

3 August 2001

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	
Date Received	13 August 2001
Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

The Secretary
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

Enclosed is a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters from Women Into Politics Incorporated. Also enclosed are 10 copies of our publication, *Women's Charter for Political Reform 2001: A charter for political equality for women and for good government for all Australian citizens*, which is an integral part of the submission.

The Women's Charter is also available in full on our website:
<http://www.womenintopolitics.org.au>

Sections 1, 2 & 3 of the Women's Charter (most specifically pages 11 to 20) are to be regarded as part of the substance of our submission.

Yours sincerely

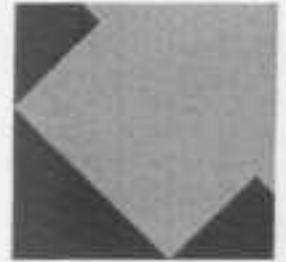
Joan Bielski, AM
 Hon Secretary



Women Into Politics Inc: A Coalition of Women's Organisations and Individuals including:

Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women (NSW Division), Australian Federation of University Women (NSW), Central Coordinating Committee of Spokeswomen, EEO Practitioners Association, Organisation of Hellenic & Hellenic-Cypriot Women of Australia, National Women's Justice Coalition, War Widows Guild of Australia (NSW), Women and the Australian Church, Women in Science Enquiry Network, Women Lawyers' Association of NSW, Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW), Young Women's Christian Association.

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**SUBMISSION FROM WOMEN INTO POLITICS INC.
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS**

Women Into Politics is a coalition of women's organisations, established in 1992 to promote political equality for women in Australia; to dramatically increase the numbers of women in our parliaments and at all levels of public life in order to make our public institutions more representative.

The reasons for our existence include our disappointment that successive Australian Governments have not honoured the obligations Australia undertook when it signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in relation to political equality for women.

CEDAW Article 8 reads:

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a. to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies*
- b. to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government*
- c. to participate in all non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country*

Only section 'a' above can be said to be in place, and that was already the case before the Australian Government signed the Covenant.

Hence we tender, as part of our submission to the Joint Standing Committee, the *Women's Charter for Political Reform 2001: A charter for political equality for women and for good government for all Australian citizens*, (copies enclosed), hereinafter referred to as "the Women's Charter", or simply "the Charter."

Women Into Politics did not have access to the Australian Electoral Commission's 1996 and 1998 Funding and Disclosure Reports. However the Women's Charter in its first three parts appears to deal directly with matters germane to the Joint Standing Committee's brief. We tender the Women's Charter as the major part of our submission, and we here refer the Committee to the relevant parts of the Charter.

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The Charter, Part 1 - *Political Equality for Women* (pages 11 - 15) asks that the organisational practices of the political parties be brought under the aegis of the Sex Discrimination Act, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Australian Electoral Commission, in order that the political parties be required in law to incorporate natural justice and anti-discrimination principles in their rules and practices and that they be required to report on such matters to the Australian Electoral Commission and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

The increase in the numbers of women in our parliaments from approximately 10% in 1992 to approximately 25% in 2001 is in large part due to the work of organisations such as ours, in making the political parties aware of the need for and the justice of recruiting the talents of women, through our publications, seminars and workshops; and also through the work of the women's units within the political parties, who have recruited, sometimes financed and trained women for political careers. The major party organisations have at best been passive on the issue, at worst have been hostile to the promotion of women within their ranks and have not addressed the issues of either direct or indirect discrimination within their organisations.

The Charter, Part 2 - *Regulating the Influence of Money in Politics* (pages 15-18) and **The Charter, Part 3 - *Changing the Parliamentary System of Remuneration and Entitlements* (pages 19-22)** address directly the issues being considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters - the extension by legislation of the Australian Electoral Commission's responsibilities in regard to funding and disclosure recommendations.

Our submission is relevant, though it does not directly refer to the Funding and Disclosure Reports, (because we were not aware of their existence when the Women's Charter was written). No doubt the recommendations in the AEC Reports cover issues that we have not dealt with, but with which we may well agree. It may well be that our recommendations (see the Charter) go further than the AEC Reports, because we see an enlarged role for the AEC as an important and desirable development.

In our consultations with women during seminars, forums and conferences, Women Into Politics became aware that a major disincentive to women entering politics was the perception that politics is a dirty business and a dishonourable occupation, corrupted in part by the methods that the political parties have come to use in raising money for party purposes and by the abuse of parliamentary privileges and entitlements. Therefore we decided that we could not continue to urge more women to undertake political careers unless we also made an attempt to reform the political process. We see as essential to this that the political parties must be brought under arms length regulation, as are other public organisations and institutions.

Women Into Politics would like to comment further on the Charter's Part 2 - *Regulating the Influence of Money in Politics*. We would expect that our recommendations if adopted would lead to less money being available for electioneering and party purposes. From the public's viewpoint this is likely to be regarded as having merit, in that having less money available could lead to political parties being more focused on their policy enunciations,