

History of the PSA's Women's Council

Women's Council and the PSA have had many successes over the years in improving the situation of women members, however there is always more to do. Women's Council has worked on issues around:

- ⇒ job security for women workers and the prevention of the casualisation of women's work, and pay equity,
- ⇒ ground breaking workplace rights for victims of domestic violence ,
- ⇒ flexible work practices,
- ⇒ Purchased leave,
- ⇒ Paid lactation breaks for women returning from maternity leave.

Women's Council meets at 4.00 pm at the PSA Head Office, 160 Clarence Street, Sydney, six times a year. Women's Council is formed under the PSA Rules and operates in accordance with the PSA By-Laws. Women's Council Committee is made up of women members elected from each of Women's Council Electorates.

The 2017 annual Women's Conference will be held in September, at PSA House. This is a great opportunity to become more engaged with the PSA.

Details and registrations will be available on the PSA website www.psa.asn.au from August each year.



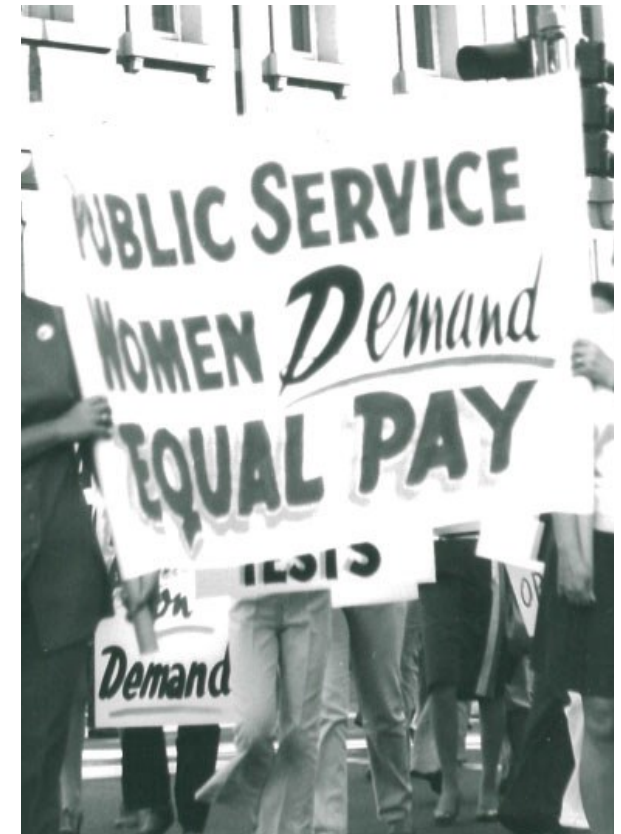
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Over eighty years ago a new clause was inserted into the PSA rules which has had a lasting effect on the PSA. The clause established the PSA Women's Auxiliary, known today as the Women's Council

During the 1920s, pressure began to be placed on the PSA executive for more representation of women and women's issues within the PSA. However, it wasn't until a former PSA President, Mr Flynn, made some comments at the Australia Public Service Federation conference in Perth in 1929, that a major push for change commenced.

Reported in the Sydney Morning Herald at the time, Mr Flynn allegedly stated, "Fundamentally, women are not honest." The Sydney Morning Herald report infuriated PSA women members. A huge meeting of angry women was organised by the women's clerical sub section, where "the council room was crowded to overflowing and many women were unable to gain admittance." Mr Flynn, declined to attend this meeting.

At the same conference where Mr Flynn made his controversial comments, Fred Willis, then General Secretary, stated, "I believe that the time is approaching when the question of equal pay for equal work for men and women will have to be regarded seriously by employers, including Governments, and by the community."



Photo: Miss Jean Arnot (Right)—Chairwoman of the PSA's Women's Auxiliary from 1937. She was also the a member of the equal pay committee that represented the PSA at meetings with the Premiers Department. Jean was awarded a PSA gold medal in 1937 and an MBE in 1967.

She started as an apprentice librarian in 1921 at the State Library. By the time she retired in 1968, Jean was Head Cataloguer of the State Library.

Early on in her career Jean became aware of the disparity between male and female rates of pay. One day she discovered that her male junior was paid more than her. She complained to the Public Service Board but was advised that nothing could be done as it was "the law of the land".

A further meeting of women members was held in early 1930 where a resolution was carried requesting that the executive and council of the union would allow for a rule change at the 1930 Annual Conference.

The rule change would create the women's auxiliary. The rule change was passed at conference and the women's auxiliary was formed, with the first elected president being Miss Grant Cooper, the elected minutes secretary being Miss DC Beveridge, and the elected representative to the PSA executive being Miss KC O'Keefe.

The women's auxiliary had a name change to the Women's Council in 1973, but what ever it was called, the members of the council have all worked hard for women's rights.

Over the years the Women's Council has fought for and won many advances. It has achieved permanency for female employees, access to the entrance exam, amenities, long service leave, removal of the marriage bar, representation on Labor Council, maternity leave, pay equity for librarians and continues to be a vital force for the improvement of women's rights within the public sector.