

Mr Tim Watling
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

March 27, 2012

Dear Mr Watling

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission in response to the Bill to amend the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* in order to support gender equality and improve workforce participation and flexibility.

The Australian Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (AWCCI) charter is to instigate research, promote trade and commerce, and advocate for gender equality in business; we provide women business owners and female entrepreneurs with a voice.

In March 2012 the AWCCI launched the findings of the first National Women Business Owners and Female Entrepreneurs research conducted in Australia.

Respondents whom took part in our evidence based research (2952 respondents are recorded as having participated in the survey) stated four main reasons for starting their own business:

1. To be their own boss
2. Obtain work/life balance
3. Flexibility
4. To escape corporate life.

The AWCCI research found that half of the respondents started their business in or since 2007; 71% of respondents are running their first business, and 29% are running a subsequent business.

The research, open only to women business owners, has found that 78% of respondents left employment at middle to upper management level to start their business.

We understand that discrimination impacts upon the effectiveness of attaining high positions in most industries, our research highlights this point; with such a high number of respondents leaving employment at middle or upper management levels there is obviously room for improvement in corporate Australia.

The AWCCI has the data to confirm that women business owners are growing in numbers and that many of these corporate refugees left their employers because they could no longer function in a male dominated environment without the conditions they require as employees.

The AWCCI believes that in the current environment law reform and policing of these is vital and the only vehicle for change; the AWCCI is in favour of the proposed amendments to the Bill and supports:

- Expanding the role and functions of the EOWA
- Introducing a new reporting framework for relevant employers
- Clarifying consequences of non-compliance with the Act and
- Empowering the Minister to set minimum standards in relation to gender equality indicators.

Furthermore we would support EOWA to encourage medium sized businesses to openly embrace a commitment to gender equity. We note from our research that women business owners tend to employ other women and they believe to be equal pay employers.

As you well know, although the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 was passed almost 30 years ago, we are today still *talking* about providing women with equal pay. This confirms that laws without enforcement are meaningless, and urge these important issues be addressed.

As a nation, both industry and government, we must work together to remove gender from our agendas. At present the only way to obtain equality is to ensure those in power are accountable and in fact are striving for equality through daily actions today and in the decades to come.

Warm Regards

Yolanda Vega
Chief Executive