

Queensland Women's Right to Vote

The gaining of the right to vote for most women in 1905 has been followed by many significant achievements for and by Queensland women. In this centenary year, it is timely to discuss how far women's position in Queensland has progressed and what it might look like over the next 100 years.

Introduction

2005 marks 100 years since the majority of Queensland women gained the right to vote ('suffrage') in State elections. However, this right was denied to most Indigenous people, men and women, as well as people of Indian, Chinese and South Sea Islander descent as a consequence of prevailing racist attitudes and discriminatory government policies at the time.

The suffrage movement in Queensland from 1889 – 1905 was heavily divided on the issues of class and race. Indigenous women's and men's struggle for voting rights continued for many years with universal Indigenous suffrage not being achieved until 1965.

Gaining the Right to Vote

The Queensland Suffrage Movement 1889 – 1905

Queensland was the second last Australian state to grant women the right to vote in State elections.^{1,2} South Australia was the first, giving women the right to vote and the right to sit in the parliament of that state in 1894.³

The right to vote in federal elections was extended to most women over the age of 21 in 1902.⁴ In this process, Australia became the first country in the world where most women had the right to vote and to stand for the national parliament.^{5,6}

The basic argument behind women campaigning for the right to vote was that justice and the principle of natural rights demanded that every individual, *man or woman*, should have a say in the government of the state⁷. However, the suffragists were generally satisfied with limiting their 'say' to the vote, and not gaining entry to parliament.⁸

The right to vote was seen as an important means to make gains for women. But it was also just one of the issues at the time for which women were fighting for equality. It was often around issues such as wife battering, poverty, moral purity and women's working conditions that suffragists became mobilised.

In Queensland, as in the rest of Australia, the temperance movement, led by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), sought to eliminate the problem of wife abuse and poverty by removing liquor from men's lives.⁹

The moral purity movement at the time was seeking to raise the age of consent for girls from twelve years to sixteen or eighteen. It also sought the abolition of the *Contagious Diseases Act 1868 (Qld)* which allowed suspected prostitutes to be arrested and forcibly subjected to a gynaecological examination for venereal disease. This legislation was a serious intrusion on the common-law rights of all women, as any woman could be accused of prostitution, without evidence and without a trial.¹⁰

The WCTU adopted women's suffrage to further its temperance objectives, while the Queensland Woman's Suffrage League, formed at a meeting in February 1889, had as its objectives the raising of the age of consent and the abolition of the Queensland *Contagious Diseases Act 1868*.¹¹

The Office for Women

Making things better for Queensland women

Department of
Local Government, Planning,
Sport and Recreation

PO Box 15031
City East Q 4002

Telephone enquiries
07 3224 4062

Facsimile
07 3224 4272

Email
ofw@dlgp.qld.gov.au



Women's working conditions were also a key issue for suffragists with wages of women all over Australia as low as 40 per cent of those earned by males doing comparable work, such as teaching, tailoring and the public service.¹² Other women, because of their caring responsibilities, were forced to do piece-work for factories for exploitative wages.¹³

Although "high marriage and fertility rates, a rurally oriented culture and not many opportunities for women's economic independence"¹⁴ meant that the growth in female employment was not as significant in Queensland as in some other states, Queensland suffragists also became mobilised around this issue.

In 1888, Leontine Cooper, a writer for the weekly Brisbane paper, the *Boomerang*, challenged the assumption that all women should be regarded as potential wives and mothers, and pointed to the large numbers of Queensland women earning their own living. She supported 'freedom to compete in the labour market for all kinds of labour' and equal wages.¹⁵ She also argued for equality of education so that women could take their place in more skilled occupations. Although some Australian universities were beginning to open their doors to women in the 1880s, access to education was essentially only for the rich.¹⁶ On 17 December 1893, May Jordan O'Connell, a labour unionist, addressed a gathering in Brisbane demanding representation for women, as well as recognition of their labour and an end to their exploitation.¹⁷ Emma Miller, a well-known labour activist and union organiser, also campaigned strongly for equal pay.

Class Divisions in the Suffrage Movement

The different issues around which the suffragists were mobilised led to significant divisions in the Queensland suffrage movement along party and non-party lines, fundamentally due to distinctions of class. The main issues pursued by affluent feminists, especially property rights, did not foster much support among factory workers or working class 'housewives'.¹⁸ Division along class lines was particularly apparent in relation to Queensland's plural voting system, which meant that electors with property in more than one electorate had more than one vote. The argument behind the plural voting system was that ownership of property brought an insight into, or a commitment to, public affairs, and therefore, property owners were more 'deserving' of the vote.¹⁹

The various suffrage organisations which were established in Queensland from 1889 were divided as to whether women should seek to obtain the vote on the same class-determined conditions as men, or seek to abolish the existing plural voting system in favour of 'one adult, one vote'.²⁰

The Women's Equal Franchise Association (WEFA), led by Emma Miller from 1894 to 1905, was a labour-affiliated organisation which sought abolition of the property vote, and made it clear it would oppose women's suffrage on any other conditions.²¹ The Woman's Suffrage League, led by Leontine Cooper, on the other hand, did not wish to "clog the movement with the huge political revolution which 'one man, one vote' subtends."²² The WCTU largely avoided the issue by demanding the vote 'on the grounds

that it is, or shall be granted to men', as its constitution prevented it from affiliating with any political party.²³

After more than a decade of intense campaigning and deputations by these suffrage organisations, not only in Brisbane, but throughout Queensland, as well as several failed suffrage bills, the *Electoral Franchise Bill* was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 5 January 1905. The *Elections Acts Amendment Bill* was introduced at the same time to provide the necessary machinery. The basic thrust of both Bills was encompassed in the latter Bill when the former failed to return from the Legislative Council after it had passed the third reading in the Legislative Assembly. It was assented to by the Governor on 25 January 1905.²⁴ This Act of Parliament not only gave most Queensland women the right to vote, it also abolished the property qualification. It stated that:

"All persons not under twenty-one years of age whether male or female married or unmarried -

- (a) who have resided in Queensland for six months continuously, and
- (b) who are natural born or naturalised subjects of the King, and
- (c) whose names are on the electoral roll for an electoral roll for an electoral district of Queensland,

shall be entitled to vote at the election of members of the Legislative Assembly for such electoral district."²⁵

Race Divisions in the Suffrage Movement

The suffrage movement in Queensland was also divided on the issue of race, since voting rights were not pursued equally for all racial groups.

Queensland society, in the late 1800s, was highly discriminatory against Indigenous people. The *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865* allowed the removal and detention of Aboriginal or 'half-caste' children (that is, those children with an Aboriginal mother and a father who was 'other than an aboriginal native') to industrial schools. The *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* allowed the removal of Aboriginal people to reserves and controlled their employment, payment of wages, ability to marry, and management of property through the Office of Chief Protector of Aboriginals. The extent to which Torres Strait Islanders were subject to the provisions of the 1897 Act is unclear, however, following the death of the last Government Resident of Thursday Island in 1917, the administration of the Torres Strait Islanders was controlled by the Office of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals through a local Protector on Thursday Island. Transitional provisions of the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939* indicate that Torres Strait Islanders were also subject to the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*.²⁶

Indigenous people were denied voting rights under the Queensland *Elections Act 1885*. Section 6 of the Act defined Indigenous people as any 'aboriginal native of Australia, India, China or of the South Sea Islands', unless they were 'freeholders and male'.²⁷

This Queensland Act also had the effect of excluding Indigenous people from voting in federal elections. The

Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902, which gave all women the right to vote in federal elections, excluded aboriginal natives of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand, unless they already had the vote at State level.²⁸ This meant that people classified as ‘aboriginal natives’ in Queensland could be excluded from voting.

Other racial issues emerged with the significant increase in Queensland’s population from 1859 to 1889, due to an influx of Chinese men working on Queensland’s newly discovered goldfields in the 1870s, and 13,000 Pacific Islanders brought in to work the cane fields in the north.²⁹

Due to concerns about this influx of ‘cheap overseas labour’, the significant influence of Labor women and the role of the Labor-affiliated WEFA in the Queensland suffrage movement, the labour movement in Queensland may have contributed to racial issues not being seriously contested at the time.³⁰

In the absence of any contestation of its discriminatory nature, the Queensland *Elections Act Amendment Act 1905* continued to disqualify certain categories of Indigenous people and certain non-European immigrants from voting. Section 9 (7) stated: “no aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific shall be entitled to have his name placed on an Electoral Roll”.³¹

It was only under special entitlement that Indigenous Queenslanders could vote. For example, ‘half-castes born in Queensland’ (that is, those with an Aboriginal mother and a father who was ‘other than an aboriginal native of Queensland’) were not defined as ‘aboriginal natives’ and therefore could enrol. However, the *Elections Acts Amendment Act 1930* removed the entitlement of ‘half-castes’ from enrolling to vote, with the result that many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who were on the state electoral roll were disenfranchised. Constant changes to the definitions of ‘half-caste’ and ‘aboriginal native’ under the various 1897 amendment acts and then the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Acts 1939* meant that even more Indigenous people were removed from the state electoral rolls and/or disqualified from enrolling.³²

Towards Universal Indigenous Suffrage

Although the issue of Indigenous suffrage did not ‘hold back’ the campaign for the right to vote for ‘white’ women in Queensland or elsewhere in Australia, once ‘white’ women got the vote, they did turn their attentions to the situation of Indigenous people in Australia. In the 1920s and 1930s, feminist and other women’s organisations throughout Australia called for significant changes to Indigenous policy and its administration. Some of these organisations had close relations with the British Commonwealth League and their activism succeeded in highlighting to the London press, and consequently Australian governments and the Australian public, the plight of Indigenous people in Australia.³³

The role of these white activists and organisations in fighting for the rights of Indigenous people both hindered and helped the cause of Indigenous campaigners. On the one hand, they often failed to listen to or respect the wishes and aspirations of Aborigines and Torres Strait

Islanders they reputedly spoke on behalf of, and tried to progress their own political agenda.³⁴

On the other hand, their support was crucial, since Indigenous people generally lacked the financial resources necessary to engage in political activity.³⁵ Furthermore, under discriminatory Queensland legislation, such as the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders lost basic human rights such as freedom of movement and labour, custody of their children, and control over personal property.³⁶ In Queensland, political activity was largely prevented by the repressive reserve system, and those who did protest risked incarceration.³⁷ Oppressive legislation, such as the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Acts 1939-1946* (‘the Queensland Acts’) remained operative until 1965.³⁸

Indigenous Activism

While there was no widespread movement of political activism by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders at the time, there were some ad-hoc attempts among Indigenous Queenslanders to protest their exclusion from state electoral rolls. For example, there is evidence of a petition by the Woorabinda Aboriginal Community to the King in 1934 regarding voting rights. Also, individuals who were ‘struck off’ the electoral rolls due to changing government definitions of Indigenous status, attempted to get reinstated.³⁹

It is important to recognise that for Indigenous people, the right to vote was just one aspect of broader human rights for which they were struggling. The Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (later FCAATSI) was formed in Adelaide in 1958. It campaigned for a referendum to amend discriminatory clauses in the Commonwealth Constitution, the end of wage discrimination, general economic and social equality in the areas of health, housing, education and land rights, and an end to social and racial discrimination.⁴⁰

Similarly in Queensland, there was no specific Indigenous suffrage movement. The Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League and the Queensland Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (QCAATSI) campaigned for the repeal of the Queensland Acts with their highly discriminatory provisions, general wage discrimination and employment conditions, and against the harsh treatment meted out against Indigenous people on reserves. QCAATSI also worked with FCAATSI’s sub-committee on legislative reform to remove disqualifications from State and Commonwealth electoral acts.⁴¹

With “a diametrical change of the White attitudes and an equally decisive change in Black confidence”⁴², Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders intensified their political activity in Queensland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Queensland Murri women played a significant part in this activity, through their involvement in ‘white’ organisations, such as the One People of Australia League (OPAL) which was established in Brisbane in 1961 and later set up branches throughout Queensland. Working cooperatively with non-Indigenous women, these Murri women utilised

the framework and structure of these organisations to advance Indigenous rights.

Indigenous Voting Rights

The 1960s finally delivered to Indigenous people some long-awaited rights. In 1962, the right to vote in federal elections was extended to all Indigenous Australians, although enrolment was not compulsory.⁴³ The universal right of Indigenous people to vote in Queensland state elections finally occurred in 1965, with the *Elections Acts Amendment Act 1965* assented to by the Governor on 17 December 1965. It was stated in the Bill's second reading speech that:

"The basic purpose of the bill is to give voting rights to indigenes of the mainland and the Torres Strait Islands. They are now allowed to be enrolled on the common roll with the same privileges and responsibilities including the right to nominate as a candidate, and to nominate a candidate."⁴⁴

The Act came into force on 1 February 1966, although voting for Indigenous Queenslanders remained voluntary until 1971.

A referendum to amend the Commonwealth Constitution finally took place in 1967, resulting in constitutional changes that established the long-overdue mandate for the inclusion of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the national census and at the same time gave to the Commonwealth Government concurrent powers with the states to enact legislation dealing with Indigenous affairs.⁴⁵

The fact that almost 90 per cent of Queensland voters supported the removal of discriminatory provisions from the constitution is indicative of the changed attitudes of 'white' Queenslanders in the 1960s and the success of Indigenous rights campaigns.

It should be noted that 'British subjects who were natives of Asia or Africa' who had previously been excluded from voting in Queensland State elections under successive pieces of legislation, were enfranchised under the *Elections Act Amendment Act 1959* – six years earlier than Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.⁴⁶

From Suffrage to Today

Non-Indigenous women

With women comprising approximately half of the Queensland population, their gaining of the right to vote in 1905 meant that it was politically prudent to pay more attention to women's issues. It also empowered women to become more involved politically, although this was initially constrained by social and political circumstances.

The first Queensland state election in which women could vote was held on 18 May 1907. However, it was not until the passing of the *Elections Act Amendment Act 1915* that women were permitted to be elected to the Legislative Assembly.⁴⁷ There was even more of a delay before the first woman, Irene Longman, was elected to State Parliament in 1929.⁴⁸

Queensland's experience was not unique. While Australia had been the second nation in the world to give its women the vote, in 1921 it had not had one woman in any of its seven parliaments. This situation led many observers of the time to comment that 'Australian women obtained their vote so easily, that's why they do not value it'.⁴⁹

However, there are other and more valid explanations for women's delayed representation in parliament. One reason is that many suffrage leaders consciously rejected the parliament as the primary instrument of social change.⁵⁰ Another reason is the position occupied by women in Australian society at the time. Until the advent of the Second World War, it was not usually acceptable for women to work outside the home.⁵¹ Therefore, the pool of potential female parliamentary representatives was extremely limited. The belief that women's role in society should centre on the home also affected their eligibility to gain endorsement by the major political parties, which considered that men were more suitable to advancing the political cause.⁵²

While demands for wider work opportunities for women, higher pay and better conditions in the workplace, played a role in the suffrage movement alongside social and moral issues, it was more difficult to sustain these demands in the political, economic and social environment of the early 1900s. Although at any one time, there were relatively large numbers of women in paid employment outside the home, it was a changing group as girls moved into it from school, and women moved out of it to marry. With such transient membership, female trade unions found it difficult to survive, let alone develop militancy.⁵³

The Second World War provided a turning point for women, as many were required to enter the workforce to replace men who had gone into the armed forces. It was from this time that the fight for equal pay was able to gather strength.⁵⁴

The mass movement of women into the workforce, greater access to, and participation in, education and training, reliable birth-control and advances in domestic technology have gradually provided women with access to improved economic, social and personal opportunities. The increasing involvement of women in State and Federal politics has led to some landmark legislation to protect women's rights, including the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*, the *Domestic Violence Family Protection Act 1989 (Qld)* and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld)*.

Despite the gains made by Queensland women in the last 100 years, there are some existing and emerging areas where Queensland women continue to face inequity and under-representation.

Although women are now more highly educated than men, this has not translated into higher incomes and rather than narrowing, the gap between earnings of men and women in full-time work is widening across the board.⁵⁵

One of the reasons for women consistently earning less than men is that women continue to be over-represented as carers for children, and increasingly, ageing parents.⁵⁶

Another reason for women earning less is that women are over-represented in low-paid occupations. This, combined with their propensity for part-time and casual work (which is easier to balance with caring responsibilities), makes them financially vulnerable.⁵⁷

Financial security in retirement is critically dependent upon occupation (and thus education), employment status, and time in the workforce. Having a dual role as both carer and worker impacts directly on all of these. Career breaks, part-time work, and concentration in low-paying jobs, all reduce the amount of superannuation women accumulate.⁵⁸

Women are also still under-represented in leadership positions in business and government. Nationally in 2003, women held only 8.4% of board directorships in the top 200 Australian companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.⁵⁹ While there have been significant increases to women's representation in government in recent years, women currently only hold 34.8% of elected positions in state parliament, 34.3% of positions on Queensland Government boards, 15% of local government mayoral positions and 30% of local government councillor positions.

Women are also still subject to alarming rates of domestic violence. Often, their capacity to escape violence is dependent on education and income levels⁶⁰, and the enhanced social and personal opportunities these provide.

Indigenous women

The picture for Indigenous women since suffrage is quite different. The period of time which has elapsed between universal suffrage and the present day is much shorter for Indigenous women (and men) and the starting point of disadvantage and inequity was far greater for Indigenous people, having been compounded by over 100 years of discriminatory government policies. Indigenous people and the Government are still trying to overcome issues impacting on the wellbeing of Indigenous people that have their foundation in these discriminatory policies.

While the 1967 referendum signalled a significant shift in white attitudes to Indigenous Queenslanders, in the years following, it became clearer that more social, economic and political reforms were needed to enable Indigenous people to participate fully as citizens. After 1967, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders began stronger political and legal moves, not just to obtain equal citizens rights, but also other rights, such as land rights.⁶¹

Since these times, major advances in Indigenous rights and quality of life issues have been achieved through the tireless lobbying by Indigenous elders and activists.⁶² However, while the situation of Indigenous Queenslanders has improved dramatically, in comparison to non-Indigenous people, Indigenous people still face inequity and discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives, including education, employment, health, leadership positions and violence.

While Indigenous women have higher completion rates for secondary school and higher participation rates for tertiary education than Indigenous men, overall participation by Indigenous students in education is much lower than for the general community.⁶³

While the unemployment rate for Indigenous women has reduced steadily from 36% in 1986 to 18.1% at the time of the 2001 Census, this was still significantly higher than the rate of 8.2% for the total Queensland population.⁶⁴ Due to lower educational levels, Indigenous women are also more likely to be employed in lower-paid positions.

Queensland's Indigenous women are also generally in poorer health than other Queensland women. Financial reasons, distances to health services, cultural inappropriateness of existing services and inadequate dissemination of information about services are all barriers to Indigenous women accessing screening, treatment and palliative care.⁶⁵ Indigenous women also experience a life expectancy 27.3 years shorter than non-Indigenous women.⁶⁶

In comparison to the total female population of Queensland, Indigenous women also experience higher fertility rates and give birth at younger ages.⁶⁷ This impacts on their participation in education, employment, and consequently, their ability to achieve economic security.

Despite an increase in political activity by Indigenous individuals and organisations in recent decades, this has not translated into Indigenous people being elected to Parliament or local councils in sufficiently representative numbers.⁶⁸ In more than 130 years of government in Queensland, there has only been one Aboriginal elected representative in the Queensland State Parliament and there has not yet been a Torres Strait Islander representative in State Parliament.⁶⁹

For many Indigenous people even today, politics and political aspirations are generally far removed from their daily lives. Poor health and educational outcomes have underpinned this inequality and limited Indigenous people's engagement in the political process, forcing them to focus primarily on basic human survival.⁷⁰

For many, this means dealing daily with violence. Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be the victims of assault than non-Indigenous women. Women in the far northern and northern police regions of Queensland are much more likely to be sexually assaulted than women in the rest of the state.⁷¹

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds

In 2001, there were 131,425 women in Queensland who spoke a language other than English at home.⁷² While Queensland is increasingly becoming a multicultural society in which cultural differences are more widely accepted and valued, for many of these women, issues of gender are further compounded by their immigration or citizenship status, socio-economic status, language and religion which limit their ability to access services and participate equally in Queensland society. As a result, women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds often face high levels of inequity and under-representation in the areas of education, employment, housing, health, safety, leadership and economic security.

The Future for Queensland Women

So what will the future look like for Queensland women in the next 100 years?

While this can only ever be a speculative exercise, it is important to be thinking about, and planning for the future, in order to attain equitable social, economic and political outcomes for Queensland women in the future.

There are two basic approaches to thinking about the future. The first approach is to extrapolate from the past, while the second approach is to look ahead to a preferred vision for the future, and work back from there to achieve it. This section will utilise both approaches.

As outlined earlier in this paper, Queensland women have achieved significant gains since suffrage. These gains have had a flow-on effect, increasing the opportunities available to women in many areas of their lives – education, employment, reproduction, relationships and recreation. Since gaining these opportunities, Queensland women and girls have been making the most of them.

The strength and resilience that was demonstrated by the suffragists in the late 1890s and early 1900s, and by Indigenous Queensland women in the 1960s, has been passed on through several generations and still exists. There are now girls participating in, and excelling in, many pursuits, including academia. There is a plethora of women's rights and services organisations, facilitating the voice of women in the community, and demanding to be heard by government. The voice of Indigenous women in the fight against alcohol abuse and family violence in their communities is just one such example. Women's policy units within government help to ensure that the development of policy and legislation takes women's issues into account. Women's issues are increasingly gaining attention in state and federal elections, and styles of leadership being promoted by many women leaders, based on networking, rather than hierarchical structures, are being recognised as having distinct advantages not only for employee retention, but also productivity and profits.⁷³

For Queensland's current generation of girls and young women who will live well into the next 100 years, the opportunities are almost, but not quite, limitless.

As outlined in the previous section, there are still some lingering areas of inequity, under-representation and need being experienced by women, as well as some new areas emerging, which are likely to impact negatively on the future for Queensland women.

The fact that women still assume the major role in child rearing is the key limiting factor for Queensland's women. It has an impact on women's participation in employment, earning capacity, opportunities for promotion, and financial security, both now and in the future. This in turn, negatively impacts on their participation in decision-making and leadership positions.

In the context of Queensland's ageing population, the fact that women are also more likely to be primary carers of

aged relatives, will further limit the opportunities available to women, in spite of a declining fertility rate.

To date, discussions regarding the expected demographic changes in the future have failed to adequately consider the differential impact of these changes on women and men.⁷⁴ If this trend continues, women will continue to face disadvantage in the areas of employment, financial security and decision-making, when compared with men.

In the area of safety, developments in cyber-technology and the concurrent growth in the cyber-sex industry⁷⁵, are likely to further contribute to the already high levels of sexual assault and violence towards women.

Based on a continuation of current trends therefore, the future for all Queensland women in the next 100 years will not be as positive as it could be. For Indigenous women and women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, current issues of gender inequality and under-representation intersect with issues of racial inequality and discrimination to create an even less positive outlook for the future.

To better ensure that all Queensland women face a more desirable future, some futurists advocate the need to create a preferred vision for the future and work backwards to achieve it.

Given that the key limiting factor for Queensland's women's full social, economic and political participation in society is the fact that women still assume the major role in child rearing, a preferred vision for the Queensland of the future may be a place where Queenslanders can balance work, family and lifestyle and women and men share caring roles in their families and communities.⁷⁶ This is the vision of the Queensland Government outlined in its five year strategic plan for Queensland women – *Women in the Smart State Directions Statement 2003-2008*.

In working backwards to achieve such a vision, issues of gender, as well as culture, would need to be recognised and taken into account when developing policy to respond to socio-demographic changes. Future developments, regardless of whether they are in the field of technology, education and training, health, superannuation, justice, housing or transport, would also need to take women's issues and needs into account.

For this to occur, women's involvement in decision-making at all levels and in all sectors – government, community and business - would need to occur.

In order to achieve this, greater efforts would need to be made to ensure that women and girls are equally represented in all fields of education, training and employment.

This would only be achieved if workplaces move towards offering more family-friendly arrangements, to enable men and women to share caring roles and to combine work and family. This would enable women to remain in the workforce longer and build up the experience and expertise required for positions of leadership and decision-making. There would also need to be greater recognition of

women's valuable unpaid contributions to community and family.⁷⁷

All of this is likely to contribute to women's economic security, and to women being able to grasp hold of other opportunities available to them to create a desirable future.

While working backwards from the preferred vision for the future has been presented as a staged approach, in reality each of these stages would need to occur simultaneously in order to generate a 'critical mass' effect. Just as the large numbers of women entering the workforce after the Second World War generated a 'critical mass' effect that led to enhanced rights for women, a 'critical mass' of women participating in all sectors – government, community and business – and at all levels to overcome areas of inequity and under-representation would be required in order to achieve a preferred vision for the future. Upon achieving a critical mass, women would need to continue to work to change government, community and business organisations to reflect the patterns and values not only of men's lives, but also women's lives.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Much has been achieved by Queensland women in the period of time since gaining the right to vote. These achievements should be acknowledged and celebrated. However, due to issues of race, diverse groups of Queensland women have experienced significantly different pasts, are currently experiencing different 'presents', and are likely to experience different futures. Despite these differences, a common approach would need to be adopted if all Queensland women were to overcome remaining areas of inequity and under-representation and achieve a more positive future for themselves. This approach would involve greater consideration of gender and cultural issues in all current and future developments, higher levels of women's participation in leadership and decision-making, and greater access and participation by all Queensland women in all fields of education, training and employment.

While more women are entering and participating in the paid workforce, there has not been a commensurate level of movement by men towards domestic and caring roles in society. While traditionally, women's movements have been driven by and for women, the concept of partnership approaches - including women and men working in partnership - to facilitate achievement of more equitable outcomes for women is gaining increasing popularity. If these trends continue, the Queensland of the future may well be a place where women and men enjoy equal opportunity and participation in all aspects of society.

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Endnotes

¹ The last Australian state to grant women the right to vote in state elections was Victoria.

² While the term 'women' will be used for the sake of simplicity throughout this section, it is acknowledged that this term is not inclusive of Indigenous women or women from other cultural backgrounds, such as India, China and the South Sea Islands.

³ Queensland Parliament, 'Introduction to Women Members of the Queensland Parliament', <<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Parlib/Members/women/womenintro.htm>> [accessed 15 June 2004], p.1.

⁴ The *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* excluded aboriginal natives of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand, unless they already had the vote at State level. Aboriginal females could vote in South Australia.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. '2001 Centenary Article – Women and government in Australia' *Year Book Australia (2001)* <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ABS@.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/306>> [accessed 18 October 2004]

⁶ In 1893, New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women the right to vote, however this was not accompanied by the right to stand for parliament.

⁷ Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia. A gift or a struggle?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 186.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁹ Sunshine for Women, 'Women Suffrage in Australia', <<http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/whm2003/australia2.html>> [accessed 15 June 2004]

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Oldfield, *op.cit.*, pp. 207-208.

¹¹ Oldfield, *op. cit.*, p. 114-116.

¹² Oldfield, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Carole Ferrier and Deborah Jordan, 'Women's Suffrage Struggles' in *Radical Brisbane – an unruly history*, ed. by Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (Victoria: The Vulgar Press, 2004), p. 105.

- ¹⁵ Oldfield, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- ¹⁷ Ferrier and Jordan, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- ¹⁸ Tom O'Lincoln, 'Sex, class and the road to women's suffrage', <<http://www.anu.edu.au/polsoci/marx/interventions/suffrage.htm>> [accessed 15 June 2004], p. 5.
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