

Submission to Office for Women, EOWW Act Review

Introduction

Security4Women (S4W), on behalf of its member organisations, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in regards to the issues paper provided by the Office for Women on the EOWW Act Review.

The group Security4Women (<http://www.security4women.com>) is one of the four national women alliances and given financial support by the Commonwealth Office for Women. As our name suggests, our member organisations coalesce around issues which impact on women's financial and economic well being at all stages of the life-cycle.

S4W believes that lifelong economic wellbeing is a high priority for Australian women – it empowers women to make choices and live independently. S4W alliance membership are peak bodies and statewide or national organisations that aim to advance the economic well being of women through training and education and provide services to enable all women to improve their economic stats and to have access to training and legal services.

Executive Summary

The issues paper provided by the Office for Women identifies that:

- the gender pay gap has not improved in 25 years;
- participation rates in senior roles (board positions and senior executives) have shown some advancement (Universities, public sector) but not in corporations (where the representation of women in senior roles in the ASX200, for example, fell from 12% to 10.7% between 2006 and 2008); and
- despite a decade of the EOWW Act (and an iteration of it in some form or other since roughly the mid 1980s) Australia is well behind its OECD peers when it comes to women's participation in executive management.

S4W submits that the EOWA mandate is still very necessary but needs a new strategy after 10 years in operation. EOWA requires resources and legislation to give the EOWA powers to tackle systemic (often subliminal) discrimination in order to achieve real improvement in outcomes rather than compliance. The EOWA needs to strengthen its capacity to influence the behaviour of workplace leaders CEOs, board members and senior executives to show leadership and bring about significant workplace cultural change. Organisations that still support an unequal workplace and discriminate against workers need to be challenged to celebrate the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that genuinely support diversity. We have seen commitment by most organisations currently covered by the EOWA Act in the form of

development programs, mentoring programs, access to flexible work practices and other initiatives targeted specifically at women due largely to their obligations to report under the act but unfortunately there are a high number of women who have completed higher education and entered the workforce still waiting to occupy most senior levels of their organisations alongside the men.

General Comment

S4W would like to suggest that the Act needs to be broadened to take into account all women and recognise that many breaches and discriminatory actions persist outside of the larger employers. This includes targeting the small business, public sector and not for profit sectors, not necessarily with resource intensive reporting but with reward incentives promoting gender workplace equity, such as financial/taxation incentives.

S4W would also like to see a policy that enforces a flexible workplace environment that all employees including the CEO and Senior Management must abide too. In order to do this EOWWA would need to provide the tools and assistance for organizations to manage flexible positions.

There is also a need for a stronger role in promoting awareness and providing education to employers and employees about what workplace gender equity is (beyond the numbers) and examine how work practices (outside of legislation) can better be developed and implemented to sustain women's life-long attachment to the workforce.

In regards to EOWA, Fair Work Ombudsman (the "FWO") and the Australian Human Rights Commission ("AHRC") working together, S4W applaud the initiative and believe that working together will add further dimension to the discrimination landscape.

S4W would like to suggest that it may also be useful to have identified relationships and reporting roles with these specific agencies – to compel them to keep and share data on gender, to identify what issues may be gender influenced. Such as numbers of women/men accessing Fair Work Australia ("FWA") and FWO, unlawful and unfair terminations and the outcomes of conferences – i.e. settlement amounts. This may be useful in identifying such things as women's negotiating power versus men. If categories using standard definitions are also maintained and gender identified – a picture could be built of what is happening to women in certain industries and occupations.

S4W believe the Act would also be strengthened by being read more closely with the Sex Discrimination Act ("SDA") or even being streamlined into one Act that includes coverage of all aspects of women and employment specifically.

S4W welcomes the examination of the role that the EOWW Act and Agency have in gathering and reporting on workplace data and although agrees that the EOWW Act makes a significant contribution to increasing women's employment opportunities and advancing women's equality in the workplace there is still room for further improvement. We would suggest that there be a "Management Reporting Cycle" whereupon reporting entities be required to align their workplace EO programs and initiatives and provide a report to the EOWA which in turn would be compiled for information purposes used to

continually improve the EOWW Act and identify any shortfalls. The current reporting requirements for larger organisations in itself is not delivering the outcomes wanted and therefore some sort of reporting that measures outcomes rather than concentrating on initiatives that were put in place would be desirable. This reporting process should not be restricted to companies with more than 100 employees but should also target smaller business. S4W would suggest that the reporting be straight forward, simple and less frequent.

Pay Equity is an area where much reform is still needed and S4W would like to see EOWA have the resources to scrutinise and enforce an "equal remuneration principle" in all the new Modern Awards and to do this on a regular basis. If EOWA could publish more information about the status of women in the workplace generally and monitor trends such as what happens in economic downturns and returns to women this would promote more awareness. The EOWA needs money for research essentially that can be used to inform policy. S4W would like to see a debate around introducing some sort of targets for senior management and above as this is where representation and remuneration becomes so markedly uneven.

During the review S4W strongly supports that there still be a regard to the effects of the Act, or any proposed recommendations resulting from this review on the economy, the labour market, business competitiveness, social inclusion and the general wellbeing of the Australian community.

S4W has undertaken a number of research projects and government submissions on the topics of:

- The Global Financial Crisis stimulus impact on women
- Paid Parental Leave systems
- Pay Equity – where is it for women
- WorkChoices & Welfare to work
- Out of School Hours Care/Vacation Care

This work can be found at www.security4women.com

S4W believes that it is the responsibility of the current review of the EOWW Act to help ensure we change "the current trajectory" and welcomes that all aspects of EOWA's activities will be reviewed, including coverage of the legislation, reporting on equal opportunity programs, provision of advice and assistance to employers and the promotion of equal opportunity for women through EOWA awards recognising best practice, including the Employer of Choice for Women citation.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Gunn
Chairperson
Security4Women