

Strengthening women's representation

PRIORITIES

1. The Federal Parliament should have 50% female representation. A proportion of these women should be CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander, LGBTQI and women with a disability so as to reflect the diversity of the Australian population. This can be achieved through political parties actively encouraging increased female membership and participation in politics.
2. The Federal Government should increase funding to the Office of Women who, assisted by the government funded Women's Alliances, can advise the government effectively on issues and policies affecting women.
3. Federal Government Boards should have 50% women representation within 2 years and this representation should include CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander, LGBTQI and people with a disability to reflect the diversity of the Australian population.
4. A minimum gender equality target should be established for the Senior Executive Service in the Australian Public Service, with compliance publicly reported annually.
5. Listed Boards should commit to 50% female representation (including CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander, LGBTQI and people with a disability) within 3 years. If this is not achieved, the Federal Government should legislate to require publicly listed companies and other large employers to achieve a mandatory minimum of 40% of women within a specified timeframe. Those who fail to achieve the target will be subject to specified sanctions such as not being awarded grants and contracts.
6. The Federal Government should commit to implementing all recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Set the Standards* Report, 2021.

RATIONALE

WEL is dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and their ability to fulfil their potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected and where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

To achieve these aims it is imperative that women's representation in the Federal Parliament (and all others) reaches 50% as soon as possible. Currently, less than a quarter (23%) of the Coalition Members of Parliament and one third of Coalition Senators are women. In contrast, women make up 47% of Labor's ranks in the lower house and outnumber the men in the Senate. This is a direct result of the Labor party's implementation of a quota system. The Greens have a similar approach and list candidates for Senate seats by alternating men and women on the ballot paper instead of placing long-standing candidates mostly men on the top of the list.

WEL supports the adoption of similar schemes by all political parties to ensure women's voices are heard and included in policy development and discussion on all sides of politics. The best way to ensure that there are more women in Parliament is to increase female participation in



political parties. Systems need to be developed to encourage and support greater female membership in political parties and to mentor women to nominate as candidates.

Providing a safe and respectful work environment in Commonwealth Parliament workplaces is also critical for actively encouraging women to participate in political life. On 30 November 2021 Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins released her report *Set the Standards*, an Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces conducted on behalf of the Australian Human Rights Commission. That report made 28 recommendations to support the Parliament to perform in line with standards in other workplaces. WEL believes that all political parties should commit to implementing all the recommendations.

In virtually all sectors of the paid workforce, women are under-represented in leadership positions. For example an Australian Public Service Commission Report in 2020 indicates that in 2019-20, women comprised 60% of all Commonwealth Public Service employees but less than 50% of SES staff. According to the Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards 2019-20 Report, 48.5% of all board positions relating to federal government portfolios are filled by women. This is an improvement but is still short of the 50% target announced in 2016. There needs to be a date by which the target will be achieved.

The findings for 2019-20 in this Report also show that action is required if there is to be no further decrease in overall board positions. The report states that:

- Of the 622 new appointments made over 2019-20, 50.5% of nominees were women – a decrease of 2.2%.
- The representation of women on Government boards decreased across six portfolios since 30 June 2019, including in two portfolios where women filled 50.9% of board positions on 30 June 2019.

The statistics in corporate Australia are even more concerning. The Australian Institute of Company Directors reports in its Board Diversity Statistics that the percentage of women on ASX 200 boards is still only 32.9% while 13 boards in the ASX 300 have no female directors. For ASX All Ords companies, the percentage of women on boards comprises 26.9% while 79 boards have no women (28 February 2021). Under 6% of CEOs of ASX 300 companies are women.