

THE MINISTERS FOR WOMEN



1. JUDI MOYLAN 54

Commonwealth
Marital status: Divorced
Children: Two sons, one daughter
Career: MP since 1993, owner of real estate agency
Education: Diploma in Real Estate Management, BEd (partly completed)
Issues: Economic security, personal safety, work and family

2. FAYE LO PO 57

NSW
Marital status: Married
Children: Two daughters
Career: MP since 1991, teacher, consultant to the Education Department, councillor and mayor of Penrith
Education: Newcastle Teachers College
Issues: Childcare, violence against women, pay equity

3. JAN WADE 61

Victoria
Marital status: Married
Children: Three sons, two daughters
Career: School teacher, tutor in law, self-employed solicitor
Education: BA (1979), LLB (1959)
Issues: Health and well-being, safety, economic security

4. JOAN SHELDON 55

Queensland
Marital status: Married
Children: Three sons
Career: MP since 1990, physiotherapist in private practice
Education: Physiotherapy graduate and LTCL (Trinity College London)
Issues: Economic stability, domestic violence, information technology

5. RHONDA PARKER 43

Western Australia
Marital status: Married
Children: Two boys, three girls
Career: Lecturer and small business partner
Education: Diploma in teaching
Issues: Domestic violence, leadership, economic independence

6. DIANA LAIDLAW 46

South Australia
Marital status: Single
Children: No
Career: MP since 1982, ministerial adviser
Education: BA (Flinders University)
Issues: Women and leadership, family-friendly work practices, economic independence

7. DENISE SWAN 40s

Tasmania
Marital status: Married
Career: Solicitor, council mayor
Education: Bachelor of Laws

8. KATE CARNELL 42

ACT
Marital status: Married
Children: One son, one daughter
Career: MP since 1992, pharmacist
Education: Pharmacy degree
Issues: Jobs, health, personal safety

9. SHANE STONE 48

10. Represented by parliamentary secretary Dr Richard Lim
Northern Territory
Marital status: Married
Children: One son, one daughter
Career: Army, teacher, judge's associate, lawyer, MP since 1990
Education: Diploma of Teaching, BA, Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration, Bachelor of Laws

11. DEBORAH MORRIS

New Zealand

Banks' interest is only in men

By MEGAN SAUNDERS and CHRISTOPHER NIESCHE

BANKS were still discriminating against women by asking them to "bring their husbands" with them when applying for a loan, federal Women's Affairs Minister Judi Moylan said yesterday.

Ms Moylan said that although more women than men were setting up small businesses, some still found it difficult to get finance in their own right.

The minister and her State counterparts yesterday announced they would commission a detailed report on women's access to finance following concerns that financial services for women were still "considerably lacking".

The report, which will also look at women's share of assets and income, will be used to pressure financial institutions into providing more responsive financial services for women.

Ms Moylan said there was significant anecdotal evidence from women about their problems with banks, but the report would establish how common the problem was nationwide.

Recounting a meeting with women in NSW, she said: "We went around the table (and) there were several women who had actually had quite significant problems in raising funding."

"They were often asked to bring their husbands with them when they came in for an interview for finance."

"They were often asked to get guarantees from their partners or husbands. Those problems were quite evident."

Queensland Women's Affairs Minister Joan Sheldon said women were dissatisfied with the lack of responsive financial services and "the manner in which they are offered".

One example was given by Melbourne caterer Sarah Wildings, who encountered problems with her bank when she went to pick up new credit cards for herself and her husband.

The bank would not hand over her husband's card without proof of his signature, but when her husband returned to the bank days later he was able to pick up both cards — without his wife's signature.

"They gave me a patten that that's not supposed to happen," she said. "I was furious."

After separating from her husband, Ms Wildings found that he was able to change the address of their joint account over the phone, but for her to change the address she had to go into the bank and do so in writing.

"I think there's still that traditional idea that the husband is the main income earner and therefore he's the main decision maker, and it's just not true."

Ms Moylan said competition between financial institutions was forcing them to pay greater attention to the needs of female customers — with new lenders putting pressure on their traditional bank competitors.

The mums and grannies who speak for women

By social affairs writer MICHELLE GUNN and MEGAN SAUNDERS

THESE are the politicians who speak for the women of Australia and New Zealand.

Most are women themselves, which is a good start. But, apart from that, they are resoundingly like many other politicians — Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged and middle-class.

Responsible for ensuring that government policy reflects the concerns, needs and interests of females, they do, however, in other ways reflect the complex realities of life for women in the 1990s.

Some are grandmothers, some have never married, others are divorced; most have had children and been in the work force (but not always at the same time) and their pre-parliamentary careers vary from teaching and pharmacy to real estate.

In Brisbane yesterday for the Commonwealth-State ministers conference on the status of women, they talked about the usual array of women's issues — economic independence, domestic violence and personal safety, the number of women in leadership positions and the balancing of work and family responsibilities.

Rhonda Parker, of Western Australia, also briefed her colleagues on the latest developments in the abortion debate in her home State, although abortion law reform was not formally part of the agenda.

It was an omission that incensed several women's groups, whose members see inconsistent and unclear abortion laws as the crucial issue for women this year. A Women's

Electoral Lobby spokesman, Jane Gardiner, said: "The right to control your own fertility underlies just about any other right women have. We would certainly have liked to have seen it raised."

Helen Kerr, president of Queensland abortion reform group Children by Choice, went further, saying the federal and State ministers had abrogated their responsibility to women by not seriously considering the issue.

When questioned at a press conference, Queensland Women's Affairs Minister Joan Sheldon refused to discuss abortion on the grounds that it "wasn't on the agenda".

Her federal counterpart, Judi Moylan, said abortion law reform was a "difficult" and

"complex" matter that each State had to decide for itself.

She declined to give her own views, except to say that there was a need for "greater clarity".

Mrs Moylan nominated income security, personal safety and the balancing of work and family responsibilities as three issues of major concern.

Mrs Moylan is the first federal minister to be employed full-time on the status of women, a fact seized upon by the Howard Government as evidence of the importance it placed on women's affairs.

The other side of the tale is that Mrs Moylan found herself in the job only after being axed as Minister for Family Services and removed from Cabinet, leaving Social Security Minis-

ter Jocelyn Newman as the sole female representative.

Since taking on the new position, Mrs Moylan has worked hard to promote women as leaders and to increase their representation on federal boards and agencies.

The Federal Government has also been active in the areas of domestic violence, reform of superannuation as it applies to women and improved recognition of carers (most of whom are women).

But these achievements have been overshadowed by government reforms to childcare, particularly the removal of the operational subsidy from community-based long-day care centres and outside school hours care, and the effects on women of the aged care reforms.