



Women's Electoral Lobby

Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
Minister for Employment
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

19 February 2014

Dear Minister,

The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) has been concerned to hear that the Government is currently reviewing the regulations recently put in place for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), and that women's organisations have received no information about the criteria for the review and the nature of its processes. We also understand that WGEA is in the course of being moved into your portfolio, where the current review is being conducted.

WEL was actively involved in the last year's public review of WGEA's regulatory function; and is hoping that you will be able to confirm that you will similarly invite input from key stakeholders for the current regulatory review.

We note that in its pre-election policy statement, *The Coalition's Policy to Boost Productivity and Reduce Regulation*, the Government has committed itself to genuine consultation with the community as well as business associations in the context of regulatory change. It has also committed itself to including stakeholders other than business associations to advise on red tape reduction through portfolio Ministerial Advisory Councils.

We welcome these commitments and would be grateful to be advised of how and by whom the interests of Australian women will be represented in your portfolio's advisory processes.

WEL notes recent research which indicates that increasing women's workforce participation and increasing workplace gender equality would both add substantially to the national economy.¹ We also note that HR practitioners from organisations reporting to WGEA have expressed strong support for the new reporting arrangements and the development of industry-specific educational benchmarks on gender performance. Seventy-seven per cent of over two thousand employer respondents to a recent WGEA survey said they would find the industry-specific educational benchmarks 'valuable' or 'very valuable'.

¹ See Access Economics (2006), *Meeting Australia's ageing challenge: the Importance of Women's Workforce Participation*, A report for the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family, ii, and Duncan, Alan and Cassells, Rebecca (2012), 'Women, wages and economic participation: unlocking a hidden resource', National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), University of Canberra, presentation to the National Assembly on Gender Equity and Inclusion, p. 12 <<http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/storage/National%20Assembly%20on%20Gender%20-%20revised.pdf>>.



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WEL would appreciate having your advice concerning the review criteria and consultative arrangements that the Government has established for the WGEA review, and your assurances that we will have an opportunity to put our case in greater detail during the review itself.

We also seek the Government's commitment that any report and/or recommendations that emerge from the review will be made publicly available, with scope for stakeholder responses to be considered before any changes are made to the current regulations.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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*Cc: Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
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