Gender In The Workplace
– The Journey To Equality
GENDER IN THE WORKPLACE – THE JOURNEY TO EQUALITY

INTRODUCTION

It’s a great honour to present the Laffer Lecture for 2012. The lecture has been presented by many distinguished people since the inaugural lecture was given by the Honourable Bob Hawke in 1993. The topics covered have spanned a broad range within the industrial relations context, and have stimulated great debate and discussion. I trust I can further the great tradition of the Laffer Lecture.

Let me first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Gadigal people, and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

Diversity and, in particular, gender diversity is currently the subject of much public debate. It’s what some people might describe as a “hot” topic. It’s timely, then, that we examine the topic in more detail, particularly as it relates to Australian workplaces.

THE CASE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The case for gender equality in the workplace has been debated for many years. Different bases have been put by the various proponents but, in essence, when viewed as a whole, the arguments focus on benefits at three levels – the individual level, the enterprise level and the national level.

At an individual level, the case put is that gender equality is a matter of fairness and equity. Why shouldn’t women be allowed to reach their full potential in the workplace? As a parent, do you believe it’s right that your daughter doesn’t have the same opportunities as your son? One would have thought that the Australian way of life which, it’s said, is underpinned by egalitarianism would facilitate acceptance of this argument. That might be the case emotionally, but perhaps not in practice.
At the national level, the arguments are essentially economic. The World Economic Forum has found a strong correlation between a country’s competitiveness and how it educates and utilises its female talent:

“…empowering women means a more efficient use of a nation’s human talent endowment and… reducing gender inequality enhances productivity and economic growth. Over time, therefore, a nation’s competitiveness depends, among other things, on whether and how it educates and utilizes its female talent.”¹

As US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, so succinctly put it:

“With economic models straining in every corner of the world, none of us can afford to perpetuate the barriers facing women in the workforce. Because by increasing women’s participation in the economy and enhancing their efficiency and productivity, we can bring about a dramatic impact on the competitiveness and growth of our economies. Because when everyone has a chance to participate in the economic life of a nation, we can all be richer. More of us can contribute to the global GDP.”²

Closer to home, Goldman Sachs JBWere has looked at the relationship between employment rates and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They concluded:

“Closing the gap between male and female employment rates would have important implications for the Australian economy. We estimate that closing this gap would boost the level of Australian GDP by 11%. Indeed, much progress in closing this gap has already occurred over the past 30 years with the rise in the female employment rate since 1974 boosting economic activity by 22%. In this respect, Australia is only 2/3rds of the way to unlocking the hidden value of the female labour pool.”³

More recently, Goldman Sachs JB Were updated this analysis on the basis of 2010 data and found the potential boost to GDP could be 13% (26 August 2011).

At the enterprise level, the arguments are more complex, and the bases more equivocal. There is a range of work that suggests a correlation between better gender diversity at the top of organisations and improved financial performance. These reports do not imply causation; they simply suggest a correlation. Other research casts some doubt on this line of thinking. Having said that, what seems to be emerging is a view that there is a correlation between a number of women at the top of an organisation and better organisational performance generally. There is, however, contention as to why this might be so. There is an ongoing dialogue about women’s leadership and management style and how it might differ from that of men. While many commentators support there being a difference, there is a contrary view that this constitutes gender stereotyping which lacks validity. Be that as it may, the fact is there is evidence of an association which, I believe, is sufficient to support having an increased representation of women in leadership roles. In the circumstances, however, the issue of gender stereotyping is an appropriate watch point. As we evolve to a more sophisticated level of talent management, we need to emphasise the importance of objective judgment, untainted by other considerations.

Apart from organisational performance, the other enterprise benefit relates to access to, and optimisation of, talent. At its basic level, this argument puts the position that, as women make up approximately 50% of the talent pool and are at least as well-educated as their male

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7 e.g. “Do men and women do it differently?” Deloitte, May 2011.
counterparts, and assuming a reasonably even spread of capability across genders, it would be absurd not to employ them. In Australia, where we have significant skills shortages, low unemployment and a relatively low female labour force participation rate, this argument is even more compelling. And, of course, accommodating women’s needs in the workplace means employers benefit from increased productivity and efficiency, higher morale and job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism and turnover. There is no doubt in my mind that companies with good diversity records will have a competitive advantage as companies compete for talent, strive to retain that talent and look to improve productivity.

THE GENDER EQUALITY SCORECARD

So, what is the current state of gender equality in Australian workplaces?

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the passing of the Affirmative Action Act in 1986, which was a legislative intervention to assist women achieve equal opportunity in the workplace. There is no doubt that women’s working lives and prospects are better than they were 25 years ago e.g. a far higher proportion of women now have paid work and are spending more time in the paid workforce, and women now have access to paid maternity leave and various options relating to flexible working arrangements which make it possible for more women to continue and progress in paid employment. However, discrimination and disadvantage still prevail e.g. in the poor representation of women in leadership positions, in the shouldering of more unpaid caring work than men, and in the persistent gender pay gap.

The gender pay gap is of particular concern. It’s about the same as it was 25 years ago and this obviously has serious financial impacts on women in terms of both their earnings while working and also their retirement savings. Sadly, women are two and a half times more likely

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8 The female labour force participation rate is 65.3 per cent – ABS, Cat 4125.0 – Gender Indicators, Australia, Jan 2012, released February 2012.
9 The gender pay gap (based on average weekly ordinary time earnings of full-time adult employees) was 17.6% in November 2011 – ABS, Cat 6302.0 – Average Weekly Earnings Australia, Nov 2011, released 23 February 2012.
to live in poverty in their old age than men\textsuperscript{10}. The principle of equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value was established about 40 years ago and Australians generally support action to achieve pay equity. However, progress on closing the gap has been slow because working men and women are still concentrated in different occupations, industries and job levels, because women still do more of the family and caring work and because many jobs women do are still undervalued. Regrettably, Australia’s pay equity legislation has not corrected historic gender-related undervaluation. In addition, there have been market failures in the valuing of some types of work.

The recent decision by Fair Work Australia\textsuperscript{11} in relation to the social, community and disability services industry is a welcome development. It reflects a proper valuation of work done by a female-dominated sector and, as such, is a significant milestone in the quest for pay equity. However, it is only one small step towards achieving fair remuneration for roles that have been undervalued in the past. Other sectors dominated by females e.g. childcare, aged care, continue to underpay their workers.

In relation to women in leadership positions, there has been some progress recently. A significant trigger for this, I believe, was the Census of Women in Leadership by the Equal Opportunity of Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA), which was published in October 2010\textsuperscript{12}. EOWA has been conducting this census since 2002. It provides very important trend data relating to the representation of women at board and executive management levels in the ASX top 200 companies. Disappointingly, the 2010 census revealed that the number of women in these leadership positions had barely changed in the eight years since 2002.

The 2010 census made an impact. It received significant media coverage and continues to be regularly cited in publications and discussions about gender diversity in corporate leadership. Following the release of the 2010 census results, we’ve seen a renewed enthusiasm for, and

\textsuperscript{11} 2012 FWAFB 1000.
commitment to, change in this area. Some would say this was the result of calls for quotas following the release of the 2010 census. Whatever the motivation, change is happening, at least in some areas. Most visible are the changes at board level in the ASX top 200 companies. The Australian Institute of Company Directors tracks appointments to boards of these companies and the most recent data shows women comprise 13.8 per cent of ASX 200 board directors, up from 8.4 per cent in 2010\textsuperscript{13}. It must be said that the companies being tracked are only a small (albeit important) sub-set of Australian companies and an analysis of the actual appointments shows they are being drawn from a limited pool. This year, EOWA will again conduct its census of women in leadership. It will extend the pool to the ASX top 500 companies. It will be interesting to see what the results reveal when they’re published in November.

While EOWA was working on the 2010 census, the Australian Securities Exchange Corporate Governance Council introduced new guidelines in relation to gender diversity\textsuperscript{14}. These guidelines recommend that listed companies establish and disclose in their annual report their diversity policy, including measurable objectives for achieving gender diversity, and also disclose the proportion of women employees in the whole organisation, in senior executive positions and on the board. These recommendations apply from January 2011, so we will see the results of the first reporting year during the course of 2012. Some companies have already shown commitment to change by publicly announcing their proposed actions, including the setting of targets for board and management positions. EOWA is also seeing an increasing number of mentoring programs\textsuperscript{15} and talent management programs\textsuperscript{16}, and an improved focus on ensuring management accountability for gender diversity. Over time, as all these initiatives


\textsuperscript{14} ASX Corporate Governance Council, “Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations,” released 30 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{15} E.g. mentoring programs conducted by the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Business Council of Australia in addition to individual company programs.

\textsuperscript{16} E.g. programs conducted by Chief Executive Women, Women on Boards and the Australian Institute of Company Directors in addition to individual company programs.
gain traction, we would expect to see further improvement in gender diversity in corporate leadership positions.

In relation to caring responsibilities, there’s still much work to be done. While we’ve seen an increase in flexible work options available to both women and men to facilitate the discharge of caring responsibilities, too few men are accessing these arrangements. Until this occurs, such arrangements are likely to be seen as “solutions” to the “problem” of women’s employment rather than as the means of supporting employees in managing the full range of their responsibilities across their work and personal lives. We know there are men who want to work flexibly to share the caring responsibilities. Employers need to do what they can to accommodate this. Importantly, too, the range of available options to work flexibly is inadequate to properly accommodate the needs of working parents. This is particularly the case for employees in senior management positions. And, of course, working flexibly should not impede a person’s career. There is still a long way to go in embedding flexible working arrangements as part of “business as usual” in workplaces.

**BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

My sense is that, at least at an emotional level, most Australians support gender equality in the workplace. I don’t doubt there are non-believers, some of whom steadfastly refuse to engage the issue notwithstanding its connection to improving productivity which is a key economic concern in Australia. However, I see them as being in the minority. The comments late last year by businessman and former Victorian Treasurer, Alan Stockdale, criticising the Business Council of Australia for its work supporting gender diversity were, in my view, not representative of the views of business.

If I’m right, why are we so far away from achieving gender equality in Australian workplaces? The short answer is that good intentions have not translated into actions and outcomes because there has been a failure to position gender equality as a central business issue. It’s
seen as an add-on, something on the periphery, something that the Human Resources Department looks after.

An examination of workplaces reveals a number of impediments to achieving equality.

We live in a society which is male-dominated in significant respects. This underpins attitudes and behaviours in many areas including the workplace. An examination of organisational cultures reveals, more often than not, the assumption of a male norm and female deviations from that norm.

Research by Catalyst\textsuperscript{17}, a leading global organisation focussed on expanding opportunities for women in workplaces, found that, even when women do “all the right things”, they are unlikely to earn as much or advance as far as their male colleagues. Catalyst puts this down to “entrenched sexism”. Earlier research by Catalyst\textsuperscript{18} concluded:

“For the past two decades leaders have counted on parity in education, women’s accelerated movement into the labour force, and company-implemented diversity and inclusion programs to yield a robust talent pipeline where women are poised to make rapid gains to the top. But results of this study show that these hopes were ill-founded - when it comes to top talent, women lag men in advancement, compensation, and career satisfaction. The pipeline is not healthy; inequality remains entrenched.”

Gendered attitudes (e.g. men don’t need to, nor should they, access flexible work arrangements), worker stereotypes (e.g. managers must be male and work full-time), and embedded bias in key human resource systems (e.g. job design and evaluation frameworks, and remuneration models) are key components of cultures which are so inimical to gender equality. And, of course, there’s the whole issue of unconscious bias. As Margaret Heffernan so concisely put it in her book “Wilful Blindness – Why we ignore the obvious at our own peril”:


“The many voices arguing in favour of diversity in recent years have not been motivated only, or even primarily, by notions of social justice. The argument for diversity is that if you bring together lots of different kinds of people, with a wide range of education and experience, together they can identify more solutions, see more alternatives to problems, than any single person, or homogenous group, ever could. Groups have the potential, in other words, to be smarter than individuals… But the problem is that, as our biases keep informing whom we hire and promote, we weed out that diversity and are left with corporate headquarters crammed full of people pretty much the same. They aren’t exposed to other ways of seeing the world, they don’t share different experiences. They can’t celebrate difference because they are blind to it.”

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE?

Last year, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, convened a group of corporate and institutional leaders described as the Male Champions of Change. This group issued a report setting out examples from their collective experience organised into three phases of bringing the gender diversity journey to life. The phases are described as follows: Phase 1 – Getting in the game; Phase 2 – Getting serious; Phase 3 – Capturing diversity advantage. Phase 1 is the beginning of the journey when the CEO gets interested. The move to Phase 2 occurs when the CEO truly becomes committed. Phase 3 is marked by regarding women’s representation as a cultural imperative. Disappointingly, most of the Male Champions of Change viewed themselves “as far from this end state”. While I applaud their honesty, their position is all the more disappointing when you realise they represent some of the strongest supporters of women in the workplace and have been committed to the cause over a long period of time.

The report contains some very useful case studies which are worthy of close attention. However, one has to question the phased approach to achieving gender equality. The fact is that gender equality in the workplace has been the subject of discussion for a very long time and there is broad acceptance of the case for change. There is, I believe, a limited window of opportunity to get results; otherwise, we will quickly see “gender fatigue” which will derail progress and potentially mortally wound the cause of gender equality. We need action and we need it now. The time for talking is over. We simply can’t wait while people work through various stages of “getting it”.

The key steps for achieving change can be summarised under three headings: leadership, focus and accountability.

Leadership is without a doubt the most important driver of change. The term includes, at least, the board, CEO, executive team and senior managers within the business. Each must have a competency in managing diversity. While such a competency may come naturally to some, in most cases leaders will need specific training in this regard.

Each leader, at a minimum, must do three things – visibly present as a believer in, and advocate for, gender equality; be a role model; and set clear expectations with their direct reports in relation to gender equality initiatives.

Focus demands that gender equality is aligned with business strategy and established as a business priority. This is an essential underpinning for successful gender equality initiatives. What these initiatives might be will differ from organisation to organisation. What is essential is that a detailed analysis is conducted to clearly identify the particular issues that need to be addressed to remove barriers to gender equality.

As with any business imperative, accountability is an essential part of making things happen. Accountability involves establishing clear action plans, measuring and transparently reporting outcomes and holding managers to account for achieving results. In relation to the last component of accountability, the most effective way to hold managers to account is to tie their
remuneration to the results for which they are responsible. Many business initiatives founder on the rock of poor accountability. It is essential to be constant and vigilant in relation to accountability. This will deal with the resistance to change often found in the ranks of middle management. This is emerging as a particular concern in relation to gender equality. Anecdotal evidence suggests some male middle managers are passively resisting initiatives underpinning targets relating to the appointment of women to management positions because they consider these initiatives to be a threat to them.

This model to achieve gender equality which I’ve just articulated is the sort of model you would apply to any business initiative. Its components are commonly applied in business and are well-understood. The problem is, as I indicated earlier, gender equality is not seen as a central business issue, so the usual disciplines that apply to ensure the achievement of business initiatives generally are not applied to gender equality.

It is interesting to reflect on the rigour which has been applied to safety performance in Australian industry. The improvements speak for themselves. Perhaps there are some lessons here which could be applied to gender equality.

**THE CURRENT ROLE OF EOWA**

EOWA is a statutory authority under the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act, 1999 (Act) and a key player in the Australian government’s efforts to support and improve women’s workforce participation and increase gender diversity in the workplace. The objects of the Act are to promote the principle that employment for women should be dealt with on merit, to promote amongst employers the elimination of discrimination against, and the provision of equal opportunity for, women in relation to employment matters and to foster workplace consultation between employers and employees on issues concerning equal opportunity for women in relation to employment.

Private sector organisations with 100 or more employees are required to develop and implement a workplace program aimed at achieving equal opportunity for women and report
annually on their program’s effectiveness. EOWA reviews these reports and determines whether the reporting organisation meets the substantive reporting requirements so as to be compliant. In exercising this function, EOWA is essentially a “light touch” regulator and works with reporting organisations to get them over the compliance line, where possible. In addition, EOWA supports reporting organisations through education, advice and other assistance to facilitate the achievement of equal opportunity for women in Australian workplaces.

EOWA’s reporting organisations are assessed as either compliant or non-compliant. Should a report be assessed initially as non-compliant, EOWA client consultants work with that organisation to obtain the necessary additional information for them to reach compliance.

For every report assessed, a client consultant provides the organisation with personalised and detailed feedback on their workplace program. The feedback conversations not only enhance the relationship between EOWA and reporting organisations but also provide an opportunity to discuss individual programs. Client consultants have specific industry knowledge thereby ensuring organisations receive the maximum benefit of the feedback provided.

Client consultants recognise that each reporting organisation is at a different stage in implementing a workplace program, hence feedback is tailored to each organisation’s particular stage in that process. This feedback is designed to facilitate change within organisations.

In the 2010-2011 reporting year, approximately 3,000 organisations covering in the order of 9,000 employers reported to EOWA. These organisations employed a total of 2,846,140 people and 47.9 per cent, or 1,363,626, were women.

The role of EOWA in influencing cultural change is particularly important. Key to this is EOWA’s Employer of Choice for Women (EOCFW) citation. This citation is a prestigious acknowledgement by EOWA of organisations that are recognising and advancing women in the workplace. Ten years ago, EOWA announced its inaugural list of 55 EOCFW organisations and this year the list has grown to 125 organisations.
Organisations are assessed for the citation against rigorous application criteria which consider a number of workplace issues including pay equity, women in executive management, flexibility, sex-based harassment and career development training. Importantly, the citation requires the organisation’s CEO to be the driving force behind the culture which supports the advancement of female employees. It also requires senior managers to be held accountable for an inclusive workplace culture. The citation provides significant positioning in a competitive marketplace, particularly when an organisation is seeking to attract and retain the best possible talent.

There is no doubt that the citation has driven significant improvements for women. The latest data clearly shows this. When comparing 2010/2011 reporting data and 2012 EOCFW data, organisations receiving the citation are ahead of non-EOCFW reporting organisations in key areas. For example, the average percentage of female managers in citation organisations is 46 per cent compared with 33.8 per cent across all reporting organisations; 22.4 per cent of citation organisations have 60 per cent or more female managers compared with 14.4 per cent in reporting organisations; 23 per cent of citation organisations have a female CEO compared with 11.8 per cent in reporting organisations; and all EOCFW organisations provide paid maternity leave (in addition to the government scheme) while only 53.9 per cent of reporting organisations provide this leave.

**PROPOSED REFORMS TO EOWA**

In June 2009, the then Minister for the Status of Women, the Honourable Tanya Plibersek, announced a review to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Act and EOWA in promoting equal opportunity for women in the workplace. It was considered an appropriate time to conduct such a review given the change in the economic, social and legislative landscape since the prior review in 1999.

The review found the Act needed to be changed so as to be effective in supporting and driving change in contemporary Australian workplaces. The key findings of the review, as they related
to EOWA, were that it was generally fulfilling its role, that it was constrained by the legislative framework and resourcing and that its education and assistance role was highly valued. The government announced its response to the review in March 2011. The Minister for the Status of Women at the time, the Honourable Kate Ellis, announced that EOWA would be retained and improved and a new Director would be appointed.

Legislation reflecting the government’s response was tabled in the House of Representatives on 1 March this year\textsuperscript{21}. On the same day, it was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, with that Committee due to report on 8 May.

The key reforms encapsulated in the legislation can be summarised as follows:

1. **A new name and focus**
   
   The new Act will be called the Workplace Gender Equality Act and the Agency will be known as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. The focus moves from equal opportunity for women to gender equality. Consistent with this new focus, the objects of the Act have been amended to include promoting equal remuneration between women and men and the elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender in relation to family and caring responsibilities. It is worth noting, too, that, in line with the Australian government’s productivity agenda, there is a new object “to improve the productivity and competitiveness of Australian business through the advancement of gender equality in employment and in the workplace”.

**Reporting**

The current requirement for reporting organisations to develop workplace programs has been removed by the new Act. The new requirements will see organisations reporting against a set of gender equality indicators focussed on outcomes which will

\textsuperscript{21} Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012.
be set by the Minister for the Status of Women. These gender equality indicators are described as:

(a) gender composition of the workforce;
(b) gender composition of governing bodies of reporting organisations;
(c) equal remuneration between women and men;
(d) availability and utility of employment terms, conditions and practices relating to flexible working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities;
(e) consultation with employees on issues concerning gender equality in the workplace; and
(f) any other matters specified by the Minister.

These indicators will be the basis for reporting from 2014. The precise reporting matters falling under each gender equality indicator will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders prior to that time.

Reports must be signed by the CEO and will be completed and lodged on-line. Reporting organisations will be required to notify employees and shareholders when a report has been lodged and how they can access it. Reporting organisations must also notify employee organisations, where they have members in a workplace, when a report has been lodged. Employees and employee organisations are offered an opportunity to comment on reports and these comments may be provided to either the reporting organisation or the Agency.

2. **Compliance**

The Minister will set minimum standards, referable to the gender equality indicators, in consultation with key stakeholders. If a reporting organisation fails to meet a minimum standard and does not improve over a two-year period without reasonable excuse, that organisation will be non-compliant with the Act. Where an organisation fails to meet a
minimum standard, the Agency will be required to provide advice and assistance to help that organisation improve its performance.

The Agency will be given the power to conduct organisational reviews to ensure reports are accurate and organisations are otherwise complying with the Act, and will be able to “name and shame” non-compliant organisations more widely than is authorised under the current legislation.

The existing penalty which precludes non-compliant organisations from engaging in Federal government procurement and/or receiving certain government grants will continue, and the intention is to make it more effective and apply it more consistently. It is worth noting that this penalty is not in fact imposed by the Act; rather it derives from a Finance Direction made by the Finance Minister and applied by Federal government procurement officers.

3. Assistance

Under the new Act, the Agency will develop benchmarks using the standardised data obtained through the reporting process. This will be done in consultation with key stakeholders. These benchmarks will enable organisations to see where they sit in terms of their gender performance. They will also enable the Agency to develop strategies to help organisations improve their performance.

The reporting obligation under the new Act will continue to apply to private sector organisations with 100 or more employees. However, the Agency will be required to provide support by way of advice and education to those private sector organisations with less than 100 employees.
The implementation of the reporting obligations under the new Act will be staged. For the 2012/13 reporting year, organisations will only be required to report on their workplace profile as prescribed in the existing legislation. Reports reflecting the new gender equality indicators will fall due in 2014 for the 2013/14 reporting period.

There is no doubt that the new Act is a significant advance on the existing legislation. The focus on gender equality, as opposed to equal opportunity for women, is more contemporary and relevant. Given the new reporting requirements, the Agency will collect a very powerful set of data over time which will be a significant driver of change. The form in which this data will be collected will enable measurement of progress. It will also enable industry-based analysis and substantially underpin the Agency’s very important education and support role.

Notwithstanding the proposed legislative changes, the modus operandi of the Agency will not change. We will continue to be a “light touch” regulator and work cooperatively with organisations to help them achieve compliance. With an improved set of data over time, the Agency will be better placed than ever to continue to provide much-valued education and support. The Agency is committed to building key external relationships, raising the profile of gender equality issues and assisting in aggregating efforts being made to improve gender equality in Australian workplaces.

**CONCLUSION**

The journey to gender equality in the workplace has been long and still has a long way to go. The case is clear and it’s time for concerted action. Well-meaning talk which is not tied to tangible actions and outcomes threatens to taint the issue and consign it to history as a failure. We need to recognise and build on past achievements in this area with urgency.
Employers have met many different challenges over the years but, strangely, seem unable to “come to grips” with gender equality. They seem unable to “normalise” gender to become “gender-blind” and to fully recognise that it’s capability that matters.

The current legislative requirements around gender equality in the workplace are relatively benign and are designed to work hand-in-hand with voluntary efforts by employers. If progress stalls, more prescriptive legislation (e.g. the imposition of quotas for women in board and management positions) is a realistic possibility.

In many respects, our workplaces still reflect an era long since gone. There are many workplace practices that represent stereotypes not compatible with how we live today. The needs and aspirations of employees have changed and employers have an obligation to understand these needs and aspirations and do what they can to accommodate them. Indeed, employers who ignore this reality do so at their own peril. It is always better to be “ahead of the pack” rather than have change forced upon you in an unplanned way.

The Agency is privileged to sit at the centre of the workplace gender equality space given its position as the Australian government’s key agency in this area. We believe we have a legal and moral obligation to use the resources available to us to do everything possible to accelerate the journey to gender equality. As Director of the Agency, my commitment is to pursue this agenda relentlessly.