

Gender reporting requirements not 'Red Tape'

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A powerful coalition of business, non-government, representative and industry associations is urging the Government not to table proposed amendments to the gender equality indicators in the regulations to the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* ('the Act').

The coalition does not support the contention by the Minister for Employment, Senator Eric Abetz that the gender reporting requirements contained in the *Act* constitute red tape.

The Government has prepared an Exposure Draft to remove swathes of reporting matters from *Schedule 1 of the Act* which is expected to be tabled in Parliament this month.

Coalition spokesperson Ms Claire Braund said if the Exposure Draft is tabled there would be a strong push to have it disallowed.

"The collection and reporting of gendered metrics on pay, recruitment, retention and promotion is critical to improving workplace equity and female participation in the workforce – in particular in management and leadership roles.

"These issues all feed into addressing declining workforce productivity and the looming crisis around women's retirement savings. Yet the Government and some parts of the business community seem keen to remove the only meaningful gendered data in the public domain".

Ms Braund said the reporting required under the Act will generate a world leading data set that will develop business intelligence, enable company and industry comparisons and benchmarking, drive policy change, improve productivity and enhance performance.

"Losing the capacity to collect this data from our larger (> 100 employee) businesses puts at risk a very real opportunity to address workplace reform in a meaningful way."

"Nor are the reporting requirements too onerous. As businesses with fewer than 100 employees are exempt from WGEA reporting, the legislation impacts less than five per cent of businesses which employ slightly less than half of Australian workers," Ms Braund said.

"While we appreciate that the legislation may need some fine tuning, the current proposals go well beyond making minor adjustments and should be replaced with a fairer draft that more equitably balances issues raised by some employers with the need to move forward on the important issue of gender equality.

"For example, items in Schedule 1 relating to gendered reporting for graduates and apprentices, reporting of the CEO salary and some aspects of reporting for parenting leave as well as a large number of reporting items in Schedule 2 could be removed without seriously impairing the Act's core objectives," Ms Braund added.

However, the coalition is adamant that certain essential items in Schedule 1 must be retained including:

- reporting of gendered workforce profile data on all managers,
- reporting of gender pay equity objectives,
- whether any gender pay gap analysis has been conducted and
- what actions have been taken in response, and
- reporting on the categories of employees consulted on gender equity issues and how they have been consulted.

“The proposed amendments will result in far less meaningful gendered data on workforce composition, no evidence-based assessment on whether employers are addressing gender equality and no framework to support them to benchmark and improve performance.

To illustrate the importance of meaningful reporting, the coalition points to FINSIA research showing that while 64 per cent of men think women are ‘well represented at senior levels’ in the financial services industry, only seven per cent of CEOs and an estimated 15 per cent of senior executives are women. The same research indicates that 61 per cent of men think the gender pay gap is grossly exaggerated’ even though at 32 per cent, the pay gap in financial services is significantly above the national gap of 17 per cent.

These examples highlight why information on women's representation in leadership and the gender pay gap remain critical and why the Government's proposals to wind back such reporting would impede progress.

“The existence of reliable and meaningful data is the ultimate reality check. It allows us to hold up a mirror on where we are actually at on gender equality and pinpoint where the greatest problems lie. Unless we continue to report on and raise awareness of these issues, we will not make the strides needed to improve workplace equality.

“No responsible government should even be considering watering down the reporting requirements in the Act. Women - and indeed the country - deserve better,” Ms Braund concluded.

About the coalition members

Australian Local Government Women's Association - peak body for women in local government.

BPW (Business and Professional Women) Australia- member-based NGO that is part of a global network, BPW International.

Diversity Council of Australia - the only independent, not-for-profit workplace diversity advisor to business in Australia.

Financial Services Institute of Australasia - Australasia's premier membership organisation for the financial services industry.

Local Government Managers Australia NSW - a *not-for-profit* association dedicated to strengthening the professional capability of Local Government Professionals. LGMA NSW is part of a federation making up the National Organisation and represents over 750 members in NSW.

National Council of Women of Australia - national non-government umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives for women and girls.

National Foundation of Australian Women – an apolitical organisation working to advance and promote the interests of Australian women, make accessible their histories, and ensure their achievements are handed on to future generations.

Women on Boards –an international network facilitating women onto boards and leadership roles.

Women's Electoral Lobby - national, independent, non-party political, feminist lobby group that for over 40 years has worked tirelessly to improve the position of women in society.

The Work and Family Policy Roundtable - is made up of researchers from 18 universities and research institutions with expertise on work, care and family policy. Its goal is to propose, comment upon, collect and disseminate research to inform good evidence-based public policy in Australia.

YWCA Australia - national association of YWCAs in Australia and part of the world YWCA movement

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Notes to the editor

- WGEA Act was brought in by the previous Labor Government after wide consultation and is strongly supported by women's lobby and business groups, industry associations and others
- The Exposure Draft amending Schedule 1 effectively removes the intent of the Act to obtain meaningful gendered data sets on workforce composition and employee actions aimed at ensuring a more equitable workplace for women
- The Drafts seek to remove the transparency and evidence-based assessment of whether employers are addressing key gender equality indicators
- Specifically the removal of disaggregated data sets around occupation means you cannot measure pay equity or where people are within the workforce. This will reduce opportunity to stimulate the participation rate for women in the workforce
- The economic benefits of enabling higher rates of workforce participation have not been taken into account by the current Government.
- NATSEM modelled the impact of the equal pay gap on women's working hours, and found that if women earned the same as men, the impact on their hours worked would see GDP grow by around \$93 billion.