

# **Victorian Labor Women's Network**

## **Report to the National Labor Women's Network Conference 2008**

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### **National Labor Women's Conference**

The National Labor Women's Conference was held in Sydney in September this year. This event was a two day experience with over 150 Labor women from around the nation who gathered together to discuss major issues facing women in Australia and within the Labor Party. There was a stellar cast of presenters and keynote speakers - The Hon. Tanya Plebersek, Deputy Premier Carmel Tebbutt (NSW), Education Minister The Hon. Verity Firth (NSW), Maxine McKew (MP), The Hon. Linda Burney who is our next Labor Party National President and the Minister for Community Services in NSW and Senator Ursula Stephens (Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion), Senator Claire Moore amongst other State upper and lower house speakers and attendees too numerous to mention. Participants were delighted with the far ranging discussions and debate on topics such as - women's legal right, women's health, women's education, indigenous women's issues, campaigning for women's success, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship. VLWN encourages all Victorian Labor Women to attend the next National conference. In addition the VLWN will convene our own Victorian Labor Women's Conference early in 2009 - details to be released.

### **Overview**

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY] The Victorian Labor Women's Network (VLWN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a report to the 2008 National Labor Women's Network Conference in Sydney. This report will highlight the key outcomes of the VLWN since the 2005 conference<sup>1</sup> as well as detail its forward agenda. Further, this report will discuss the challenges faced by the VLWN and conclude by discussing how the VLWN hopes to work collaboratively with other jurisdictions in seeking to further the aims and objectives of women in the ALP.

### **2006-2008**

Since 2005, there have been two elections of the VLWN executive. The first executive, headed by Lorie Werner and Narelle Wiggan, focused on inspiring and training ALP women. In seeking to achieve these goals, the executive held two state-based conferences, one which strived to inform ALP women regarding the party machine and the other, which sought to advise women on

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<sup>1</sup>2005 National Labor Women's Network Conference Melbourne

how they could get involved in the ALP's federal election campaign. At both conferences, speakers represented various aspects of the labour movement including the federal and state parliamentary caucuses, unions and the party office. Both conferences were well attended and well received by participants.

This executive also commemorated the contribution of a dearly departed ALP woman activist, Lisa Bellear. An indigenous woman, Lisa Bellear was amongst other things, an advisor to Aboriginal women in politics (at all levels), an ALP Councillor on the Collingwood City Council and a role model for Aboriginal women aspiring to political life. In recognition and celebration of her life, the executive decided to establish an annual award to recognise work done by Indigenous and non-Indigenous female members of the ALP towards justice, reconciliation and in keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs as a high priority within the ALP. Recipients of this award receive a framed certificate of merit and two tickets to the western suburbs NAIDOC ball.

## **2008 -**

In developing its program for its two year term, the current executive has drawn on the prescribed aims of the VLWN in the Victorian ALP rules. These include fostering e-communication between Labor women, organising training events and co-ordinating a state based women's conference. However, aim 'a' which is to encourage women to join and participate in the ALP, provides the overarching objective for this executive.

In seeking to inform our forward agenda on how we can achieve this objective, the VLWN executive is planning to distribute a survey to its 5000 members. The survey will seek to understand what, if any, are the barriers to women's participation in the ALP and what actions may assist to remove these constraints. The survey will be distributed by the end of this calendar year to ALP women members by email and mail. The VLWN will endeavour to distribute the outcomes of this survey to each jurisdictional Labor Women's Network by mid 2009.

The survey results will help inform the VLWN regarding the drivers of and barriers to women's participation in the ALP. However, in the absence of these survey results, the VLWN has sought to consider what participation in the ALP means. As an initial view, the VLWN executive considers that participation should not be limited to policy committee attendance or campaigning in elections. It can and should be about being involved in the decisions of the party and representing the ALP in public office.

In accord with this view, the VLWN held a Local Government Forum to encourage ALP women to stand for local government as well as to advise women on how they can assist candidates. The Local Government Forum, which was well attended by over 30 women members, provided an opportunity for participants to listen to ALP women who had participated in local government politics, describe their experiences, challenges and pass on key points of wisdom. In addition, participants also received 'practical' training

in terms of the nomination, endorsement and campaign process. The VLWN executive understands that as an outcome of this forum, a number of women have decided to run for their local council – which of course we are very proud about.

Further, the VLWN has committed to providing ongoing support for ALP women running for local government by being a ‘campaign volunteer interface’. This will primarily be facilitated by e-communication and will be reviewed for its effectiveness after the local government elections to assess whether a similar approach could be adopted by the VLWN in the 2010 state election to support ALP women candidates.

The VLWN has prioritised undertaking an active assessment of Victoria’s status in regards to the ALP’s Affirmative Action targets. The VLWN intends to commence this assessment by holding a joint meeting with the Victorian ALP women’s policy committee, followed by a state conference in March 2009. At this conference, the VLWN endeavours to invite key decision makers of the party, including factional and union secretaries, to have a vigorous and open discussion with women members regarding Victoria’s Affirmative Action targets. As a complement to this process, it is likely that the State Conference in October will move that a committee be established to explore the Affirmative Action issue. It is the hope of the VLWN that these conferences and committees will ensure Affirmative Action is not only prioritised as an issue for the Victorian ALP, but that effective outcomes are achieved for ALP women.

The VLWN will also continue what it considers to be its ‘bread and butter’ activities, such as networking events. Our first networking event will be in October and held to celebrate 100 years since Australian women obtained the right to vote. It is the hope of the VLWN that the results of the survey will help inform the types of networking events that should be held in the future to encourage women’s participation.

In relation to other aims of the VLWN, the executive has sought to enhance e-communication between members. The VLWN now has its own web presence on the Victorian ALP website, which provides the contact details of the executive and the aims and objectives of the VLWN. The VLWN also uses email, as its main mode of communication with its members.

The VLWN would also relish the opportunity to work closer with other jurisdictional labor women’s networks on issues such as affirmative action. At a minimum, the VLWN would like to hear from other branches regarding their activities and term objectives. One way this may be facilitated is through the circulation of quarterly reports and perhaps a six monthly telephone hook-up facilitated by National Secretariat. The VLWN is interested to hear the thoughts of other jurisdictions on this matter.

Finally, the VLWN would like to thank the NSW organising committee for their efforts in putting this conference together. Apart from the hiccup of organising it on Victoria’s holiest weekend – the AFL grand final weekend – the VLWN

recognise that any conference, particularly a national conference is an arduous task that demands a lot from those who put their hand up to organise it. So thank you to Elizabeth Scully and co.

**Co Convenor  
Sarah McDowell**

**Co Convenor  
Lynn Psaila**