

Wednesday 24 November 2021

ACTU calls on Government to strengthen WGEA

In a submission today to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) review the ACTU is arguing that the agency's current framework lacks focus on concrete action, excludes too many workplaces from reporting requirements, has subpar standards, and limited accountability mechanisms, including no requirement to consult with workers and unions about gender equity at work.

WGEA can only 'name and shame' employers and there are no penalties for breaching obligations under the act. Minimum standards are also far too low and only apply to employers with 500+ employees and only require a policy or strategy, not any actual action.

In its submission the ACTU recommends:

- Employers should be required to consult with workers and their unions on gender equity issues and report to WGEA on the action taken as a result.
- All employers regardless of size, including all Labour Hire companies and all public sector agencies, should be required to report on gender equity issues
- All employers should be required to meet meaningful new minimum standards on gender equity, which require actual measurable progress towards gender equity year on year – not just policies and strategies
- Employers should report on the same date each year, and reporting obligations should be expanded to cover:
 - a) Total remuneration packages of all employers (including CEOs) and WGEA should publish each employer's gender pay gap
 - b) The actual earnings and hours of part-time and casual employees so the impact of insecure work can be properly measured
 - c) Access to paid parental leave and whether superannuation is paid on it
 - d) Measures to prevent sexual harassment as recommended by Respect@Work
 - e) The availability of sanitary and safe amenities, including toilets for women workers.
- Penalties should apply where organisations fail to comply with their obligations under the Act.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"No employer should be excluded from ensuring a workplace is equal and that women are safe. The current WGEA framework is too weak and is not making enough progress to close the gender pay gap or make work safe and equitable for women".

"WGEA has the potential to make a real difference to safe and equal work for women, and the time for action is now. All employers, including labour hire employers, should be required act to improve gender equity, in consultation with workers and unions.

"If the Morrison Government is serious about improving workplaces for women, then this is another opportunity to show it. WGEA can and must be empowered to improve safety and equality in Australian workplaces.

“With the gender pay gap widening to 14.2%, rampant sexual harassment, and more women being forced out of the workforce by the pandemic, we are at a critical moment in the fight for workplace safety and equality in this country. The Morrison Government cannot sit on the sidelines and let another opportunity pass by.”

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