



Media Release

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## New law drives gender equality at work

The *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, passed by federal parliament today, is a landmark development on the journey to gender equality in Australian workplaces. It:

- focuses on gender equality including equal pay between women and men, and eliminating discrimination on the basis of family and caring responsibilities
- will provide ground-breaking data on the state of gender equality in Australian workplaces
- will change the name of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

The Act is a significant advance on its predecessor, the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*, shifting the focus from equal opportunity for women to gender equality, which is more contemporary and relevant. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency will be renamed the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reflecting this change in focus.

Director of the Agency, Helen Conway, says: "the changes will increase Australia's productivity and improve business performance by empowering organisations to harness all of the nation's talent."

Under the Act, non-public sector organisations with 100 or more employees will report on actual gender equality outcomes, and provide the Workplace Gender Equality Agency with standardised data.

"This data will put Australia at the international cutting edge for analysing progress on workplace gender equality. The Agency will use the data to set industry-specific benchmarks. Employers will be able to compare their performance with others in their industry and we'll work with organisations to develop strategies to improve their performance," Ms Conway says.

"These benchmarks will also help organisations set voluntary targets on gender equality – something I strongly encourage. As with any business initiative, the best way to drive change is to set clear objectives and reward managers for achieving them."

The legislation also focuses on eliminating discrimination on the grounds of gender in relation to family and caring responsibilities.

"The Act recognises that the days when women did all the caring and men were the sole breadwinners are long gone. It's time workplace practices caught up with the way we live today," Ms Conway says.

2013 will be a transitional year giving employers time to prepare for the new reporting arrangements that will be fully operational from 2014.

"There is a strong business case for gender equality but we recognise that many organisations struggle to achieve it. We are absolutely committed to working collaboratively with employers to help them bring gender equality to their workplaces," Ms Conway says.



"The Act will enable our Agency to measure how far Australian employers have come but, more importantly, determine where there is more work to be done and where the Workplace Gender Equality Agency can help."

For more information on changes to the legislation, visit [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au)

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## In their own words...

Following the introduction of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, here's what some of Australia's business leaders, employer groups and women's groups had to say about gender equality:

"Telstra takes its commitment to gender equality very seriously. While we know there is still much more work to do, the new legislation for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency will provide an even stronger focus, create higher expectations around accountability, and ultimately support organisations like ours to achieve better outcomes in this important area."

**David Thodey, CEO, Telstra**

"Without a constant focus on gender equality, we miss truly creating a workplace which we can be truly proud of and representative of our society. We welcome the new Act which will support an important business imperative of ensuring engaged and motivated employees work in an inclusive environment."

**Alan Cransberg, Chairman and Managing Director, Alcoa of Australia**

"As an employer-based professional association, AHRI welcomes this new legislation as a positive force in encouraging higher and more senior participation by women in the workforce - particularly within senior executive and board roles, where their representation remains unacceptably low in Australia by world standards.

"Whenever gender equity is enhanced - both economic performance and social equity improve - and that's a worthwhile outcome for all Australians.

"It's sad but true that Australian businesses still need a nudge when it comes to making progress on gender equity, and AHRI believes the Workplace Gender Equality Agency is capably structured and better positioned now to do just that. And I am sure they will."

**Peter Wilson AM, President and Chairman, Australian Human Resources Institute**

"ASX supports initiatives that promote greater equality and diversity in Australian business. As a company, ASX is committed to further improve diversity in its own leadership team. And as one of the world's leading exchange groups, ASX will continue to play an active role in promoting diversity in the wider business community."

**Elmer Funke Kupper, Managing Director and CEO, ASX**



"ExxonMobil Australia is very proud of our focus on creating a working environment that encourages all of our employees – both women and men – to achieve their ultimate potential. It is pleasing that new federal laws on workplace equality also focus on achieving this aim."  
**John Dashwood, Chairman, ExxonMobil Australia.**

"Workplace productivity will only be maximised if we fully utilise our potential workforce and this means engaging and empowering women. This legislation will strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Agency meaning that businesses will be better equipped to make the necessary changes to engage and support women into leadership roles.  
"The data collected by the new Agency will also better support Australian businesses to understand what works and what doesn't, as well as informing consumers about which businesses are taking steps towards equality."  
**Julie McKay, Executive Director, UN Women Australia**

"Today's reforms will assist Australian employers to deliver better outcomes for both women and men in their workplaces, while also generating productivity benefits in their own organisations."  
**Nareen Young, CEO, Diversity Council of Australia**

"Although the economic case for gender diversity in the workforce has been proven by extensive research, the number of women in senior leadership roles remains woefully low. CEW supports the new gender equality legislation because, in achieving any goal, what gets measured gets done - which is why measurable objectives and reporting are critical to achieving gender equality."  
**Belinda Hutchinson AM, President, Chief Executive Women**

"Gender diversity is not only good social policy but it makes good business sense. The Australian Institute of Company Directors supports initiatives that encourage boards and companies to benefit from all the talent that is available to them."  
**John Colvin, Chief Executive and Managing Director, Australian Institute of Company Directors**

"In business, gender equality is often perceived as a women's issue. We've found that you have to demonstrate the bottom-line impact of poor gender diversity practices to steer the conversation back to the business case. The changes put a spotlight on gender pay equity. We've employed a rigorous approach to gender pay equity which has helped reveal powerful data about the composition of our workforce. This information is invaluable to informing strategy and driving change.  
"The changes announced today will aid organisations in their conversations about gender equality at work. They will also lead to better outcomes for both men and women by improving access to flexible and innovative work arrangements for anyone with carer and family responsibilities."  
**Sally Macindoe, Partner and Head of Diversity, Norton Rose**

"As a male-dominated industry it is important for Iplex Pipelines to encourage and support females to manage their work and family lives effectively to attract and retain talent. It is also equally important to recognise that our male employees have increasingly taken on greater caring responsibilities in recent years. We allow every parent - male or female - to access time off as a primary or secondary carer when they have a child. We have in recent years seen an increase in our male employees taking up these benefits to enjoy valuable time with their family."  
**Jacqui Levings, National Human Resources Manager, Iplex Pipelines Australia Pty Limited**

"Gender diversity generates diverse thinking which translates into greater innovation for our clients and our firm."  
**Neil Cockroft, Head of Diversity and Culture, King & Wood Malleons**