National Conveners. As Education is our main focus a motion was passed that each STA President appoint an education convener as a matter of urgency and send details of that person to the National Conveners, Marion Jones (Schools) and Madeleine Laming (Tertiary Education). In addition Marion Jones asked for input from STAs for a submission on teacher/librarians for the House of Representatives Committee.

Commission on the Status of Women

Many of you will be aware, from involvement with other women's NGOs, of the Commission on the Status of Women that meets in March each year at the United Nations in New York.

The Commission on the Status of Women ("CSW") is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Every year, representatives of Member States gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. This year the priority theme was:

'Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.'

With such a theme it is no surprise that IFUW decided to increase its team of representatives to 20 and we were delighted that two AFGW members from GWVic, Dr Madeleine Laming and Associate Professor Helen Forgasz nominated and were chosen for this team. I hope to have a preliminary report from them very soon but they have promised a contribution to **Graduate Women** in July. In addition, Elaine Butler, a member from GWSA and the national co-ordinator for WAVE (Women in Adult and Vocational Education), was chosen as one of three NGO representatives to attend as part of the Australian Government delegation.

The ten page document on the agreed conclusions of CSW55 is available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/55sess.htm#agreed>. As an official delegate for the Office for Women Elaine will be preparing an official discussion paper which will be available through eS4W. Again these conclusions mean a lot of hard work if they are to produce change.

National Women's Alliances.

Those of you visiting the AFGW website will have been reminded that there are now links and member information to both eS4W (Economic Security for Women) (<http://www.security4women.org.au/>) -for which we were actually paid to keep updated - and ERA (Equality Rights Alliance) (<http://equalityrightsalliance.org.au/>). In an attempt to reduce the volume of emails, all general information will be on the ERA website and any member of AFGW is eligible to become a 'registered user' and have access to all the information about events, projects etc that used to be circulated to the Womenspeak mailing list. I recommend both websites. Much of our joint advocacy and project work is now undertaken through these Alliances. After my last newsletter I was berated for referring to much that was only available on-line so I do apologise but it is increasingly the case that this is the only source of much valuable information – and if we try to summarise this information and send it by email there are complaints about email overload from some members! Any suggestions to solve the problem gratefully received!

Centenary of International Women's Day

Celebrations will have happened all around the country in many different ways. As a first, in NSW at least, young members from AFGW NSW, Business and Professional Women (BPW) and UN Women (formerly UNIFEM) joined in an event sponsored by all three parent bodies. It was an enjoyable evening generating a small profit that helped fund our new banners produced for the occasion. As President I represented you at a morning tea at Yarralumla hosted by the Governor General to mark the commencement of the Australian Committee for UN Women and the launch of the book "Women's Words of Wisdom, Power and Passion" insights from 50 influential achievers – Miranda Kerr to Cathy Freeman via Pat O'Shane and June Dally-Watkins!

I then went to the Great Hall of Parliament House for a forum "Celebrating 100 years" with a discussion panel of Annabel Crabb, ABC Online's chief political writer, Miriam Lyons, Director of the Centre for Policy Development, Tania Major, Queensland Indigenous Youth Advocate and 2007 Young Australian of the Year, and Brigadier Alison Creagh, Director General of Public Affairs for the Australian Department of Defence. It was an interesting and stimulating panel but I was left with a feeling that women with good and reliable family support and a well paid and interesting career as a result of extended education can do almost anything but the gap between them and the women with less education, fewer career options and working from financial necessity is widening every day. This is where the women's movement needs to focus and it emphasizes the importance of AFGW's role in striving to empower women and girls through education. The day ended with a reception in the beautiful gardens of Government House to mark the Centenary of IWD. It was attended by women from the Diplomatic Corps and representatives from all Women's organizations. (How they overlap! Many AFGW members were there wearing other hats). It all happened on a beautiful sunny Canberra early autumn day leaving one with only the brief regret of the lack of a VFT track to Canberra!

Graduate Women

The annual publication is due out in late July. There will be full reports on progress and plans from the Membership Workshop Facilitators and reports from the delegates to CSW but I welcome any material from STAs about their activities, award winners, presentation ceremonies, honours, obituaries or any matter of interest to the wider membership. In NSW the Hunter Valley Branch has celebrated a 50th jubilee and the Southern Highlands Branch has preparations for a 20th birthday well advanced and I know the Sunshine Coast Branch in Queensland is also 20 years old this year.

I have met with Rebecca Richards, the first Indigenous Australian Rhodes scholar, who early in her academic career was awarded the Padnendadlu Undergraduate Bursary from AFUW SA and she has promised an update on her career before she heads across China and Siberia by train to Magdalene College Oxford. We often forget how even our smaller awards are the start of something big – or, as was the case with a recent NSW award, the deciding factor in continuing with a PhD.

Member Emerita

Our Rules allow for the election of a Member Emerita, (4 2 (d) There shall be a category of Member Emerita, who shall be recommended by an STA or Council and confirmed by Council), and I am delighted to tell you that Council approved with acclamation the nomination of Dr Jennifer Strauss AM as the first Member Emerita of AFGW. Jenny has confirmed she will be available to attend our AGM on 22 October 2011 when the formal presentation will be made. I can think of no one more worthy to be first. Apart from being the first Australian on the IFUW Board in 57 years, she has twice served as National President and twice as a vice president of Council as President of AFUW Vic. She has been a long time convener for the Status of Women and Education committees and has taught many of us all we know about the importance of the Status of Women at state, national and international level. Her submissions for advocacy are models of how best to write a submission or letter, her grasp of important issues in education, status of women, peace, resolutions and fellowships is a guide for all our conveners as well as all the Council. How lucky we are that her progress as a woman academic applying for an open scholarship was blocked all those years ago resulting in her joining AFUW as it then was!

We all offer Jenny our warmest congratulations –knowing that we now must work our hardest to revive membership in an organization to which she has given so much!

Jane Baker
President