

Productivity Commission - Improving business reporting requirements | WGEA submission

Executive Summary

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency ('WGEA') supports the Government's objective outlined in the Commission's terms of reference to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden. This submission highlights the steps that WGEA has already undertaken to address this objective, and how we seek to continue to improve the employer experience.

WGEA's current reporting framework is the result of several years of review, consultation, and staged legislative reform, with further reforms currently underway. Significant elements of the new framework only recently commenced or are still being implemented. The reforms were expressly designed to balance regulatory burden with the public value generated by workplace gender equality reporting.

The 2021 Review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 led to a substantial program of legislative and administrative reform. Subsequent changes have themselves been subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny. WGEA continues to pursue regulatory value through continuous improvement of our reporting processes and practices. Additionally, WGEA has commenced foundational work to support the evaluation and future review of these reforms including through an [independent evaluation by Deloitte](#). Given the recency of these reforms, WGEA considers the priority should be to allow the new framework to operate and be evaluated, while continuing to reduce unnecessary burden through better technology, streamlined processes, smarter data collection and greater interoperability across government. The 2021 Review also recommended a formal review of the effectiveness of the reforms five years after commencement, which ensures an appropriate mechanism to assess their operation once sufficient evidence is available.

The value of workplace gender equality reporting

WGEA is in a unique position as a regulator. We not only monitor compliance with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* ('the Act'), but also leverage the data provided to us to generate evidence-based insights and inform practical action across workplaces.

The following sections are structured around WGEA's key activities outlined in our Corporate Plan. They demonstrate how the information employers provide to WGEA can become a catalyst for change within their own workplaces, while also contributing to progress on gender equality across Australia.

Deliver regulatory excellence

What are the main costs associated with complying with the reporting requirements, including any upfront implementation costs and ongoing reporting costs?

In designing and administering the reporting framework, WGEA has consistently sought to keep reporting costs as low as possible to balance regulatory burden with regulatory value. We recognise that reporting takes time, effort, and resources to complete. That is why we are focused on ensuring the value of that effort extends beyond the act of reporting itself.

Where new regulatory requirements are introduced, WGEA carefully considers potential regulatory burden. For example, WGEA and the Office for Women designed gender equality targets to only apply to employers with 500 or more employees. These employers generally have greater organisational capacity and resources, while also accounting for approximately 75% of employees represented in WGEA's dataset. This approach seeks to limit additional burden on smaller employers, while focusing the reform where it can have the greatest impact across the workforce.

Given the significance of the target setting reform, WGEA provided employers with extensive guidance, webinars, direct advisory sessions, and ongoing implementation support. In designing the scheme, WGEA sought to minimise additional regulatory burden by leveraging information already reported through existing processes, rather than introducing new data collection requirements. This approach helped reduce the time, effort, and costs associated with implementation, while enabling employers to focus on selecting and achieving meaningful gender equality targets.

Recent amendments to the gender equality targets cycle are a further example of this approach. The *Regulatory Reform Omnibus Act 2026* ('Omnibus Act') introduces a 12-month gap between gender equality target cycles to allow employers of 500 or more employees time to assess the outcomes of one cycle before setting new targets. This will promote more meaningful target-setting and reduce administrative burden. The Omnibus Act also aligns Commonwealth public sector reporting with the private sector reporting period (1 April to 31 March) to increase regulatory value by improving data comparability and enabling WGEA to deliver a single economy view of gender equality.

WGEA acknowledges that reporting burden has historically been a concern for some employers. While we seek to minimise unnecessary regulatory burden wherever possible, a degree of effort is inherent in meeting legislative reporting obligations. The level of effort required will vary depending on an employer's size, systems, capability, and existing data practices, but does reduce with experience.

Generally, costs arise from the time required to prepare and lodge a report. As part of our approach to continuous improvement, we seek feedback from employers in our annual reporting survey and use the insights to inform changes to our systems, processes, and services. Preliminary results from the 2026 survey indicate ongoing improvements are significantly reducing the time and effort associated with reporting and improving the employer experience:

- time taken to prepare and lodge reports has nearly halved since last year with the average time to prepare and lodge a report decreasing from 41 hours in 2025 to 24 hours in 2026
- 72% of employers completed reporting in 40 hours or less, up from 62% in 2025, exceeding WGEA's reporting effort target
- 60% of employers rated their overall reporting experience as good or better, up from 50% in 2025, meeting WGEA's target for overall satisfaction
- 67% of employers of who sought assistance were satisfied with the support received, up from 59% in 2025, exceeding WGEA's satisfaction target for support services.

Turn Australia's world-leading data into action

How is workplace gender equality reporting used by employers and other stakeholders, and what impact has it had on decisions, actions, and outcomes?

Since 2012, WGEA has become the custodian of the world's most comprehensive employer-level workplace gender equality dataset and a critical source of Australian workforce insights. Our database covers approximately 10,500 employers and 6 million employees. While WGEA publishes the information reported by employers on the WGEA Data Explorer, creating greater transparency across workplaces, the value of reporting extends well beyond its publication.

The data provided as part of the annual Gender Equality Reporting program informs WGEA's Scorecards, benchmarking, industry insights, practical tools, and research publications. These products translate reporting data into actionable insights. This, in turn, enables employers to benchmark their performance, analyse their workforce, and accelerate workplace gender equality outcomes. For smaller employers with 100-249 employees, reporting can help build capability by strengthening data collection practices and improving understanding of workplace gender equality outcomes.

The value of the dataset extends beyond employers. The data is also used by current and prospective employees, researchers, investors, policymakers, broader stakeholder groups, and the media. The 2021 Review highlighted the significant value of our dataset, noting that stakeholders described it as 'world-leading – a 'national treasure' – and of great value to many users of it including employers, researchers, government decision-makers, and investors'.

The value reporting generates outweighs the cost. The time that employers spend reporting produces an evidence base that can be accessed, used, and tracked by everyone, instead of being collected separately by government, researchers, and other organisations. For example:

- the Australian Government used WGEA's data on men's uptake of parental leave to refine parental leave policies and improve access for men,
- WGEA makes reporting data available and collaborates with research organisations such as Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre ('BCEC') to publish the annual Gender Equity Insights report. The reports identify trends, policies, and practices that work to address gender inequality in the workplace,
- other organisations, including the Finance Sector Union, draw on WGEA's data in their analysis of paid parental leave, and
- external platforms such as Work180 also use WGEA's data to benchmark gender equality and track the gender pay gap.

Independent evidence also demonstrates that WGEA reporting can influence organisational decision making and action. A 2026 Deloitte evaluation ('Deloitte Evaluation') found that WGEA's mandatory reporting requirements remain its most powerful motivating tool, with 44% of surveyed employers identifying compliance as the top motivating factor. The Deloitte Evaluation also noted that buy-in from leadership is an important factor in whether an organisation is motivated to make systemic change and go beyond compliance requirements. It found that bringing WGEA's reports to boards can initiate conversations about actions organisations could take to accelerate progress toward gender equality.

Accelerate employer action and workplace change

What other tools could be used to increase gender equality in the workforce? Are these preferable to WGEA reporting and why?

WGEA encourages employers to leverage a range of tools to increase gender equality in their workforce, including, gender equality strategies, targets, flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, changes to recruitment, and leadership practices. These measures are most effective when supported by robust data and evidence. WGEA reporting provides that evidence base, helping employers turn information into action.

WGEA also supports employers by translating data into practical tools, insights, and resources. This includes the provision of the Executive Summary and Industry Benchmark Report, guidance materials, webinars, masterclasses, advisory sessions, and targets selection resources. The value of these resources is reflected in more than 2,500 employers attending WGEA capability sessions in 2025-26 and a further 1,600 attending WGEA webinars/events. Employer feedback reinforces this, with 89% of participants reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied with WGEA's support for improved practice via capacity building, education, and research.

The value of our data also comes from the level of granularity it provides. WGEA collects data that is not collected from other sources. We collect information on policies, strategies, and actions employers are taking to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, harassment on the ground of sex, or discrimination. This data provides insights into the actions employers are taking, particularly in relation to their positive duty under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. This data highlights how broader Australian legislative and policy reforms are operating in practice, and whether employers are adopting preventative measures as required.

To what extent do existing penalties for non-compliance provide incentives for organisations to action on gender equality?

Existing consequences for non-compliance provide an important role in incentivising compliance. However, evidence indicates that regulatory mechanisms that increase transparency can support employer action. Since gender pay gap publication, the proportion of employers undertaking a gender pay gap analysis has increased from 55% to 68%, while the proportion taking action following that analysis has increased from 60% to 75%. Employee consultation on workplace gender equality issues has also increased substantially from 47% to 73%.

This reflects WGEA's right-touch regulatory approach. Compliance consequences provide an important incentive for organisations to meet their obligations, and the 2021 Review notes that a number of stakeholders called for even stronger enforcement measures. However, education, transparency, and employer support can encourage action beyond minimum requirements. This balanced approach allows WGEA to apply proportionate consequences for non-compliance and supports broader workplace gender equality outcomes.

The Act specifies the consequences for non-compliance. If an employer does not meet all compliance requirements, WGEA may:

- name the employer in a report to the Minister that is tabled in both Houses of Parliament
- name the employer publicly by electronic or other means.

Under the Workplace Gender Equality Procurement Principles, employers who do not meet their compliance requirements may not be eligible for Commonwealth procurement contracts.

Not every employer that fails to comply with the Act is publicly named. WGEA offers the opportunity to provide a reasonable excuse for the non-compliance. Where an excuse is accepted as reasonable, the employer remains non-compliant but is not named. Where no reasonable excuse is provided, the employer is given a further opportunity to make a representation before a naming decision is made.

The Deloitte Evaluation notes ‘in order to make real progress on gender equality, employers must be motivated, supported, and educated – not only mandated – to take effective action’. Accordingly, while enforcement tools are important motivators, WGEA’s approach prioritises working with employers to understand the circumstances of the non-compliance and to support them to become compliant in the future. Our Compliance Strategy also notes the importance of identifying employers that are required to report but are not doing so. This helps maintain the integrity of the reporting framework and ensures fairness for employers that meet their reporting obligations. Importantly, the 2025-26 reporting year has seen the highest compliance rate to date. This can be attributed to the effort WGEA has invested in ensuring employers understand their obligations. 94% of employers surveyed this year agreed they were at least moderately confident that they understood their compliance requirements.

Lead the national conversation

The impact of WGEA’s work extends beyond Australia.

The 2021 Review noted that WGEA’s work is an asset for Australia’s global leadership on gender equality and highlighted the importance of sharing and promoting WGEA tools for employers internationally, especially in Southeast Asia.

International experts and gender equality advocates frequently cite WGEA’s comprehensive reporting mechanism - which covers millions of employees across private and public sectors - as a gold standard for transparency and a key driver of change.

WGEA’s work has been showcased at international forums, including the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The OECD identified Australia’s workplace gender equality reporting scheme as a comprehensive framework. The Equal Pay Day International Coalition recognised WGEA’s work in communicating the difference between equal pay and the gender pay gaps as one of the best education campaigns globally. Harvard University is also seeking to prepare a case study on Australia’s workplace gender equality targets framework highlighting it as best-practice.

Publicly naming employer-level pay gaps has inspired policy discussions in other OECD nations looking to replicate mandatory corporate transparency. WGEA has met with delegations from other nations such as Canada and Vietnam as they seek to improve their reporting and publication methods to the Australian standard.

More recently, the Australian Ambassador for Gender Equality highlighted that WGEA has shown the ‘power of data to drive change’, while noting the data WGEA collects helps governments, employers, and communities understand where progress is being made and where barriers remain.

In its 2023 report on practical tools to facilitate gender equality reporting, the OECD called for more investment in digital technology globally to improve processes for employers. It is this approach, rather

than a rollback, which could improve productivity without the cost to equality, productivity, and women's financial security.

In September 2026, the UN Gender Snapshot found a political retreat from gender equality had resulted in several measures of gender equality deteriorating at the global level. As a result, equality will not be achieved globally for 171 years. UN Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua called for nations to continue the work to ensure all people had equal opportunity at work and that their potential could be realised. Li Junhua said the timeline 'is not inevitable - it is the result of choices made visible through data.'

Aspire to excellence

What changes to WGEA or other reporting requirements, reporting processes, or mechanisms (such as Single Touch Payroll) could reduce compliance and reporting costs and duplication?

Currently, there is no existing government dataset that captures the suite of information collected by WGEA. While Single Touch Payroll (STP) may complement WGEA reporting, it is not a substitute. STP does not capture occupational categories, hours worked, leave balances and entitlements, or workforce demographic information. This information is critical for understanding the drivers of gender pay gaps and provides broader, holistic, workforce context needed to interpret pay outcomes. Before introducing additional reporting requirements, WGEA considers the value of the information being sought and the availability of alternative sources. Consistent with the Australian Government's 'tell us once', WGEA actively seeks opportunities to reduce duplication and employer burden through exploring improved data sharing and collaboration with other government agencies, where appropriate.

WGEA is also continuing to modernise and improve employer experience through advances in digital services. Our technology strategy is focused on reducing employer burden, providing more user-centric digital services, improving technology performance and reliability, and ensuring accessible and inclusive digital experiences for the employer. This includes improvements to reporting templates and digital reporting tools, automating validation processes, making ongoing improvements to the Employer Portal, and exploring AI tools for lower-complexity employer support activities. In the past 2 years WGEA has:

- identified areas of confusion and delay within the Employer Portal and implemented fixes, including clearer submission error messages and point-in-time instructions to help employers resolve issues more quickly,
- reduced the number of documents for employers to handle,
- reduced clicks required to lodge the reporting Questionnaire,
- automated approvals for 4-week extensions,
- streamlined Public Report documents,
- improved reporting templates and automated validation processes, and
- introduced a call-back functionality for employers seeking assistance.

Corporate group reporting and reducing reporting friction

WGEA is continuing to refine its approach to reporting and data collection while working within the legislative framework. We consistently engage with employers to identify areas of complexity and

consider how it can be made clearer and easier to navigate without compromising data integrity. WGEA recognises some employers operate through unique and complex corporate structures. Entities within the same corporate group may have different activities, workforces, policies and strategies, and characteristics. At the same time, a consistent reporting framework is required to support comparable data and transparency for users of WGEA's data.

WGEA captures workplace-level information at the ABN level. However, we also provide flexibility for corporate groups to reflect their individual business structures.

A corporate parent may report for all entities in the group with a single Questionnaire or may divide the group into separate submission groups where the same or similar gender equality policies, strategies, and actions apply. This approach reduces administrative effort for employers, while reflecting genuine differences between the entities within the group. This approach reflects WGEA's broader commitment to continuous regulatory improvement by reducing reporting friction while maintaining the integrity, transparency, and usefulness of the information collected.

Conclusion

WGEA welcomes the Commission's inquiry and the opportunity to further reduce regulatory burden for employers across Australia. As outlined in WGEA's Corporate Plan, Statement of Intent, and Compliance Strategy, WGEA is committed to improving the reporting experience for employers while also maximising the value of gender equality data. Consistent with the Government's shift towards a 'tell us once' approach, WGEA remains committed to working collaboratively across jurisdictions and sectors to reduce duplication, streamline reporting obligations, and deliver a more efficient and effective regulatory system for employers.

