



Women's Suffrage in South Australia – 125th anniversary: Fact sheet

Introduction

The *Constitution Amendment Act (1894)* gave women in South Australia the right to vote and the right to stand for Parliament ('subject to the same qualifications and in the same manner as men'). The Bill was passed by the South Australian Parliament on 18 December 1894 and received Royal Assent (becoming an Act) on 2 February 1895. The Act was then proclaimed on 20 March 1895 and gazetted on 21 March 1895.

South Australia was the first place in Australia to grant women the right to vote and the right to stand for Parliament. This fact sheet puts this achievement in an international context.

Voting

South Australia was preceded in granting universal suffrage for women (not limited on the basis of property or race) by Pitcairn Island (1838), the Cook Islands (a British Protectorate) (1893) and New Zealand (1893).

Several jurisdictions in North America granted women the right to vote before 1894, including the territories of Wyoming (1869, a state after 1890), Utah (1870), Washington (1883) and the state of Colorado (1893). Although the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 prevented states from denying the right to vote on the basis of 'race, colour or previous condition of servitude', more detailed research would be required to establish whether or not race was a factor in the exercise of voting rights in these states and territories.

Standing for Parliament

South Australia was preceded in granting women the right to stand for Parliament by the state of Colorado in the US; three women were elected to the General Assembly (the lower house of the Colorado state legislature) on 6 November 1894 and sworn in on 2 January 1895.

Conclusion: South Australia in an international context

It is not accurate to claim that South Australia was the first place, or first representative government, in the world to give women the right to stand for Parliament, nor to claim South Australia as the first place in the world to give women the same political rights as men (see Colorado).

Additional note: Aboriginal people and the vote in South Australia

Aboriginal people have always had the same voting rights as other South Australians, although they have not always been encouraged to exercise those rights. Aboriginal people did not lose the right to vote in South Australian elections when South Australia became a state in 1901. However, a narrow interpretation of the Australian Constitution meant that this right was not transferred to Commonwealth elections from 1901. In 1949 the law was clarified, extending the vote in Commonwealth elections to those 'aboriginal natives of Australia' who were entitled to vote in state elections.

This meant that Aboriginal people in South Australia could vote in Commonwealth elections. In 1962 the Commonwealth franchise was extended to Indigenous people in all states and territories.



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