

# **N**T Women Lawyers' Association

The Women's Constitutional Convention was held in Canberra at Parliament House on 29 and 30 January, 1998. Sally Gearin and myself attended on behalf of the Northern Territory Women Lawyers.

The Women's Constitutional Convention was opened by Mrs Agnes Shea, Elder of the Ngunnawal and the Honourable Judi Moylan MP, Minister for the Status of Women.

When the Australian Constitution was written some hundred years ago there were no women present. The idea behind the Women's Constitutional Convention was to give women an opportunity to voice their opinions on such issues as whether or not Australia should become a Republic and if so, how the Head of State should be elected. One of the aims of the Women's Constitutional Convention was to emerge with consensus as to:

- (a) Republic -v- Monarchy.
- (b) How a Head of State is to be elected.

(c) Bill of Rights compared to an Equality Act.

(d) Whether or not the Constitution should include a preamble and if so, what should be included in the preamble.

It was then hoped that the female delegates to the Constitutional Convention which was held in the two weeks immediately following the Women's Constitutional Convention could take the consensus with them. It is interesting to note the number of delegates to the Women's Constitutional Convention was double the number that attended at the Constitutional Convention.

Over the two days of the Convention we heard speakers such as Kim Rubenstein, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Melbourne; Linda Kirk, Lecturer in Law, ARM, Delegate to the Constitutional Convention and AWL Board Member; Kerry Jones, Executive Director, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy, ACM Delegate to the Con-

stitutional Convention; Professor Hillary Charlesworth; Elizabeth Evatt, AC and Dr Joclynn Scutt.

On Thursday evening the delegates gathered for a night of finery and fun at a formal dinner held at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

All Board Members of the Australian Women Lawyers attended at the Women's Constitutional Convention with two of the Board Members Linda Kirk and Claire Thompson also being delegates to the Constitutional Convention.

Whilst the two days were exhausting it was nevertheless an event which illustrated to the writer and I hope to others the determination of women to not only have a voice but to be heard in relation to the future of Australia. If you are interested in further information on the Women's Constitutional Convention check out the home page at <http://www.womensconv.dynamite.com.au>.

— Merran Short



*The Women's Constitutional Convention in Canberra, 29 and 30 January 1998*