

9 December 2024

Via Australian Parliament portal

DCA submission in response to the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024

Dear Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the *Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024*.

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We have over 1,300 member organisations, reaching approximately 20% of the Australian labour market.

DCA strongly supports the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024.

A note on language:

DCA recognises that a diversity of terms is used to describe people's lived experience. We recognise and respect individuals' right to identify with terms that they feel most comfortable with. We also recognise the limitations of binary language. However, sometimes binary categories have very real effects on peoples' experiences and may be necessary to convey the gendered nature and dynamics of our society.

DCA recognises that language is socially constructed and constantly evolving and our intention is always to be inclusive and to be open to change.

A note on intersectionality:

DCA recommends an intersectional approach when developing and implementing policy and programs on the individual lived experiences. We define intersectionality as how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.¹

Below are some comments to support this Bill:

DCA's commitment to gender equality:

DCA has been a long-standing advocate for gender equality in the workplace. We have conducted research and advocacy on gender equality over many years, including:

- [Research](#) on key workplace diversity and inclusion issues, including: [Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership](#), [She's Price\(d\)less. The economics of the gender pay gap](#), [Gari Yala \(Speak the Truth\) Gendered Insights](#).
- The [RISE](#) project: Realise. Inspire. Support. Energise. This collaboration, with Settlement Services International and Chief Executive Women, funded by the Office for Women, aims

to build pathways to leadership for women from culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) backgrounds.

- Evidence-based, practical tools for workplaces on achieving greater gender equality, including: [Inclusive Teams at Work](#), [Inclusive Meetings at Work](#), [Centring Marginalised Voices at Work](#), [Inclusive Recruitment Tools](#).
- Numerous written [submissions](#) and testimonies at public hearings on gender equality issues such as: paid parental leave, universal access to early education and care, workplace flexibility, issues relating to menopause and perimenopause, supporting women to achieve vocational education and training pathways in non-traditional fields, diversity on ASX Boards, domestic and family violence and sexual harassment at work.
- Active participation in numerous committees, working groups, roundtables and similar consultative forums on gender equality issues, including but not limited to membership and engagement on:
 - Respect@Work Council.
 - NSW Women's Advisory Committee.
 - Champions of Change Coalition.
 - Equality Rights Alliance.
 - National Rural Women's Network.
 - Job and Skills Australia Gender Economic Equality Study Steering Committee.
 - Advancing Women in Healthcare Leadership Committee.
 - United Nations Global Compact.
 - United Nations Global Compact Network Australia.
- Active participation in the United Nations NGO Committee on the Status of Women through annual forums.

Progress to date – the Australian context:

The Australian government agreed, in principle, to implement all ten recommendations following the review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* in March 2022. This included **Recommendation 3.1a**:

Add a new minimum standard to require relevant employers with 500 or more employees to commit to, achieve and report to WGEA (the Agency) on measurable genuine targets to improve gender equality in their workplace against three of the six gender equality indicators.

DCA concurs with the conclusions of this review, and the informed opinions of many stakeholders, that progress on gender equality in Australia is too slow.

In October last year, the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce provided the government with its final report. [Women's Economic Equality Final Report](#). This report outlined a ten year plan to drive women's economic equality in Australia, including recommendations for immediate actions, as well as medium and longer term actions.

Recommendation 3 stated: *The Australian Government must utilize its legislative, regulatory and spending powers to ensure all Australian workplaces create safe. Secure, flexible and equitable*

work opportunities that support women's economic participation. (Page 26)

Specifically, **3.6 stated:** *Encourage employers to set gender equality targets and strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting obligations to include meaningful benchmarks against which to measure progress towards gender equality year-on-year.* (Page 27)

DCA strongly supports the findings and recommendations of the *Women's Economic Equality Taskforce* and the Bill which is the subject of this Inquiry. The Bill will effectively action this recommendation.

In March this year the Australian government launched the national gender equality strategy: [Working For Women. A Strategy for Gender Equality](#). DCA provided a [submission](#) to the government about this strategy. We gathered the views of **over 800** of our member employees to inform this submission. The results showed that workplace gender equality is an issue of significant interest to DCA **and** to our member organisations. Our submission made a total of 28 recommendations, identifying the many systemic and cultural barriers to progress on gender equality and supporting a strategy that will achieve substantial change to embed gender equality into diversity and inclusion and business strategies.

DCA welcomed the launch of the national strategy this year and agrees that *"Achieving gender equality in Australia is a long-term goal – but it must be pursued with urgency to improve people's lives as quickly as possible."* (Page 10, Overview section)

The benefits of setting targets:

The benefits of setting gender diversity targets are outlined by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in their [Perspective Paper: Targets and quotas](#). Given the evidence available clearly points to the slow progression of women to senior management roles, despite their increased workforce participation numbers and educational attainment, there is an emerging sense of urgency to accelerate progress in this country. The *Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024* will facilitate and monitor gender parity initiatives in larger organisations.

The [30% Club Australia](#) demonstrated that meaningful change can be achieved through voluntary targets. We now have 30% of board seats on the ASX 200. However, as stated in KPMG's [Building Gender Diversity on ASX 200 Boards](#), today's challenge is to maintain momentum and treat 30% as a minimum standard for businesses.

This report encourages companies to set stretch targets on diversity: *"The setting of specific diversity goals and targets is one of the most effective methods for increasing the representation of women and other minority groups."* (Page 15) *"Explicitly adopting diversity targets focuses the board on progressing at each opportunity and ensures diversity is a priority."* (Page 15)

Global movement:

The Bill supports Australia's progress on the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). DCA actively works towards the UN SDGs and targets, specifically:

- SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- SDG 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.
- SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

DCA is a member of the [United Nations Global Compact Network Australia](https://unglobalcompact.org.au/blog-gender-equality-actionable-insights-forward-faster-forum/) which recently held a *Forward Faster Forum*. This forum brought business leaders and change-makers together to focus on gender equality. <https://unglobalcompact.org.au/blog-gender-equality-actionable-insights-forward-faster-forum/>

[Forward Faster](#) calls on companies to commit to one or more targets to accelerate progress towards the achievement of SDGs. Two targets have been identified in relation to gender equality:

1. Equal Representation, participation and leadership across all levels of management by 2030.
2. Equal pay for work of equal value by 2030.

Working with Chief Executive Women and Champions for Change, DCA is also currently engaging with the World Economic Forum [Gender Parity Accelerator Program](#) in Australia to support a world-wide network of public and private leaders, experts, practitioners and civil society organisations to progress gender parity.

As noted in the Bill's impact analysis, the Bill supports a number of international human rights obligations of the Australian government:

- The right to equality and non-discrimination
- Freedom from discrimination in employment
- Protection against discrimination on the ground of sex
- The right to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work

Recommendation:

DCA strongly supports the passage of the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Annese
Chief Executive Officer
