



BPW Australia

Affiliated with BPW International

ABN 50 956 174 998

Email: bpwaust@bpw.com.au

Web: bpw.com.au

BPW Australia Submission on Workplace Gender Equality reporting

BPW Australia takes action for women's equality at work, on boards and in leadership and works for women's economic security and equal opportunity.

BPW Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission regarding Information Request – Workplace Gender Equality Reporting. We write in support of continuing this important reporting for the economic benefit of all Australians, and particularly women.

BPW Australia

BPW is a national and international non-government organisation. We are women currently in the workforce, aspiring to be in the workforce or retired from work from a wide range of occupations and sectors.

We are a community of women working to end gender inequality and work towards women's economic empowerment. Our members share an interest in the issues that affect working women in Australia and around the world.

Our advocacy, projects, programs, and partnerships focus on issues that affect women and workplaces such as pay inequity, accessible and affordable childcare and housing, and support for continuing education so women can enter the workforce.

We lobby government at all levels - local, state and national; and consult with business, industry and organisations to provide a gender perspective on key issues.

Australia has long championed economic equality for women — including leading the Equal Pay Day campaign and our 10-year advocacy campaign for paid parental leave.

BPW Australia supports Workplace Gender Equality reporting

We are fully supportive of Workplace Gender Equality reporting. As the feminist writer Caroline Criado Perez explains in her preface to her book "Invisible Women – exposing data bias in a world designed by men": "The gender data gap isn't just about silence. These silences, these gaps, have consequences".

Effective gender-related reporting can strengthen an organisation's reputation, attract socially conscious investors, demonstrate innovation, and support ESG requirements. More importantly, it can drive positive change by encouraging businesses to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The effectiveness of the reporting that has been undertaken by WGEA is manifest in the drop over the past 12 years in the gender pay gap. For many years, the gap hovered at over 20% but, as of August this year it is 11.3%. We are concerned that changes to reporting that involve less data collected across Australia would mean that the effectiveness of the measures put in place by organisations when the gender gap is revealed would be diluted.

We understand that employers may argue the collection of data may involve work that may seem economically unproductive, but BPW Australia believes that ensuring participation and proper remuneration for 50% of our workforce will drive productivity. Certainly, the reporting requirements may need to be streamlined but we are confident that the WGEA is working towards this and the Agency already provides assistance to all reporting organisations.

Our recommendations:

1. Moving from regulatory burden to achieving better compliance outcomes.

The EU and UK have reviewed their gender-related reporting requirements and processes and paid particular attention to communicating its context and benefits to drive compliance. Whilst Australian Gender reporting requirements are amongst the best in the world, we can learn from their approach which we have summarised below.

Organisations should report on gender-related activities that not only mitigate risks but also create meaningful opportunities for women, whether as employees, within their value chains, or in the communities impacted by their business activities. Motivations for reporting on gender-related activities ought to go beyond mere compliance.

The value of gender equity reporting should be communicated clearly to reporting organisations. Organisations can use sustainability reporting to showcase their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Effective gender-related reporting can provide organisations with a strategic advantage. Gender-related activities which prevent gender-based risks or promote gender-positive impacts can enhance an organisation's attractiveness to socially conscious investors who are looking to prioritise gender equality. They also enable organisations to highlight their innovations and therefore position themselves as front runners in the market, thereby attracting and retaining employees and enhancing their reputation and brand amongst consumers. Disclosure can be a powerful driver of positive change, especially in the context of women's economic empowerment.

Gender Pay Gap reporting should not be viewed as a regulatory burden but as a societal improvement tool and a part of an organisation's commitment to achieving their triple bottom line of people, planet and profit. We urge the government to consider methods of streamlining the reporting required across all collecting agencies. In this way, the data can become part of doing business rather than an additional task. This will have multipronged benefit to an organisation by helping them to improve their corporate image amongst their key stakeholders

2. Reporting thresholds for companies with 50 + employees.

Rather than excluding small businesses from the reporting, we recommend that organisations with 50+ employees are encouraged and supported to collect relevant data and encouraged to participate in a simpler voluntary reporting scheme. This will enable them to upscale and meet the mandated reporting requirements should the business grow and employee numbers increase over 100. A current example exists in the levels of audit oversight required, triggered by thresholds including number of employees, revenue and assets.

Small businesses, including those operated by women, experience the mechanisms of reporting as an additional burden which disproportionately impacts their operating model. Extra working hours are needed to complete the tasks. In the case of women owned businesses, this may encroach on their lives out of work differently than men, given the extra caring and home life load often undertaken by women.

However, given the breadth of small business investment and impact in Australia as a whole, it is beneficial to account for the data in these businesses.

About BPW Australia

BPW Australia is a community of women working to end gender inequity. Our members share an interest in the issues that affect working women in Australia and around the world today. BPW's membership includes employers and employees who work across many sectors including corporate, small business, professions, trades, non-profit and government. BPW Australia is affiliated to BPW International, which has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has expert and experienced representatives accredited to most United Nations agencies.

Contact:

BPW Australia National President Miriam Cuellar

BPW Australia Director of Policy and Advocacy Ronnie Gurung

BPW Australia Past President and Member Representative Director for AGECEC Jacqueline Graham

References:

1. Caroline Criado Perez book "Invisible Women – exposing data bias in a world designed by men"
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/aligning-gender-related-activities-to-eu-regulations-an-overview-of-eu-reporting-and-disclosure-topics/aligning-gender-related-activities-to-eu-regulations-an-overview-of-eu-reporting-and-disclosure-topics-january-2025>.