

August 18 2008

**The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Employment & Workplace Relations  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

## **RE: PAY EQUITY & ASSOCIATED ISSUES - FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE**

Potential causes of disadvantages in relation to women's participation in the workforce:

### **1. Adequacy of current data?**

- ◆ The accuracy of current data monitoring definitely needs to be examined. Firstly, how is it measured? And also how can this be effective in a constantly changing environment.
- ◆ Surveying can only use a certain "sample size" – is never going to be highly reflective of society as a whole and the same for all industries.
- ◆ People, including women leave jobs for many different reasons. Trying to ascertain the true percentage of these relating to pay equity issues will be extremely difficult. The true reason is often not disclosed upon resignation.
- ◆ Pay equity issues within small businesses in Australia would be extremely difficult to measure.

### **2. Need for education among employers, employees & trade unions**

- ◆ What is the level of understanding? Need to research extensively and across industries
- ◆ Independent audits on individual industries to prioritise where initiatives should focus.
- ◆ Many employers want to achieve equality but don't know what policies to implement, highlighting need for better overall awareness education.
- ◆ Some demographic groups, eg – school leavers, new migrants would not be sure of what "equity" actually means in terms of monetary equity, rights in relation to returning to work and equal access to training.

### **3. Structural arrangements in wage negotiations that may impact disproportionately on women**

- ◆ Performance reviews are generally performed on annual basis. If a woman is on maternity leave, this may not get done.
- ◆ Or if a woman is pregnant or has just returned to work during that time period, generally they are viewed not to have "achieved" at the level of others due to lack of opportunity time wise to do this, hence a year has passed without "equal" access to pay reviews.

### **4. Remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation**

- ◆ Not conversant with the overall current provisions but presume this would be related to the Government looking into paid maternity / paternity leave schemes for all industries.

## **5. Access to training and promotion for women who have taken maternity leave / returned part time / sought flexible work hours**

- ◆ Believe this is where majority of “equity” issues are often not as transparent. The extent of which is often immeasurable at this point.
- ◆ Employers are more often not going to spend money training someone who is about to commence maternity leave or even a part time mother instead of a full time employee. The simple “return on investment” philosophy is usually adopted here.
- ◆ From this, women are missing opportunities to further their skills and apply / obtain higher paying positions.
- ◆ Disadvantages of higher paying positions not being available or workable in a part time / flexible capacity – hence, women returning to work don’t even apply for or simply are not considered
- ◆ Rigidness of Government funded training schemes. These are often targeted at full time employees which are not attractive for employers of casual or part time women, particularly small businesses.

## **6. Need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia**

- ◆ Considering the extent of “inequality” is most likely not fully realised at this point, a lot of research should be conducted prior to any legislative changes taking place.
- ◆ Suspect problems would be evident to different degrees across various industries.
- ◆ Need to ascertain where the problems lie and develop both marketing and education strategies for employers, employees and unions.
- ◆ Need to market overall image to society better – including these three groups.
- ◆ To achieve “best practice”, need to benchmark industries individually against top world models.
- ◆ Maybe part of this is providing incentives or recognition for employers with good initiatives or results ie, return to work programs?