



Piloting a multipartisan Women's Caucus with a focus on climate change in the ACT Legislative Assembly – A Discussion Starter

Background

Climate change is upon us and many voices which could contribute to navigating the crisis are missing or marginalised. Of these, women's voices, with their particular modes of collaboration and care, and deep concern for future generations and the environment, are largely absent from the economic and governmental debates at every level of government, from international to local. 'Gender neutral' hides specific information, and ignores gender impact.

A proposal

The proposition is that the current poorly acknowledged normatively gendered approach to problem-solving could and should be re-balanced through supporting and elevating women's approaches and expertise in the parliamentary sphere. This would lead to more informed discussions, longer term thinking and the opportunity to shape and deliver more effective policies in the future.

Objectives

- **To recognise and respond to the acknowledged “differential vulnerability”** of women to climate change impacts and current policy responses
- **To improve governance and community trust**, by bringing a deliberately collaborative and long-term approach to the crucial issue of climate change
 - this more collaborative approach will draw on the diverse experience, expertise and viewpoints of women, across party divides
 - it will encourage habits of understanding and valuing others' viewpoints, working together on critical challenges
 - participants will tackle problems together rather than getting locked into critiquing party policies
- **To affect policy development and decision-making about climate change into the future**, rather than being restricted to or conflicted about current party or governmental policies
 - developing a set of shared fundamentals on relevant subjects to enable women MLAs to contribute as effectively and creatively as possible
 - offering an alternative to the short-termism of much government thinking, and helping to reinstate community trust in government and parliamentarians to look to the future and protect future human generations and all biodiversity.

How is this different from what currently exists?

1. There are no all-inclusive multipartisan women's caucuses specifically focused on climate change within Australia's federal, state or territory parliaments.
 - 90 countries have women's caucuses operating within their parliamentary systems. None refer specifically to climate issues.
 - Cross-party Women's committees are strong players in parliaments as diverse as the UK and Rwanda, though they are generally focused on rights, equalities and representation
2. The proposal is to marry the cross-party Women's committee idea with an initial, single focus on climate action for the longer term.
 - This new group of women parliamentarians in the ACT Legislative Assembly will also be a pilot for similar groups in other jurisdictions.
3. The intent and operating principle of this women's caucus is quite different from current committees and friendship groups. It is for those MLAs who wish to engage productively with women colleagues across party lines, to develop trust, knowledge and effective working relationships within the caucus that will enable successful negotiations both within party rooms and across divides.

ACT focus

The ACT is rightly regarded as innovative and experimental for its human rights and social justice frameworks, and for its focus on renewable energy as a key plank in reducing climate change impact. There is enthusiasm to do more, and the participation of women in this model caucus, who come from all the parties in the ACT Legislative Assembly, is potentially a feasible, exciting and scaleable pilot for other jurisdictions.

Next steps

We propose a conversation event for women MLAs and thought-leaders, to be held in early 2024 and hosted by the Women's Climate Congress. It would explore their response to the worsening impacts of climate change in the light of outcomes from COP28, current scientific advice, and the emerging international movement for greater women's representation at all levels of decision making.

This event could support the initiation of a pilot multipartisan women's caucus focused on climate change, as outlined above.

Reading

Women's Charter for Change <https://womensclimatecongress.com/charter>

[Climate Action Tracker](#) (a collaboration between Climate Analytics and the NewClimate Institute) tracks government climate action in relation to the Paris Agreement target of holding warming below 2°C, with efforts to limit to 1.5°C.

A Mavisakalyan and Y Tarverdi, '[Gender and Climate Change: Do Female Parliamentarians Make a Difference?](#)', *European Journal of Political Economy* 56 (January 2019): 151-164.

In September 2018 [the first International Congress of Parliamentary Women's Caucuses](#) was held in Dublin, Ireland, with participants from more than 40 countries. An outcome of the Congress was the [Dublin Declaration](#) proposing action on women in politics and a commitment to working across party and ideological lines in pursuit of gender equality.