

Pay equity report welcomed but there must be no delay in bringing it to life: unions

Unions have today urged the Federal Government to move quickly to bring to life major recommendations from a Parliamentary inquiry into pay equity.

The ACTU has welcomed the report from the Employment and Workplace Relations committee for major reforms to close the average 17% gap between men and women's pay.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the committee's recommendations were far-reaching and must not be allowed to be left on the backburner.

"The committee has identified a widening gap between men and women in Australia in terms of pay, workforce participation and access to senior executive positions," Ms Burrow said.

"It has made a series of solid recommendations that would make a real difference by forcing businesses to take action on wage inequality. This is long overdue, and we want to work with the Federal Government and businesses and other stakeholders to quickly act on this inquiry and produce real solutions to these problems.

"There has been minimal regulation of employer's obligations to address pay inequity for the last decade. And in that decade the wage gap has in fact worsened.

"All sides of Parliament must recognise the need to implement the recommendations of this report as a priority.

"It is worrying that business lobby groups are already gearing up to oppose any reforms on the grounds that it would be too much red tape.

Ms Burrow said the report had many positive recommendations, including a proposal to establish a specialist pay equity unit within Fair Work Australia.

This would be a new pay equity umpire that should monitor, investigate and enforce equity in pay, conditions and benefits, including overseeing regular pay equity audits that require large companies to reveal how many women are employed and their pay rates compared with those of men.

Ms Burrow said women's participation in the workforce would also be boosted by more affordable, accessible and quality childcare, including after-school programs, and robust rights to request flexible working hours to suit caring responsibilities.

The committee's recommendations would also make a start on addressing women's disadvantage in retirement income but much more needs to be done.

Equity on pay and workforce participation for women will be a top priority for Australian unions over the next 12 months. Unions are undertaking a major industrial campaign with a 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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