

Gender Mainstreaming in the Australian Parliament: Achievement with room for improvement

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Introduction

Since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming—or the process of ensuring policies and practices meet the needs of men and women equitably—has been hailed as a key strategy in the achievement of gender equality. Today, international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) encourage and monitor State parties' progress in instituting gender mainstreaming practices across all sectors of policy development, implementation and oversight.

This requires that, in addition to national governments, parliaments play a fundamental role in gender mainstreaming. Interestingly, this has been a central tenet in development and governance efforts of the United Nations and other international donors across a number of developing countries. Specifically under its Millennium Development Goal 3 (Empowerment of Women), the United Nations has encouraged States to develop frameworks by which gender is mainstreamed at both government and parliamentary levels. This has seen the development of elaborate frameworks by which policy and legislation are analysed from a gender perspective.²

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) defines a gender sensitive parliament as one which responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work as a nation's peak legislative institution.³ In ensuring gender is mainstreamed, the institution will have implemented changes to promote less aggressive parliamentary language and behaviour; more family-friendly sitting hours; the introduction of childcare facilities and parental leave for MPs; and gender sensitive training programmes for all MPs. The rules of the parliament may also have been changed to ensure they are accessible to all MPs, do not exclude, restrict or discriminate against women, and provide for gender neutral language. More radically, parliaments may change their structures by including a dedicated committee on gender equality or rotating positions of parliamentary authority between men and women so that all MPs are afforded the opportunity to be represented.⁴

¹ Sincere thanks to Anna Gadzinski and Naomi Swann for their invaluable research assistance, and to Judy Middlebrook for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² For example, in Vietnam, the National Assembly has recently passed two laws, the *Gender Equality Law 2006* and the *Law on the Promulgation of Legal Normative Documents 2008*, which specifically outline the process by which its Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs is responsible for ensuring that bills have been assessed from a gender perspective and that no law discriminates against women.

³ IPU, 2008, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, p. 61.

⁴ IPU, 2008, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, p. 71. See also, UNDP, *Gender and Parliament*, 2008.

This article explores how the Australian Parliament has fared over the past 20 years on the question of gender mainstreaming. It does this by developing a framework for gender mainstreaming in parliaments and applying that to the Australian context. As a first step in this process, the paper presents an analysis of women's presence in some of the key parliamentary positions, including presiding officer, party whip, and committee chair. Gender equality concerns are usually considered in parliaments by women's caucuses, dedicated gender committees or a network of 'gender focal points'. The paper therefore investigates the extent to which Australia has institutionalised any of these approaches to gender mainstreaming.

A longitudinal approach is chosen, as opposed to a comparative approach, to provide a historical perspective. Changes in the name of gender equality have never occurred suddenly and are therefore best appreciated over time. The starting point of 1987 is chosen because this was the year in which the House of Representatives created its own committee structure, thus allowing for a more complete analysis of women's participation in committee work across the Parliament.⁵

The paper shows that Australia has not made systematic efforts to reform institutional structures and practices to ensure gender is mainstreamed across all areas of the parliament.⁶ The Australian Parliament has never had a cross-party women's caucus or a dedicated gender equality committee. The presence of a gender focal point network is difficult to detect, although it is clear that women's presence on committees has changed significantly over time. Women are now on all committees – although remarkably, it was not until the current, 42nd Parliament that this achievement was reached in the House of Representatives. In fact, specific committees have been curiously resistant to women's presence.

Even without formal gender mainstreaming structures, however, the Australian Parliament has, over time, managed to ensure that certain gender issues have been addressed. Women have been gradually represented in all areas of the parliament, including the highly sort after positions of presiding officer, whip and committee chair. In fact, women today chair a greater number of committees than men in the House of Representatives, and a significant number of Joint and Senate committees. Some gender equality concerns have been addressed in parliamentary committee reports, and standing orders do reflect the need for language to be gender neutral. After 20 years of deliberation, the Parliament has even accepted the need for, and implemented, a child care centre.

⁵ Committees are also the predominant site of investigation for gender mainstreaming in parliament. See IPU, 2008, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, p. 71.

⁶ It should be noted that while gender mainstreaming has not been explicitly pursued as a policy in the Australian parliament, it has been applied to the arm of government. At this level, Australia pioneered the original tenets of gender mainstreaming with women's budgets and women's audits. Indeed, what has become known as gender budgeting owes much to the Australian femocrat experience of the 1980s and 1990s. See Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill, 2002, "Budgeting for Equality: The Australian Experience", *Feminist Economics* 8(1):25-47.

This notwithstanding, these achievements have not been made systematically, and there is significant potential for legislation to be passed without adequate analysis of its potential impact on men and women. While the parliament conducts training for all new Members at the beginning of each parliament, there is no gender training for new or old MPs and Senators. Moreover, the inescapable role of political parties in Australian politics has meant that gender sensitive practices tend to depend more on party than on any collective effort by women in the parliament. Calls for a dedicated gender equality committee or a more evenly distributed and formalised approach to gender mainstreaming across committees should therefore be heeded.

Gender mainstreaming: theory and application

Gender mainstreaming allows for diverse situations of different groups of both men and women to be considered in policy making. Advocates of gender mainstreaming believe that it addresses discrimination more fully and promotes equality more broadly. In 1997, the United Nations defined gender mainstreaming as:

... the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.⁷

At its core, gender mainstreaming is a process of questioning: assumptions, actors, benefits, processes, policies, and outcomes. What assumptions have been made about the beneficiaries of a process or policy? Who does that process or policy seek to target? Will all groups be affected equitably? Will all groups benefit equitably? Gender mainstreaming questions the gender-neutrality of institutions, particularly where these are discovered to reproduce and contribute to gender inequality through their internal assumptions, working procedures and activities. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to change the nature and institutions of the mainstream to be more reflective of the needs, aspirations and experiences of all women in society.

Gender mainstreaming in government

As an important process of government, gender mainstreaming requires, inter alia, that:

- all key decision makers acknowledge and implement the goals and principles of gender mainstreaming;
- appropriate organisational arrangements be made for its implementation; and
- gender tools be developed and staff be skilled in their application.⁸

⁷ United Nations, 1997, *Report of the Economic and Social Council*.

⁸ Adapted from Lorraine Corner, 1999, "Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming in Development", Technical Paper, UNIFEM, <http://unifem-eseasia.org/resources/techpapers/mainstream.htm>. It should be noted that while there is no single model for gender mainstreaming, there are commonly accepted key principles.

Essential to gender mainstreaming is the equal participation of women at all levels of the decision making process, from those being consulted to those making the decisions. While women's presence in positions of authority across all policy areas is a necessary part of raising awareness of gender mainstreaming, its importance should be understood and accepted by all senior government officials.

In accordance with the strategies set out by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), implementing gender mainstreaming can either rely on experts being placed in one discrete unit (often known as the 'national women's machinery'), or more evenly distributed across the government sector as 'gender focal points', or both.⁹ In South Korea, for example, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is mandated by the Women's Development Act (as amended in 2002), to:

- coordinate the Basic Plan for Women's Policies;
- support the Women's Policy Coordination Committee, which is chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of heads of relevant ministries;
- designate Gender Equality Policy Officers; and
- hold meetings of the Director-Generals of metropolitan and provincial level government agencies at regular intervals.¹⁰

Gender awareness training and tool kits have been developed to assist policy makers and implementers in identifying gender equality concerns, differences between women and men in access to and control over resources, participation in decision making and the direct and indirect impact of policies, programmes and projects. Training in the collection, analysis and reporting of gender sensitive data is vital. Agencies are encouraged to collect and make information available as:

- (1) individual-level and national data disaggregated by sex;
- (2) specific data on emerging gender issues such as the counting and valuation of unpaid labour, the incidence, nature and impact of violence against women and the role of women in business; and
- (3) composite gender indices, such as the UNDP Gender and Development Index (GDI), the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the CEDAW indicators.¹¹

Given parliament's pre-eminent role not only in legislating, but in legislative oversight, there is also a need to implement gender mainstreaming practices at the parliamentary level. The BPA notes that governments should report "on a regular basis, to legislative bodies on the progress of efforts, as appropriate, to mainstream gender concerns ..." (paragraph 109). Yet

⁹ Paragraph 201 of the BPA specifically states: "A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas".

¹⁰ H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin, Minister of Gender Equality and Family, Statement to the 39th Session of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 31 July 2007, New York, p. 2.

¹¹ See Lorraine Corner, 1999, "Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming in Development", Technical Paper, UNIFEM, <http://unifem-eseasia.org/resources/techpapers/mainstream.htm>.

in much of the literature on gender mainstreaming, the role of parliament is not emphasised or considered. Only a few international resolutions point to a need to enhance institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming at the level of the national parliament.¹² While there are presently no binding requirements for legislatures in this regard, they clearly have a responsibility to both pass legislation and to monitor and evaluate its implementation – including legislation on gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming in parliaments

Parliaments are well placed to provide a strong role model for government agencies and other organisations in mainstreaming gender through their own institutional processes and practices. Applying the basic framework outlined above for government processes, gender mainstreaming of parliaments requires, first, that all those in senior positions be well versed in the need for, and principles of, gender equality and the means by which to achieve this.

Secondly, gender mainstreaming can be the responsibility of a discrete unit, such as a women's caucus, or a specialised committee on gender equality – in which women and men from all political parties may participate. These bodies are entrusted with monitoring the progress of gender mainstreaming across the parliament, the scrutiny of gender related aspects of all government reporting, as well as the effectiveness of performance indicators used to monitor progress.¹³ In countries as diverse as Belgium, Costa Rica, Cyprus, India, the Philippines, South Africa and South Korea (to name a few), gender equality committees have been able to make significant progress in gender mainstreaming by:

- debating the content of bills and ensuring gender considerations are taken into account;
- creating a network of gender focal points across other committees of the legislature;
- working in partnership with national women's machinery, civil society, NGOs, the private sector and the media to ensure follow-up parliamentary action, review and oversight;
- holding public hearings and consulting with policy communities to determine the effects of policies, programmes and legislation on women and men, girls and boys;
- holding governments, and particularly Ministers, to account for their actions;

¹² See, for example, IPU Resolution "Beijing + 10: An Evaluation From A Parliamentary Perspective" (2004) which:

Encourages parliaments to play an active and positive role in the promotion of gender equality and to implement measures aimed at ensuring gender equality in representation, by establishing parliamentary committees on gender equality, composed of both men and women, making use of the tools of gender-budgeting analysis, ensuring the gender mainstreaming of all decisions and legislation, and allocating sufficient resources to these activities.

See also European Parliament resolution on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, adopted 13 March 2008.

¹³ Report of the Expert Group Meeting on National Machineries for Gender Equality, held 31 August to 4 September 1998, Santiago, Chile.

- institutionalising gender-sensitive budgeting by raising gender issues during budget debates and developing partnerships with the budget or public accounts committees; and
- ensuring the implementation of CEDAW obligations, especially in relation to State party reporting.¹⁴

An alternative approach to having a specialised committee on gender equality is that used in Sweden, where gender is treated as a crosscutting issue and addressed in the work of all committees.¹⁵ Indeed, the work of the Riksdag is based on an understanding that “gender equality efforts must be conducted in a planned, methodical and continuous fashion...” To this end, in 2004, the Swedish Parliament established a working group “to review gender equality efforts in its own structures”. The report proposed:

- adopting a programme of equality for every parliamentary term;
- increasing visibility and knowledge of gender equality; enhancing mentoring of, and support to, new members; and
- ensuring due consideration is given to parental responsibilities when planning the work of parliamentary committees.¹⁶

Thirdly, parliaments need to have their own mechanisms and toolkits by which to ensure gender oversight. Gender-sensitive legislation checklists have been created for example, to:

- identify the groups most likely to be affected by the proposed Bill and whether the bill might unintentionally discriminate against men or women, boys or girls;
- consider whether potential differences in the anticipated impact of the proposed legislation should be measured, and if so, if there are sufficient sources of sex-disaggregated data;
- identify additional compliance or administration costs of the proposed law that might affect different groups.¹⁷

Parliaments should also conduct gender-sensitive training for all Members. Training could be used to highlight the gender dynamics of specific parliamentary practices, such as responding to questions without notice or chairing committees. This could be part of induction programs for new Members and Senators or as part of an ongoing professional development course for all MPs.

Having outlined various methods in which parliaments have begun to mainstream gender equality concerns in their structures and processes, the paper now addresses the question of gender mainstreaming in Australia. Women’s presence across various positions of authority

¹⁴ IPU, 2006, *The Role of Parliamentary Committees in Mainstreaming Gender and Promoting the Status of Women*, Seminar for Members of Parliamentary Bodies Dealing with Gender Equality, 4-6 December 2006, Geneva, pp. 8-10. Today, the IPU counts 98 parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality in 83 countries (a greater number of bodies exists due to a number of countries having bicameral parliaments and gender equality bodies in both chambers). See www.ipu.org/parline-e/instance-women.asp.

¹⁵ IPU, 2006, *The Role of Parliamentary Committees in Mainstreaming Gender*, p. 14.

¹⁶ IPU, 2008, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, p. 76.

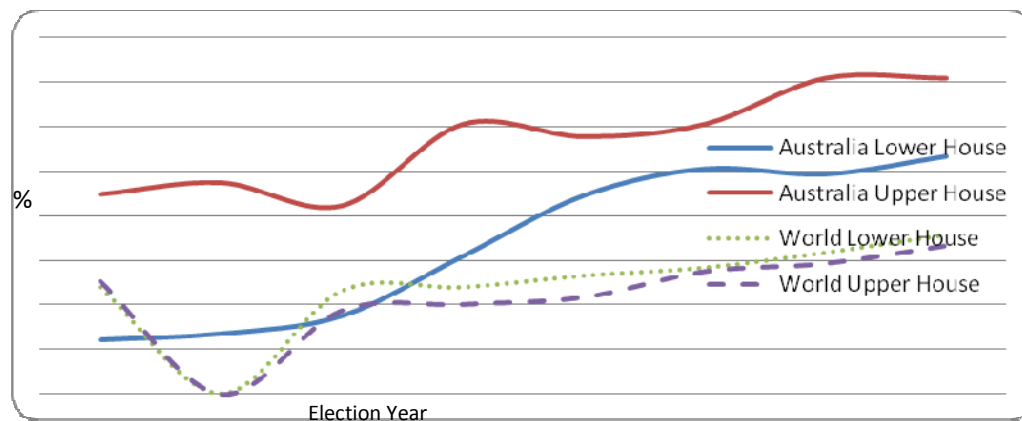
¹⁷ See *Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project, February 2003, “The Key Steps of Gender Analysis of Legislation”*.

in the Australian Parliament is presented, followed by a consideration of the extent to which its parliamentary structure has facilitated gender mainstreaming efforts.

Women's representation in the Australian Parliament

The election of women to parliament is a story of gradual improvement, both nationally and internationally. In 1902, Australia was the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote and the right to stand for election simultaneously. Over the past 20 years, Australia has seen women elected to parliament in greater numbers than the international average (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Proportion of women in parliament, Australia and International averages



Source: Australia: Parliamentary Handbook, 2008; International averages: IPU Women in Parliaments Archive of Statistical Data, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>

Australian Senate figures, in particular, have far exceeded international averages. Numerous studies have pointed to the electoral system by which Australian Senators are elected, namely proportional representation.¹⁸ This system has seen the election of a number of minor parties to the Australian Senate, and within those parties, the election of several women. For example, the Australian Greens and the Australian Democrats have traditionally had high proportions of women elected.¹⁹ The system of proportional representation has also meant that when the two major parties – the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal Party of Australia (LP) – put women on their Senate tickets, even if at the bottom of the ticket, those women had a greater chance of election than had they been the sole candidate in a single-member constituency (such as in the lower house).

¹⁸ See for example Marian Sawer, 2000, "Parliamentary representation of women: from discourses of justice to strategies of accountability", *International Political Science Review*, 21(4):361-380; Richard Matland, 2005, "Enhancing women's political representation: Legislative recruitment and electoral systems" in Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (eds) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, A Revised Edition*, International IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden.

¹⁹ The Australian Democrats have been a particularly female-friendly party, having appointed the first female party leader in Australian politics. Six of the party's 12 leaders were women, and four of these – Janine Haines, Cheryl Kernot, Meg Lees and Lyn Allison – were among the longest-serving Democrat leaders.

Australian political parties have not introduced mandatory special measures such as quotas to improve women's electoral representation. The ALP has implemented targets that have not yet been reached,²⁰ while the LP has preferred to rely on awareness raising campaigns, mentoring and training of women candidates to improve their numerical presence in parliament.²¹

While Australia may compare favourably with international averages, however, it is important to remember that these are considerably weighed down by a number of countries that still, today, have no women in parliament at all. A more telling comparable figure is the international ranking of Australia, based on the proportion of women elected to the lower house or a unicameral house, over the same time period. Table 1 shows Australia's ranking for years where figures are available.

Table 1. Australia compared with top ranking countries

Election Year	Ranking
1996	27 th
1998	15 th
2001	19 th
2004	23 rd
2007	30 th

Source: IPU Women in Parliaments Archive of Statistical Data, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>

In 2007, 30 countries had greater representation of women in their lower or unicameral houses than Australia: Rwanda, Sweden, Finland, Argentina, the Netherlands, Denmark, Costa Rica, Spain, Norway, Cuba, Belgium, Mozambique, Iceland, New Zealand, South Africa, Austria, Germany, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Peru, Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Belarus, Guyana, Andorra, Switzerland, Portugal, Afghanistan, Namibia and Trinidad and Tobago. Thus while there has been an improvement in the number of women elected to parliament in Australia, this has been the case in many other countries as well. Australia's tradition of taking small steps will continue to be overtaken by both developing and developed countries unless more radical change is made.

Sharing responsibility: women in positions of authority

Having women in positions of parliamentary authority is important not only as an equal opportunity measure, but also because these positions provide women an opportunity to learn and apply of the rules of parliament. It may be self-evident, but in order to change the parliament's written and unwritten mores, women MPs must first be familiar with them.

²⁰ At the 1994 ALP National Conference, a rule change was introduced requiring a minimum of 35% of ALP candidates for winnable seats would be women by the year 2002 (Emily's List Australia, website: <http://www.emilyslist.org.au/news/news.asp?id=25>). In October 2002, the target was increased to 40% of winnable seats. In 2009, the ALP National Constitution was amended to include a rule which aims "to produce an outcome where not less than 40% of seats held by Labor will be filled by women, and not less than 40% by men". All seats, that is, held by Labor, rather than just winnable seats, are now considered in the target that will apply to preselection rounds taking place after January 2012.

²¹ The Federal Women's Committee is the peak body representing women in the Federal Liberal Party and has been active in promoting women for elected office, advocating policy, advising on a wide range of issues, and assisting in election campaigns, see <http://www.liberal.org.au/The-Party/Liberal-Women.aspx>.

While this paper does not wish to lay the responsibility for gender sensitive changes on the shoulders of women MPs, holding positions of authority does give women a greater opportunity to make such change.

The most senior parliamentary position is that of the **Presiding Officer**. The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate are each responsible for the efficient conduct of their respective houses. They are expected to maintain the authority of their house, and protect its rights and privileges.²² Of the 28 Speakers of the House of Representatives and the 23 Presidents of the Senate, only one of each has been a woman: Speaker Joan Child (11.2.86 to 28.8.89) and President Margaret Reid (20.8.96 to 30.6.02). In 2008, Anna Burke was appointed Deputy Speaker.

In many ways, **Whips** can be seen as both a party position and a key parliamentary position. Within each party, they are responsible for organising members to take part in debates and votes.²³ They also tend to be well versed in parliamentary procedure given their role in assisting with the arrangement of business in their house. Tables 2 and 3 present women's representation in this position in the House of Representatives and Senate, respectively.

Table 2. Whips of the House, 1987-

Chief Whips	'Deputy' Whips*	Party Whips
38th Parliament		
Trish Worth (Government)		
39th Parliament		
	Kay Elson (Government)	
40th Parliament		
Janice Crosio (Opposition)	Joanna Gash (Government)	
41st Parliament		
	Jill Hall (Opposition)	Kay Hull (Nationals)
	Joanna Gash (Government)	
42nd Parliament		
	Jill Hall (Government)	
	Nola Marino MP (Opposition)	

Note: * These whips are not technically referred to as 'deputy whips', but do assist the Chief Government or Opposition Whip.
Source: Parliamentary Handbook, 2008

Very few women of the House of Representatives have been appointed whip, of any description. No women held the position in the 35th, 36th or 37th parliaments. It is true that during these parliaments, women constituted small proportions of the House (6.1%, 6.8% and 8.8% respectively). Yet even when women were present in greater numbers in subsequent parliaments, only a total of seven women have ever held the position. This may point to a certain resistance in appointing women as whips in the House, especially from the ALP where the strict party discipline has arguably required a harsher 'whip' than in other parties. It may be coincidence, but it is interesting that when the party finally did appoint a woman whip, it found one highly versed in the norms of the House and parliaments more broadly. The Hon. Janice Crosio had been a mayor and the first female Cabinet Minister of

²² House of Representatives, 2008, "The Speaker: Infosheet", p. 1.
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/speaker.htm>

²³ Parliament of Australia, "Glossary of parliamentary terms",
<http://www.aph.gov.au/find/glossary.htm>

New South Wales before her election to the House of Representatives in 1990. She was also a parliamentary secretary under the Keating Government, between 1993 and 1996. While a number of factors contribute to the appointment of a whip, including years of experience and alignment with certain parliamentary groups/factions, it could also be concluded that the institutional norms of the House have dictated that women have not been considered likely candidates for the position.

Table 3. Whips of the Senate, 1987-

Chief Whips	Deputy Whips	Party Whips
35th Parliament		
Margaret Reid (Opposition)	Sue Knowles (Opposition)	
36th Parliament		
Margaret Reid (Opposition)	Sue Knowles (Opposition)	Vicki Bourne (Australian Democrats)
37th Parliament		
Margaret Reid (Opposition)	Kay Denman (Government)	Florence Bjelke-Petersen (National Party) Vicki Bourne (Australian Democrats)
38th Parliament		
	Kay Denman (Opposition)	Vicki Bourne (Australian Democrats) Dee Margetts (Greens) Christabel Chamarette (Greens)
39th Parliament		
	Kay Denman (Opposition) Jeannie Ferris (Government) Helen Coonan (Government)	Vicki Bourne (Australian Democrats)
40th Parliament		
Jeannie Ferris (Government) Sue Mackay (Opposition)	Trish Crossin (Opposition)	Lyn Allison (Australian Democrats)
41st Parliament		
Jeannie Ferris (Government)	Linda Kirk (Opposition) Ruth Webber (Opposition)	Fiona Nash (Nationals) Rachel Siewart (Greens)
42nd Parliament		
	Dana Wortley (Government) Judith Adams (Opposition) Anne McEwen (Government)	Fiona Nash (Nationals) Rachel Siewart (Greens)

Source: Parliamentary Handbook, 2008

The Senate on the other hand has seen many more women occupy this position. Senator Kathy Martin was the first woman to be appointed Deputy Opposition Whip on 8 April 1975. Following the election of her party to government in 1975, Senator Martin became Deputy Government Whip and held the position until 1977. In 1982, Senator Margaret Reid was the second woman to become a whip, a position she held under various governments until 1995.

While the LP clearly pioneered the appointment of women whips in the Senate, the ALP has, eventually, come to appoint an almost equal number of women in the position in this chamber. Clearly all parties have tended to keep specific women in the position, testimony perhaps to the build up of corporate knowledge once in the role, and the need to maintain and preserve that knowledge.

Again, it is evident that the presence of women from minor parties ensured women played a significant role in institutional positions of the Senate. Given each of the minor parties –

generally constituted with significant proportions of women – requires a whip, it is not surprising that these parties frequently appointed female whips.

The **chair of a parliamentary committee** is responsible for presiding over the business and conduct of a committee. Knowledge of the standing orders relevant to the conduct of committees is useful, and for this reason, chairs are often members who have served at least one term in parliament. The position is considered a stepping stone to more senior political positions such as parliamentary secretary or minister, and is remunerated with an additional allowance. They are not surprisingly coveted positions.

Globally, women MPs predominate in leading committees on gender and women's affairs, and other social welfare issues such as family, employment and education.²⁴ These are often classified as 'soft' portfolio committees. The more prestigious 'hard' portfolio committees – such as foreign affairs, finance and security – have traditionally been reserved for men.

In Australia, there are a number of factors which explain the selection of a committee chair. In the first instance, MPs choose committees on which they wish to serve often on the basis of their experience before entering parliament. With a certain level of experience on that committee, and some 'runs on the board' as a member of the committee, an MP may eventually come to chair it.

A secondary, but no less influential, factor is an MP's political party. The designation of committee chair is determined by the rules of the chamber. In House of Representatives and Joint committees, chairs are always from the governing party. The Senate, as a chamber that has the power to determine its own rules often outside the dictates of government, has seen certain committees chaired by government, and others chaired by opposition or minor parties. Committee chair vacancies often arise when a party has a ministerial reshuffle, or changes are made in other parliamentary positions.

The number and range of House of Representatives committees chaired by women has improved significantly over the past 20 years (see Table 4). This is due in part to the increasing numbers of women in the House in this period. Between 1987 and 1995, with proportions of women not exceeding 9%, women presided over committees on Employment, Education and Training, and Environment, Recreation and the Arts. Indeed these two committees are the most frequently chaired by a woman in the House of Representatives.

Under the Coalition Government between 1996 and 2007, the number of committees chaired by women did not immediately increase in line with the subsequent increase in women MPs. The 38th and 39th Parliaments had two women chairs each, despite the proportion of women rising to 15.5% and 22.3%. This Government, however, did expand the range of committees chaired by women. The appointment of women to the Procedure and Primary Industries committees in the 38th Parliament is easily seen as being based on previous experience. As a Senator, Kathy Sullivan (formerly Martin) had held a number of procedural positions. She had also been the deputy chair of the House Procedure Committee

²⁴ IPU, 2008, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, p. 64.

since 1993. Fran Bailey's chairmanship of the Primary Industries Committee reflected her strong appreciation of rural and agricultural affairs, having previously been a cashmere goat breeder and exporter, and elected to represent the Victorian rural seat of McEwen. This trend however continued in the 40th Parliament with the appointment of women to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee, and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry committee, and in the 41st Parliament, with Jackie Kelly's chairing of the Communications and Information Technologies committee.

Table 4. Women Chairs in the House of Representatives, 1987-2008

CHAIRS		
Name	Committee	Tenure
36th Parliament		
Mary Crawford MP	Employment, Education and Training (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Jeanette McHugh MP	Environment, Recreation and the Arts (Standing)	25 months
37th Parliament		
Mary Crawford MP	Employment, Education and Training (Standing)	12 months
38th Parliament		
Kathy Sullivan MP	Procedure Committee (Standing)	18 months
Fran Bailey MP	Primary Industries, Resources and Rural and Regional Affairs (Standing)	21 months
39th Parliament		
Fran Bailey MP	Primary Industries and Regional Services (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Kay Elson MP	Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (Standing)	7 months
40th Parliament		
Bronwyn Bishop MP	Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Kay Elson MP	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Kay Hull MP	Family and Community Affairs (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Margaret May MP	Procedure Committee (Standing)	Whole Parliament
De-Anne Kelly MP	Employment and Workplace Relations (Standing)	21 months
41st Parliament		
Bronwyn Bishop MP	Family and Human Services (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Trish Draper MP	Publications (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Jackie Kelly MP	Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Margaret May MP	Procedure (Standing)	Whole Parliament
42nd Parliament		
Jenny George MP	Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts	2008-
Sharon Bird MP	Education and Training	2008-
Sharryn Jackson MP	Employment and Workplace Relations	2008-
Annette Ellis MP	Family, Community, Housing and Youth	2008-
Maria Vamvakinou MP	Industry, Science and Innovation	2008-
Catherine King MP	Infrastructure, Transport, Rural Development and Local Government	2008-
Julia Irwin MP	Petitions	2008-
Julie Owens MP	Procedure	2008-

CHAIRS

Name	Committee	Tenure
Belinda Neal MP	Communications	2008-

Source: Work of the Session, Department of the House of Representatives, 1987 to 2007. Committees website, http://www.aph.gov.au/committee/committees_type.htm#house, accessed February 2010.

Under the Labor government elected in 2007, women have chaired a greater number of committees than ever before. Again, this is primarily due to the range of experienced women MPs who had served in Opposition as deputy chairs. In the 41st parliament, the ALP appointed an unprecedented number of women deputy chairs. When the party was elected to government, many of those women deputy chairs became chairs, including in the high profile area of Climate Change, and in non-traditional areas such as Industry, Science and Innovation, and Infrastructure, Transport, Rural Development and Local Government. The House's strong tradition of appointing women to procedural committees has continued in the current parliament when it also established a petitions committee and appointed a woman chair.

Table 4 also shows clearly that the tenure of women's committee chairmanship has increased over time. That is, when women were appointed chairs between 1990 and 2001, they did not necessarily hold that position through the whole parliament. In some cases, this was because women were promoted to more senior positions (e.g. Kathy Sullivan was promoted to Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs in 1997). By the 40th parliament, however, women tended to remain in the position for the full term.

Women have relatively rarely chaired joint committees. Composed of Members of the House of Representatives and Senators, these committees all fit outside the traditional 'soft' portfolios, being in the areas of foreign affairs, defence, trade, crime and law enforcement, intelligence and security, public works, and electoral matters, to name a few. No women chaired joint committees under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments between 1987 and 1996. Under the Howard Coalition government, women commonly chaired the Migration and Public Works committees. Consistent with the findings on House committees, women have chaired the greatest number of joint committees during the 42nd Parliament. In fact, a woman now chairs the prestigious Public Accounts and Audit Committee (Sharon Grierson), and the Trade Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade (Janelle Saffin).

Joint committees are also more likely to have been chaired by women for brief periods of time. The National Crime Authority for example was chaired by Senator Ferris in two parliaments for 3 months each time. Its companion, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity was chaired by Senator Fierravanti-Wells for 8 months. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, traditionally a committee that enjoys the membership of 'political machine men'—being those interested in the machinations of the electoral process—had its first woman chair in 2007 for a period of only 8 months.

It is curious, however, that a greater number of joint committees were not chaired by women Senators, there having been many more than women Members of the House. In no

parliament since 1987 has there been a greater number of joint committees chaired by a female Senator than chaired by a woman MP.

Table 5. Women Chairs of Joint Committees, 1987-2008

CHAIRS		
Name	Committee	Tenure
38th Parliament		
Christine Gallus MP	Migration (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Senator Jeannie Ferris	National Crime Authority (Statutory)	3 months
39th Parliament		
Judi Moylan MP	Public Works (Statutory)	Whole Parliament
Senator Jeannie Ferris	Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund (Statutory)	Whole Parliament
Senator Jeannie Ferris	National Crime Authority (Statutory)	3 months
Christine Gallus MP	Migration (Standing)	25 months
Margaret May MP	Migration (Standing)	7 months
40th Parliament		
Teresa Gambaro MP	Migration (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Judi Moylan MP	Public Works (Statutory)	Whole Parliament
Julie Bishop MP	Treaties (Standing)	21 months
Senator Jeannie Ferris	Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund (Statutory)	6.5 months
41st Parliament		
Judi Moylan MP	Public Works (Statutory)	Whole Parliament
Senator Marise Payne	Human Rights Sub-Committee (FADT) (Standing)	Whole Parliament
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells	Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (Statutory)	8 months
Sophie Mirabella MP	Electoral Matters (Standing)	8 months
42nd Parliament		
Senator Jan McLucas	Public Works (Statutory)	2008-
Senator Kate Lundy	National Capital and External Territories (Standing)	2008-
Senator Carol Brown	Publications	2008-
Melissa Parke MP	Australian Commission for Law Enforcement (Statutory)	2008-
Sharon Grierson MP	Public Accounts and Audit (Statutory)	2008-
Janelle Saffin MP	Trade Sub-Committee (FADT) (Standing)	2008-
Kerry Rea MP	Human Rights Sub-Committee (FADT) (Standing)	2008-

Source: Work of the Session, Department of the House of Representatives, 1987 to 2007. Committees website, http://www.aph.gov.au/committee/committees_type.htm#house, accessed February 2010.

The Senate paints a completely different picture again. Women's presence as chairs of so many committees in the Senate is clearly a factor of the greater numerical presence of women in this chamber. Yet it also gives the impression that committees have been an area of the Senate that women have had a degree of power in. Women have chaired a very wide range of committees. While the more traditional areas, such as community affairs, are covered, diverse portfolios are also represented. Given the relative ease with which the Senate can establish select committees to investigate specific matters of topical importance for a defined period of time, women have also chaired inquiries into whistle blowing, information and electronic technologies, and the case concerning Scafton evidence.

The Senate's more complex committee structure has also meant that women have often had multiple roles as committee chairs. Because of the party composition of the Senate, the party in Government usually has less influence on chairmanship than it does in the House. This has seen women from a wider range of parties represented in this position in any one parliament.

Secondly, when general purpose standing committees were separated into legislation and reference committees (legislation being chaired by government members and references by opposition members), chairs of one became deputy chairs of the other.²⁵ This has seen pairs of women work very closely with each other in specific portfolio areas, for example Senators Sue Knowles and Rosemary Crowley, and Senators Claire Moore and Rachel Siewart.

In addition, estimates are reviewed three times each year through the Senate committee process. Prior to the reforms of 1994, chairs of standing committees were frequently also chairs of an estimates committee. For example, under the Labor Governments before 1994, it was women with significant chairing experience leading the estimates process, namely Rosemary Crowley, Olive Zakharov, Margaret Reynolds and Sue West. However, following the restructure of the committee system, legislation committees sat as estimates committees, meaning that the chairs of legislation committees would also chair estimates proceedings.

Table 6. Women Chairs in the Senate, 1987-2008

CHAIRS		
Name	Committee	Tenure
35th Parliament		
Sen. Rosemary Crowley	Health Legislation and Health Insurance (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Rosemary Crowley	Estimates C	Whole Parliament
Sen. Olive Zakharov	Community Affairs (Standing)	Whole Parliament
36th Parliament		
Sen. Pat Giles	Regulations and Ordinances (Standing)	2 years
Sen. Olive Zakharov	Estimates D	Whole Parliament
Sen. Margaret Reynolds	Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Rosemary Crowley	Environment, Recreation and the Arts	Whole Parliament
37th Parliament		
Sen. Margaret Reid	Procedure	1 year
Sen. Margaret Reid	House	1 year
Sen. Margaret Reynolds	Privileges	Whole Parliament
Sen. Margaret Reynolds	Estimates C	1 year
Sen. Margaret Reynolds	Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Kay Denman	Employment, Education and Training (Legislation)	1 year
Sen. Meg Lees	Environment, Recreation and the Arts (References)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Jocelyn Newman	Public Interest Whistleblowing (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Judith Troeth	Scrutiny of Bills	2 years
Sen. Sue West	Community Affairs (Legislation)	Whole parliament
Sen. Sue West	Estimates E	1 year
Sen. Olive Zakharov	Employment, Education and Training	2 years

²⁵ This system was first introduced in 1994, abolished in 2005, and re-instated in 2008.

CHAIRS		
Name	Committee	Tenure
38th Parliament		
Sen. Sue Knowles	Community Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Jacinta Collins	Economics (References)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Kay Patterson	Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts	Whole Parliament
Sen. Judith Troeth	Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade	2 years
Sen. Jeannie Ferris	Information Technologies (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Kay Denman	Senator's Interests	Whole Parliament
Sen. Rosemary Crowley	Employment, Education and Training (References)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Sue West	Procedure	Whole Parliament
Sen. Sue West	Community Affairs (References)	1 year
Sen. Sue West	House	Whole Parliament
39th Parliament		
Sen. Sue Knowles	Community Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Rosemary Crowley	Community Affairs (References)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Kay Denman	Senator's Interests	Whole Parliament
Sen. Jacinta Collins	Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education (References)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Jeannie Ferris	Information Technologies (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Helen Coonan	Regulations and Ordinances	2 years
Sen. Marise Payne	Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
40th Parliament		
Sen. Sue Knowles	Community Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Kay Denman	Senator's Interests	Whole Parliament
Sen. Jacinta Collins	Economics (References)	1 year
Sen. Lyn Allison	Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts (References)	1 year
Sen. Marise Payne	Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Ursula Stephens	Economics (References)	Whole Parliament
41st Parliament		
Sen. Jacinta Collins	Scafton Evidence (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Lyn Allison	Mental Health (Select)	Whole term
Sen. Marise Payne	Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Legislation)	Whole Parliament
Sen. Claire Moore	Community Affairs (References)	2 years
42nd Parliament		
Sen. Mary Jo Fisher	National Broadband Network (Select)	2008-
Sen. Helen Coonan	Scrutiny of Bills	2008-
Sen. Carol Brown	Publications	2008-
Sen. Anne McEwen	Environment, Communications and the Arts (References)	2008-
Sen. Anne McEwen	Environment, Communications and the Arts (Legislation)	2008-
Sen. Michaelia Cash	Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (References)	2008-
Sen. Trish Crossin	Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Legislation)	2008-
Sen. Fiona Nash	Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport (References)	2008-
Sen. Claire Moore	Community Affairs (Legislation)	2008-
Sen. Rachel Stewart	Community Affairs (References)	2008-
Sen. Annette Hurley	Economics (Legislation)	2008-
Sen. Helen Polley	Finance and Public Administration (Legislation)	2008-
Sen. Dana Wortley	Regulations and Ordinances	2008-

Institutionalising gender mainstreaming

The Australian Parliament has not had a formal, cross-party women's caucus. Unpublished research conducted in the 1990s with a number of women MPs found that they preferred informal get-togethers—such as morning teas or lunches—with women of other political parties, rather than a formalised meeting or caucus.²⁶ This was predominantly because of the fundamentally opposing views of women from different political parties. Women in the Australian federal parliament have often found it extremely difficult to leave partisan politics aside and work together on gender issues. A rare exception was when a coalition of women from all parties in the Senate introduced a bill to remove Ministerial approval of the abortion drug RU486 and give it, instead, to the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Likewise, the Australian Parliament has not instituted a dedicated gender equality committee. To some extent, the community affairs/family and human services committees of the House and Senate have served as the 'gender affairs' committee, having inquired into such matters as balancing work and family and men's health. These committees, however, have not served the specific function of reviewing legislation from a gender perspective. Their members do not have a list of questions, for example, with which they analyse government policies, programmes or activities to ensure they do not discriminate against women, and meet the differential needs of men and women, boys and girls.

The alternative approach to gender mainstreaming is that of instituting a network of gender focal points across all committees of the parliament. For this approach to have been successful, women would obviously have to be on all committees. Interestingly, it has not been until the current, 42nd Parliament, that women have had a seat at every committee table. Table 7 presents the House, Joint and Senate committees in which women did not serve between 1987 and 2007. Notably, the number has reduced significantly over time, a function of the actual number of women in the parliament. Indeed, by the 42nd Parliament where women constitute 26.7% of the House and 35.5% of the Senate, no House, Joint or Senate committee was exclusively composed of men.

The range of committees without women since 1987, however, has been fairly predictable. In the House, the Finance and Public Administration (35th, 36th, 37th parliaments), Industry, Science and Technology (35th, 36th, 40th parliaments), Member's Interests (35th, 36th, 38th, 41st parliaments), and Publications (35th, 36th, 37th parliaments) committees have had no women. The Senate has seen a similar selection to the House, namely the Finance and Public Administration (35th, 36th, 37th, 40th and 41st parliaments), Appropriations and Staffing (35th, 36th and 38th parliaments), and the Scrutiny of Bills (38th and 41st parliaments) committees. Joint Committees without women have been in the areas of Security and Intelligence (35th, 38th, 39th, 40th parliaments) and Public Works (35th, 36th, 37th, 38th parliaments). A notable finding is that in those parliaments where these committees did include women, they often

²⁶ Di Zetlin, 1995, "Women Members of Federal Parliament: A comparative analysis over two decades", Australian Research Council Grant, University of Queensland.

included only one woman. There is then something about these portfolio areas that has not attracted women Members and Senators.

Table 7. House, Joint and Senate committees without women, 1987 to 2007

	35 th Parliament	36 th Parliament	37 th Parliament	38 th Parliament	39 th Parliament	40 th Parliament	41 st Parliament
H O U S E	Aboriginal Affairs Finance & Public Administration Industry, Science & Technology Legal & Constitutional Affairs Members' Interests Privileges Procedure Publications Selection	Aboriginal Affairs Finance & Public Administration Industry, Science & Technology Long Term Strategies Members' Interests Publications Selection Transport, Communications & Infrastructure	Banking, Finance & Public Administration Library Privileges Publications Selection Televising of the House of Representatives Transport, Communication & Infrastructure	Library Members' Interests	House	Industry & Resources	Members' Interests
J O I N T	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Corporations Legislation National Crime Authority Public Works	Public Works	Corporations & Securities Public Works	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Public Works	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation	ASIO, ASIS & DSD	
S E N A T E	Appropriations & Staffing Privileges Employment, Education & Training Finance and Public Administration Industry, Science, Technology & Infrastructure Publications Certain Aspects of the Airline Pilots' Dispute Animal Welfare	Appropriations & Staffing Finance and Public Administration Animal welfare (Select) Subscription TV Broadcasting Services (Select)	Finance & Public Administration Industry, Science, Technology, Communications & Infrastructure	Appropriations & Staffing Scrutiny of Bills		Finance & Public Administration (Legislation)	Finance & Public Administration (Legislation) Scrutiny of Bills
	♀ House: 6.1%	♀ House: 6.8%	♀ House: 8.8%	♀ House: 15.5%	♀ House: 22.3%	♀ House: 25.3%	♀ House: 24.7%
	♀ Senate: 22.4%	♀ Senate: 23.7%	♀ Senate: 21.1%	♀ Senate: 30.3%	♀ Senate: 28.9%	♀ Senate: 30.3%	♀ Senate: 35.5%

Sources: *Work of the Session*, Department of the House of Representatives, 1987 to 2007, *Journals of the Senate*, 1987 to 2007

Joint committees have clearly benefited from the substantial proportion of women in the Senate, and more particularly, women represented in the minor parties such as the Greens, and the Australian Democrats. For example, the high profile Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade does not appear in Table 7, significantly due to the presence of Senator Jo Vallentine, originally of the Nuclear Disarmament Party, and subsequently of the Greens (WA). Similarly, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters often had a woman present due to a position on the committee being earmarked for the Australian Democrats and the number of women in that party.

It should be noted, furthermore, that the sole woman on a committee was often not just the sole woman on one committee, but on two or three. The extent to which any person can influence the work of two or more committees from a gender perspective is limited. Moreover, it is also the case that some women will not be interested in pursuing questions of gender equality in their committee work.

A note on the vexed question of impact

It might be asked what difference have women in parliament made. Was parliamentary conduct less gladiatorial under Speaker Child's or President Reid's reigns, than under the reigns of their male counterparts? Were these women able to introduce child care facilities into a House that could accommodate a gym and a prayer room? Have women whips been able to institute changes to the standing orders to ensure women have equal access to positions of authority in the parliament (on a rotational basis, for example)? Are women chairs more likely than men to conduct inquiries into gender equality issues or conduct proceedings in a less adversarial, more consensual manner?

The simple answer to these questions is that no change in the Australian Parliament can (or should) be attributed to women alone. Women's presence in parliament and in positions of authority is vital, but women need men to support their proposals. A quick examination of committee reports produced over the past two parliaments is enough to point to the difficulty of relying on women alone to raise gender equality concerns.

Table 8. Gender specific inquiries, 41st and 42nd parliaments

Committee	♀ Chair	Inquiry subject matter
41st parliament		
House Family and Human Services Committee	Y	Balancing work and family
House Health and Ageing Committee	N	The health benefits of breastfeeding
House Procedure Committee	Y	Options for nursing mothers in the House
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee	N	Women in sport and recreation in Australia
Senate Community Affairs Committee	Y	Gynaecological cancer in Australia
Joint Committee on Australian Crime Commission	N	Trafficking of women for sexual servitude
42nd parliament		
Joint Select Committee on Men's Health	N	Men's health
House Employment and Workplace Relations Committee	Y	Pay equity and increasing female workforce participation
Senate Procedure Committee	N	Senators caring for an infant
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Legislation Committee	Y	Review of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984
Senate Education, Employment, Workplace Relations References Committee	N	Provision of childcare

Source: Committees website, accessed March 2010

Table 8 shows that of all the gender-specific committee inquiries conducted over the last two parliaments, an equal number have been chaired by women and men. Three points are worth noting here: first, men have an interest in gender-specific inquiries and this is commendable; second, despite the greater number of women chairs in the 42nd Parliament than ever before, these women have not used (or had the opportunity to use) their positions to conduct gender specific inquiries; third, we cannot and should not rely only on the presence of women in positions of authority to ensure committee proceedings are less adversarial. The political nature of an inquiry, and indeed the very mix of personalities, can and will produce particularly hostile relations.²⁷ Thus the responsibility for change must lie with the parliament as a whole, that is, with both men and women MPs.

Conclusion

Institutional change is difficult. Like those in many other developed countries, the Australian Parliament has not had the same pressure placed upon it to reform its approach to gender mainstreaming as has been applied in developing countries. Gender mainstreaming, in fact, tends to be advanced as a means of achieving development, rather than simply as a strategy for ensuring policies, programmes and institutions do not discriminate against either sex.

In this context, it is not necessarily surprising that Australia has not made systematic efforts to reform institutional structures and practices to ensure gender is mainstreamed across all areas of the parliament. The absence of a cross-party women's caucus, a dedicated gender equality committee or a network of gender focal points owes a great deal to the highly partisan make up of the parliament. Without the agreement of political parties, reform of the parliament is impossible, and whether certain parties in the Australian parliament even agree with the idea of gender mainstreaming is debateable.

This notwithstanding, the Australian Parliament has, over time, managed to ensure that certain gender issues have been addressed, including pay equity for women, balancing work and family, specific health issues relating to both men and women, and perhaps most importantly, a review of Australia's gender equality legislation. Women have been gradually represented in all areas of the parliament, including in positions of parliamentary leadership such as presiding officer, whip and committee chair. With respect to the latter, women today chair a greater number of committees than men in the House of Representatives, and a significant number of Joint and Senate committees. Facilities in which children may be looked after have been introduced and the issue of mothers breastfeeding while at work has also been considered.

The glaring omission is in the analysis of legislation from a gender perspective. In this regard, Australian could learn from the experience of Sweden, and a number of developing countries, in their formalised approach to gender mainstreaming across committees, be it one dedicated committee, or across all committees. A less radical approach would be to reform the existing process of verifying all bills through the Senate Scrutiny of Bills committee, using a defined check list of gender sensitive indicators.

²⁷ Sonia Palmieri, 2003, *The Impact of Gender or the Gender of Impact: A Study of Interactions in Australian Parliamentary Committees*, Unpublished PhD thesis, School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland.

Ultimately, parliamentarians need to use the opportunities they have, not only to ask gender related questions but to publicise the answers they receive. Where gaps exist, MPs have the opportunity to propose the solutions through amendments to existing legislation, by initiating entirely new legislation, or by changing the practices and processes of parliament. The Australian Parliament does not do this as effectively as it might. It needs to consider general equality strategies more systematically.