

## BPW Australia Submission to the 2014 review of Beijing +20

BPW Australia is a member-based NGO that's part of a global network, BPW International. We make real differences in women's lives by creating awareness, leading debate and driving change. Our focus is issues that affect women and work, and our members include business and professional women currently in the world of work, those preparing a career and women who have completed their working lives and remain committed to our aims.

Our clubs are Australia wide and cross metropolitan and rural boundaries; their members include young students through to retirees. BPW Australia has been an advocate for gender pay equity for more than sixty years and will continue to support change that can improve women's full participation in all aspects of the economy, returning benefits to individuals and business alike.

Individual members have completed the online Beijing +20 survey, addressing three matters of specific personal relevance. In addition, as an organisation BPW Australia has elected to respond to one critical matter – **Women and Power in Decision Making**, believing the numbers of women in senior leadership in the public, private, and non-government sectors should be a clear indication of their success and influence.

Comments were sought from our members on this single issue; a selection is published to demonstrate the diversity of observation and opinion that we would expect from a membership base that includes women of all ages who identify as employers, employees and self-employed:

### 1) What can you see happening in your workplace and personal life environment?

"I am retired and although not in the workplaces, I visit mainly retail where I see people being replaced by self-service which is reducing the number of jobs available for women. As well, as an older Australian I am being reminded when things go "wrong" that as a baby boomer I am costing the health system a lot of money and will continue to do so in the future. Although, if I require a service and I attend in person I am invisible to those supposedly providing the service. The attitude of the Government to anyone or anything that does not agree with them is to confront and denigrate which is providing opportunities to those awaiting an opportunity to put women down in the workplace and is spilling over to life in general."

"I see a workplace that actively supports women, but still has ground to make up. An increasingly vocal fear based rhetoric in the public sphere concerning women, race and religion."

*"As a business owner currently with a team of 3 women aged 19 (trainee), 25, 32, I am working on creating a team culture and mindset of continual growth, development and self-empowerment. In short, growing leaders through modelling, educational workshops, business networking, and coaching."*

"In my workplace the representation at the senior executive level and senior management levels has increased approximately 60% and 40% respectively. However, at the middle management levels, women continue to be under represented at only 40% which diminishes the opportunities for succession management into executive and senior roles in the future. There has been no real design or systematic planning to increase the number of women at executive and senior management level, which could possibly be described as happenstance, and it will be important for the organisation to develop a strategic policy addressing the need for gender equality at high levels in the immediate future, so that the current top level gender composition does not reverse to a point where women are again under represented."

“While the Department of Education is made up of predominantly female teachers, there is a disproportionate number of male Principals and Heads of Departments. While at a National Conference this last week, a female teacher told me of being at a job interview where the male interviewers commented on her recent marriage and asked her if she was planning to have children.”

In Australia, despite record numbers of female graduates, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership in almost every field. And there has been little progress in the last five years.

We need to focus on: the career selection of young girls and women; the feminisation of too many industries such as childcare, teaching and the care sector where, despite the predominantly female workforce, there are still few women in leadership; the employment structures that have entrenched an average 17.5% pay gap; the barriers to flexible employment that prevent women from continuing their career after extended leave for caring; and recruitment and promotion policies that conceal inadvertent gender bias. An imbalance between work hours and childcare provision that is often considered to be either too expensive or unavailable is a clear contributing factor to the high participation rate of women in the part-time employment category – many of whom will be unlikely to rise into positions of power and influence.

## **2) Has the number and influence of women in decision-making improved over the past 5 years?**

“Yes.”

“I do not believe so. Those women in positions of influence are still the same women we saw being touted in the media 5 years ago and I do not believe they are encouraging or mentoring younger women to replace them in the future. The current coalition government does not support any special measures to encourage women through child care or education opportunities. Since the demise of Julia Gillard as Prime Minister and the way she was treated by the press and the opposition, I consider women are keeping a low profile.”

“In the Geelong business community, which has and is still experiencing the closure of large manufacturing companies with a knock-on effect to smaller supporting industry as part of a city in transition, I continuously see women stepping up in business and leading the way forward.

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce Presidency has been very capably held by two women in business in successive years with equality in gender balance across the Board. Past BPW members Kylie Warne, and Bernadette Uzelac who is the current CEO. Membership has increased substantially, just under 300 members, I believe, and the funded high quality support programs and educational workshops for SME's are very engaging and ongoing, particularly for start-up businesses, many of which are started by women. The Geelong Chamber of Commerce is renowned as being one of the most active chambers in Australia. BPW Geelong member Liz Grant runs the Small Business Smart Business program for the Chamber.”

“As I scan the media horizon, I can see that the gender pay gap still exists and is increasing, and that women remain under represented on ASX and other company boards. I can also see that women continue to provide the greatest share of caring for families and elders, and that they are over represented on community, not-for-profit and charity boards.”

“I have not seen any change in this situation over the last five years. What I have witnessed is a Principal includes female teachers with pastoral care roles in the School Leadership Group on paper, despite them not being involved in Senior Staff meetings or decision-making, in order to make the gender percentages look more balanced on reports to the Minister.”

The cooperation of the public and private sectors is crucial if we are to see the numbers of women in leadership and positions rise. BPW Australia is a member of UN Global Compact and we champion its 10 Principles, especially *Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation*. Our organisation has spent time and resources on focusing on this principle – and the Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business – with particular regard to employment participation at all levels.

We recognise that reporting matters often exclude the Small and Medium business sector, but with some 7 million employers and employees working in this sector in Australia, we strive to reinforce their need for a diverse, equitable workforce that is gender fair and gender aware.

### **3) What do you think still needs to be done by government or others?**

“Where to start! Some positive attitude would be a pleasant change and the encouragement of those who have less and are working to improve their lot would be appreciated (this is not what is wanted in response to this question I know). The use of slogans which are not inclusive despite the words used implying inclusiveness should cease as the use of “wedging” is not building on the past achievements for a better Australia.

“Quotas in parliament, boards and executive teams.”

“Government reporting on gender issues in the workplace, with high priority given to the gender composition in management and governance roles, and gender pay equity, must be resourced so that reliable results are produced annually. It is imperative that the work of WGEA is managed in similar ways to other significant government reporting requirements, for example the way in which schools and hospitals must report to the Commonwealth on performance. Achieving gender equity must be championed at Federal Cabinet level as a key area of performance in the workplace. The infrastructure for reporting must include very senior level management group endeavours to provide strategic direction and to strengthen the reporting regime.

In addition, Federal Cabinet must lead in developing positions that influence gender equity in the workplace across all relevant policy platforms, relevant legislation and across all sectors.”

“Those in Leadership and decision-making roles need additional and ongoing training, and then to be held truly accountable for their inequitable practices.”

“The Geelong Businessmen's Club, now Geelong Business Club, admitted women when past BPW Geelong member Cr Barbara Abley became Mayor some years ago. Bernadette Uzelac has just been named the first female President Elect to take office in 2015.

Women are continually coming forward and standing up for their communities in council positions.

I'm seeing many women combining their business skills and evolving as business/life coaches using the Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) approach, working on the growth and development, self-empowerment of the business owner in Geelong.

All in all, women are standing up and taking the lead in Geelong and, as you can see, BPW is playing an important role in empowering women”.

### **In addition**

BPW Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that represents both employers and employees and can speak for women in corporate, small business, NGO and public sectors. Therefore we are in a sound position to contribute to and comment on Government policies that have direct influence on the levers of employment.

Examples from the last several years include the following contributions to public debate:

1. Australian Centre of Leadership for Women 2013  
<http://www.leadershipforwomen.com.au/transform/activism/panel-on-women-experiencing-disadvantage/transform/panel-for-disadvantaged-women-s-concerns-for-the-federal-election/sharing-the-caring-we-need-to-spread-the-load>
2. Productivity Commission re childcare and taxation [http://www.bpw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/eS4W-Letter-PM-Gillard\\_Child-Care\\_20121123.pdf](http://www.bpw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/eS4W-Letter-PM-Gillard_Child-Care_20121123.pdf)
3. Response to inquiry on Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012 <http://www.bpw.com.au/what-we-do/issues/child-care/>
4. Submission to the Workplace Gender Equality (Matters in relation to Gender Equality Indicators) 2013

BPW Australia is aware that a whole of society approach is needed if we are to see a gender equitable workforce that will encourage and support women to rise to positions of power and influence.

We formed the Equal Pay Alliance that has a membership of employers, not for profit and SME businesses representing over 30,000 women. The Equal Pay Alliance <http://www.equalpayday.com.au> continues to work collaboratively with Australia's premier equal pay advocate, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, enabling further dialogue around other issues affecting women and workforce participation. We commend the additional focus that the Agency has on the SME sector and support its ambitions to provide sector by sector analysis to reveal where gaps and barriers lay that inhibit women's success. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/>

As the 2012 Australian Census of Women in Leadership shows: despite an acceleration in the progress for women on the boards of ASX 200 companies, there had been negligible progress for females in executive ranks over the past decade. Women comprised less than one in 10 executives of ASX 200 (9.7%) and ASX 500 (9.2%) companies. Only 12 ASX 500 companies had a female CEO.

In contrast, women held 12.3% of directorships in the ASX 200 but only 9.2% in the ASX 500, indicating that larger companies are more likely to have female directors. The growth in the number of female directors of ASX 200 companies came on the back of strong reaction to the poor 2010 Census results. Following this Census, the ASX Corporate Governance Council Principles and Recommendations relating to gender diversity were introduced

At the time of writing the government is locked in debate over the reporting requirements for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (renamed and reviewed since the last Beijing review). Tasked with addressing the gender pay gap (18.2%) the Agency must be empowered to collect meaningful data that provides granular analysis of employment terms and conditions for men and women – and to ensure a greater compliance for employers to conduct gender pay audits. Such audits will give light to where women are lagging or leaving the leadership arena, and provide opportunity to address this. To date there has been, and continues to be, very light penalties for ASX companies that fail to address the lack of women on their board and in senior management. This lends weight to the argument for mandatory quotas – as a temporary measure – to bring rapid improvement.

The relocation of the Office for Women from FAHCSIA to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is seen as a positive move to increase the government focus on women's participation in the workforce. Other such government leadership strategies should include an annual pay equity audit reporting for all government agencies. We commend the Australian Government's commitment to achieving a target of at least 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men on Australian Government boards by 2015. On 5 August 2013 the Government released the *Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards*

*Report 2012–2013.* <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/women/publications-articles/government-international/gender-balance-2012-13.cfm>. As at 30 June 2013, women held 41.7 per cent of Government board appointments. This is up from 38.4 per cent in 2012, and exceeds the target set by the Government in 2010 of a minimum of 40 per cent women on Australian Government Boards by 2015.

Over the 2012-2013 financial year women were appointed to 47.6 per cent of the 1069 new board appointments, demonstrating the concerted effort of portfolios to improving the representation of women on their boards

Australia is also locked in a debate about paid parental leave and the review of the first universal scheme that was introduced in 2011. The results of the compulsory review are yet to be made public but the current government election policy was to increase the period of leave from 18 weeks to 26 weeks, to include superannuation on payments, and to provide payments (subsidised by large employers) to a maximum replacement salary of \$150,000 pa. We support policies that improve retention and return to the workforce and believe that an adequately funded parental scheme will deliver great returns – but only if increased measures are matched by a review of the childcare and out of hours care sectors to ensure affordable and quality care is available when and where it is needed. This is the essential ingredient for women to return to their positions and build their careers.

BPW Australia is available for any further consultation on this or any other relevant matters.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Cook

Past Vice President

On behalf of BPW Australia