



NATIONAL OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK (NOWN)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NOWN TO DATE
OCTOBER 2021

Dear Members, all.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet and acknowledge the past and present Elders along with the elders of the other first nations across the oceans and the seas

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL OLDER WOMENS' NETWORK INC (NOWN): 2013 – 2021. For those of you who do not have the history, we the current NOWN, thought it would be a good idea to fill you in on at least, our time, from when we started. Often is the case, history can depend on who is telling the story.

To begin, there are so many women to thank, and I trust I can recall them all here in this newsletter to acknowledge their support for NOWN and for me personally.

In Queensland (Qld) I begin with our **Patron, Dame Quentin Bryce** whose ongoing support as our patron for NOWN has been so reassuring to all of us for the dedication and work we have produced **since 2013** when we began to focus on a National body for OWN.

Quentin Bryce **Former Governor-General of Australia**



Dame Quentin Alice Louise Bryce, AD, CVO is an Australian academic who served as the 25th Governor-General of Australia from 2008 to 2014. She is the first woman to have held the position and was previously the 24th Governor of Queensland from 2003 to 2008. Quentin has been unwavering in her support for us at NOWN. She attends, in person or by electronic means at all of our National conferences. With this my last conference, as National President, coming up in October Quentin will be in conversation with me and will be sending her best wishes to us all as she does.

The Beginning: As a point of reference, after several years of volunteering in a number of different countries, I arrived back in Australia in 2011 accompanied by my fiancé now husband. Introducing this Canadian to Sydney we were exploring the Sydney Rocks area when we came across an old 'cottage' with the words, **"Older Women's Network"** out front. Having recently completed a volunteer role at the Calgary, (Canada), Seniors Resources Society we were both interested and went into this cottage. We were greeted by **Dr Sonia Laverty** (PhD) who was most welcoming and interested in our 'story'. By the time we left her we had agreed to her powerful persuasion to kick start the OWN Australia Inc (OWNA) organisation, as it was then called. An organisation that had 'run out of steam' and 'needed resuscitation', thus, the journey began. Here I would acknowledge the women who had put in considerable Volunteer time to OWNA: Betty Johnson, Cate Turner, Ruth Kershaw, Sally Jones among others.

With respect to all those involved, past and present, I apologise here at this point if some of these recollections are, while true may not be, exactly accurate.

We had little to go on, very few, if any, written records of OWNA so we essentially started from scratch. “I ‘ll give you two of my best to help”, Sonia said. Those two were **Sharan Tuite and Cate Turner**, both still by my side God bless them and, along with a third, (“best”), woman, **Barbara Malcolm** we formed an executive and were voted in by the membership in 2013. There were also women on this Council: from Queensland, e.g., **Sally Jones (Former National Convenor) June Donnelly** (Qld) and from WA: **Ruth Kershaw (a Former National Convenor)** (Sue Joslin, Patricia Morris later recruited) and Deborah Sharp. All of these women have since been joined by a number of others. But, not to be forgotten, there was also the very important **Beth Eldridge** who was the support lead for OWN NSW, a great woman. To some Beth was quite controversial but she was always respected for her work as she really ran the day-to-day business of OWN NSW. Let us not forget Beth. At this time OWN was in NSW, W.A. and in Qld, more from these State bodies, below.

With respect to all those who laid the path for us to follow I believe it is important for us to have an **honor roll**, to recognise those who have gone before us. From what little documented history there is, I recognise, not in any order of priority: Sally Jones (my immediate predecessor), Cate Turner, Ruth Kershaw (Sally Jones’ immediate predecessor), Sharan Tuite, Pat Morris. I would seek your support with the establishment of an Honor Roll.

For no particular reason I had difficulty with the title ‘OWN Australia’ and in **2017** we changed the name, designed a new logo, and registered **National Older Women’s Network Inc (NOWN)**. We also changed the title from National Convenor to National President. Since that time there are now more and more Presidents as it has turned out to be a popular title for many, even local groups.

We launched NOWN with a major conference held on International Women’s Day (IWD) at the NSW Parliament house in the Auditorium and we had over 150 women in attendance. The largest gathering ever, I believe, the largest turnout of members to that time. This event also served as a recruitment drive for new members, and it was successful in that, among other regards. Our primary goal was for the organisation to be membership driven, by the members for the members and not by any management. These changes all seem like such a long time ago yet, at times, not too long at all.

At this major event the OWN women did, as women do, volunteered to help, meeting and greeting, sorting tickets/payments, ushering the audience. It was truly amazing: Introducing the new name, **NOWN**, (in preference to OWN Australia), with a new National management team, and with a focus on National advocacy for all older women, Australia wide. Following this event Sonia granted me a life membership of NOWN and sometime later Sharan Tuite and Cate Turner were also granted Life Membership

At this IWD event, on screen we had our Patron, **Dame Quentin Bryce**, who remains a passionate Patron and supporter, and we introduced two other important women Patron:



1. **Prof Gillian Triggs**, former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission now making a major difference Assistant Secretary-General of the U.N. Gillian Triggs



2. **The Honorable Susan Ryan AO FAICD** at the time the Age Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Susan, a very dear friend, and a wonderful supporter passed away last year (2020). A great loss for NOWN, the women's movement in Australia and for the whole country.



Aloma Fennell and the Hon Susan Ryan AO at the NSW Parliament House Auditorium for IWD

To Begin: when I was working in the corporate world both in Australia and Internationally, (in Australia as National President of the Australian Institute of Training & Development (AITD) and as the head of TAFE; I was one of the first here in Australia to emphasize that membership organisations, if they are to succeed and maintain their membership, must be Membership driven not Management driven. Unfortunately, most are still management driven.

How often, for example, are you the members asked where would you like your group to be headed, in what direction? If changes are to be involved in any new strategy, how many of you, the members, are asked if you agree with those changes?

For a short time, some group members actually managed the offices of OWN NSW. These members were known as “**the MacArthur Girls**”. To this day, I am often asked, ‘what happened to the MacArthur girls?’. They really did make an impact. I am sorry to say most of them, if not all of them, are no longer members. Our National Secretary, Sharan Tuite is one of these women and she remains in touch with these former members: Glenda Laird, Mary Bently, Pat Carter (deceased), Beverly Farley, and others. For a time, they were, essentially, OWN NSW. Our Secretary Sharan was granted, along with Cate Turner and Barbara Malcolm, life membership to OWN NSW. Sharan, Cate, Barbara, Sonia Laverty and I all now have life membership of NOWN. While I am in frequent contact with Sharan in her role with advisory capacity and as a former **National Secretary**, I am sorry to advise that her health has not been very good of late. She nonetheless remains my right hand in many decisions we make as her wisdom and experience is invaluable. Sharan’s current role is as Assistant Secretary.

Our first NOWN Council, in 2013, consisted of: Barbara Malcolm, Sally Jones, Sharan Tuite, Debbie Sharp, Ruth Kershaw, June Donnelly and Aloma Fennell. **Since 2019** the National council has been and remains: National Executive: Aloma Fennell President; Cate Turner Treasurer; Sharan Tuite Assistant Secretary. Councilors: Lee Hodgson (Qld), Ruth Tom Sargent (Qld) Pat Morris (W.A.), and Julie Boyd, (W.A.).

I am sure I speak for you all in thanking all those women who have worked tirelessly in and for their respective States providing a voice for women to be heard with courage, confidence, and dignity.



L to R Cate
Turner National
Treasurer, Prof
Gillian Triggs
Former Age
Discrimination
Commissioner,
Aloma Fennell
National
President
NOWN

The current NOWN executive has achieved some major milestones:

1. Introducing NOWN to the Global Alliance of Older Persons (GAROP).

When contacted by the Chairperson of GAROP (2019) with an invitation for me to be a member of the steering group of GAROP I advised I would be standing down from NOWN at the 2021 AGM. However the Chairperson in turn, advised me he was recruiting the individual and not the organisation. Thus, I remain on the Steering group of GAROP as, at this time of writing, September 2021 I have been re-elected for another two years.

We also introduced NOWN TO ERA & ES4W

- 2.** This same response (as above) came from the **Equality Rights Alliance (ERA)** when I was invited to join the ERA Steering Group. Thus, I plan to remain a member of both steering groups (GAROP & ERA). Additionally I have attended the U.N. in New York where I introduced and promoted NOWN to many international organisations. As a result we are internationally recognised.
- 3.** On another note I did express this same intent (to retire) when the **Economic Security for Women (ES4W)** invited me along to join their Forums, again I got the same reassuring reply. The key council members of ES4W actually took me aside and asked how they could offer to help me as they knew my position on NOWN had no external funding whatsoever. I will never forget these supportive gestures. In turn I wrote a complementary piece in support of Single Mothers and their Children (a

member of ES4W) and their funding request. I believe this support really helped in their gaining financial assistance.

Additionally, I recruited the Hon Shirley Randle AO as our National Ambassador. Shirley has also been active with the latter groups.

Having these connections with the above groups enables us to contribute more effectively to NOWN providing our members, as well as others, with global information which, in turn, enables members to voice their opinions and concerns in regard to global women's issues.

Again I believe it is important to seek out and keep in mind those who have gone before us and who have paved the way. When I was asked to take on the role of National President I was very conscious of those who had held the role before me, those who I have met: **Ruth Kershaw (WA), then Sally Jones Qld.**

In remembrance:



Above: Pat Zinn (deceased) Pat a true treasure and founder/convenor of the Aboriginal Support Circle of OWN NSW.

Pat who for many years has spearheaded the First Nations Group of older women. The original title for this group was the Aboriginal Circle, as I understand.

One of the very many delightful memories I have of the early times, with Pat present, are the concerts that were held at the Mott Hall, close to the 'old cottage'. So much fun, laughter, and mayhem with the OWN concerts there. Another very happy recollection is the IWD celebrations and Conference that we, NOWN, (based on the Mott Hall experiences), held on the Central Coast at Point Clare in 2019. **Pat Zinn** gave the acknowledgement to country for this event as well as many others.

At the Point Clare event we had another audience of 100 plus women attend. The drummers and the theatre group performed as only they can. There is such a need for more of these gatherings for our members to remind them, **they**, are the National Older Women's Network, **they the members**.



Aloma Fennell with Kate Jenkins Sex Discrimination Commissioner (AHRC)2010.

For those who don't know me I submit a brief introduction and update:

Aloma Fennell BA. MA. CELTA. FAITD

Aloma Fennell has many firsts to her name: The **first** woman to be the Chair of the Board of the largest educational institution in Australia: Sydney Institute of Technology; the **first** woman to be the National President of the Australian Institute of Training & Development, AITD (I continue to be an Honorary Fellow) and a recipient of a **Leadership Award from the University of NSW**. Also, the **first** woman to **Chair the Board of the Mona Vale Hospital**. A career in Organizational & Strategy development, along with Human Resources, has seen me working with

senior managers in many Leading Organisations both in Australia and internationally.

Finally, in 2021 I was voted in by all National Councilors of NOWN as the International Ambassador for and on behalf of NOWN.

Now easing back on workloads, Aloma continues to advise and consult with organisations and a range of businesses & NFPs. She also continues to be called upon as an International Speaker to many conferences and events. Along her career path Aloma has always spent time in, 'expertise contributions to society', in doing so right now she contributes as the National President of the National Older Women's Network (NOWN), as a member of the Steering Group of the Global Alliance for Older People and, as well as being a member of the steering group of the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA). Fortunately, I managed to be in **New York prior to the COVID outbreak, when I was able to promote National OWN, at the UN.**

In Acknowledgement of those who have gone before me: **National Presidents: Ruth Kershaw WA, Sally Jones Qld. Thank you for the path you prepared.**

At this time, in closing, I would like to acknowledge the excellent support of **Mary Hacio** a very good personal friend who has worked very closely with me while Sharan has been very ill. It needs to be noted that **Mary has been granted life membership to National OWN.**

We all in NOWN are most appreciative of the support from **Rhoda Sexton and Larissa Bergmann** both of whom have stood in as interim Secretary /Public Officer (Rhoda) and Interim Treasurer (Larissa) during Sharan and Cate's absences 2021.

I wish to thank all of the women, interstate, who have looked after us when we attended their states for our conferences and AGMs. Thank you for all you have done including your wonderful hospitality.

I feel a strong ongoing association as, for example, I designed the Logo for NOWN. Whenever and wherever I see this logo, I will be reminded of my time with you and all of the wonderful women who have worked with me for NOWN.

Finally, to all those wonderful members and friends of NOWN to whom I have had the privilege of serving during my tenure, I offer my heartfelt thanks. If you wish to contact me/keep in touch you can do so on at alomafennell@gmail.com

At the same time, we will all be keeping in touch as the National Councilors, at our last meeting, agreed to engage me officially as an **International Ambassador to NOWN**

I now ask that this document be kept with NOWN records to be referred to when required in acknowledging the good work of so many women.

Very best wishes to all, thank you for the opportunity to be your President!

Keep up the good work.

Aloma Fennell: National President 2012- 2021



Our friends and supporter's logos:



Australian Institute of
Training and Development



THE SENIOR AGENDA INC.





1. Aloma Fennell (NOWN) & Sally Jones (Qld)
 2. Unknown, Sharan Tuite, Aloma & Cate Turner (All NSW)
 3. Barbara Malcolm (NSW), Cate Turner, Aloma, Sally, Sharan and Unknown
- Prizes will be given to the first women who can name the "unknowns"**

THANK YOU ALL