



Australian Council of Trade Unions

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Employers must not stand in the way any longer of equal pay for Australian women

With average female pay still at least 17% lower than for men, it is clear that business self-regulation has failed and new mandatory requirements are needed, says the ACTU.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow welcomed recommendations from a Federal Parliamentary committee to introduce annual pay equity audits requiring companies to reveal how many women are employed and their pay rates compared with those of men.

But tougher regulations on business are needed to prevent unequal remuneration, including performance improvement notices and mandatory action plans, Ms Burrow said.

The committee's recommendation for gender and equal remuneration principles to be considered when industrial awards are upgraded by Fair Work Australia, including the federal minimum wage case, is a positive step.

Positive also is the proposal for a pay equity unit within Fair Work Australia to gather data, monitor and investigate equity in pay, conditions and benefits.

The World Economic Forum's annual *Global Gender Gap Index* recently revealed a disturbing trend for Australia women, who are slipping further down world rankings on key indicators of labour force participation and wage equality.

"It's 40 years since the first equal pay test case, yet women still lag well behind men in the Australian workforce," Ms Burrow said.

"Women went backwards or stood still on pay, workforce participation and access to senior executive positions under the former Coalition Government.

"Over the course of her career, an Australian woman will earn \$1 million less than a man, and will retire with less than half the savings in her superannuation account.

"Employers have had four decades to correct this inequity. They've shown they can't do it voluntarily so it is time for tougher regulations.

"But already employers are gearing up to oppose equal pay for women for the simple reason that they don't want to pay women any more. We cannot allow claims about red tape to stand in the way of fairness and equality."

Unions are calling for action on women's pay and career opportunities by businesses and governments.

Unions are also undertaking a major industrial campaign with a major new test case in Fair Work Australia that could lift the pay of workers in the female-dominated social and community services sector by more than \$100 a week.

It is wrong that workers in the sector have historically been underpaid simply because their jobs were undervalued and seen as "women's work", Ms Burrow said.

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