



26 September 2018

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Office for Women
Health and Wellbeing Division
Gender Equality Team
Department of Health and Human Services
email: gender.equality@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Ask for: Kathleen McClusky
Phone: 9932 1109
Our Ref: A2941323

Dear Ms Hutchins,

Submission on the Gender Equality Bill

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback for consideration as part of the development of the Gender Equality Bill.

The inclusion of Gender Equality legislation in Victoria is in alignment with Council's Gender Equity Policy Statement 2014. This policy outlines Council's commitment to a safe and just community, where every girl, boy, woman, man and gender diverse person is included and valued – where equal and respectful relationships and opportunities for meaningful participation are supported and celebrated.

Please find attached Council's submission to the draft Gender Equality Bill. We look forward to the outcome of the consultation and future implementation.

If you would like to discuss this submission further please contact Council's Manager Strategy and Advocacy, Kathleen McClusky on 9932 1004 or email kmccclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Millard
Director Strategic Development



Draft Gender Equality Bill

The City of Hobsons Bay covers an area of 64 square kilometres, extending seven to 20 kilometres south-west of Melbourne's central business district. The population in 2017 was nearly 95,000 people.

Hobsons Bay City Council is a key employer within the municipality with nearly 800 employees. Gender equality is not a new concept to Council. In 2014 Council adopted a Gender Equity Policy Statement 2014 which outlines our role as an organisation. In addition Council has a number of organisational processes in place to support gender equality such as family violence leave, flexible work practices, breast feeding rooms, workplace diversity and inclusion working group, and leadership programs.

The inclusion of Gender Equality legislation will further support Council to implement this work into the future however there are some key considerations and opportunities that should be recognised in order to ensure effective implementation. These are outlined below.

Gender Equality Action Plans

The implementation of legislated Action Plans is not a new concept to councils, with many councils having similar plans and/or requirements, an example being a Disability Action Plan. In order for these plans to be effectively developed, implemented and reported on, councils will need to provide adequate resourcing. The ability to integrate the Action Plan in with other strategic documents and planning processes could greatly support this resourcing, however it may still be challenging for some councils.

The principles within the discussion paper in relation to the Gender Equality Action Plans are well grounded. The actions for guiding the development of the Action Plans however require further specifications and definition e.g. 'special measures'.

Recommendation: appropriate levels of resourcing for the development, implementation and reporting on Gender Equality Action Plans will need to be considered to ensure they are effective.

Recommendation: actions for guiding the development of the Plan require further specifications and definitions.

Indicators, Targets, Compliance and Reporting

Indicators and targets can be useful measures to track progress and ensure organisations prioritise work. Depending on the type of indicators and targets however this can lead to 'ticking the box' rather than taking a nuanced and holistic organisational approach. Flexibility within actions to reach targets should be considered during the development.



Given the Action Plan is a four year plan it is recommended that these indicators and targets be trialled with organisations during the initial twelve months of implementation to ensure appropriate internal processes are in place.

Targets such as 50/50 quotas are still a relatively new concept in terms of success in meeting these quotas. It is suggested that a more flexible target be considered such as the 40 per cent male, 40 per cent female and 20 per cent of either gender and or those that are non-binary. Not only is this model more achievable, it allows for those that are gender diverse or non-binary to feel included as well as ensure the organisation can make business decisions when required e.g. ensuring knowledge is retained in the organisation within the older workforce, building skills and flexibility when gaps arise in workforce skills, and having flexibility when staff vacancies occur. Quotas should also be responsive to different working conditions, to ensure part time workers are not counted as the equivalent of a full time worker of the opposite gender. Quotas will require time in order to address any skill shortages, barriers within the workforce and surrounding sectors, and any organisational cultural issues that need to be addressed.

Annual reporting on indicators provides an opportunity to understand any changes and flag any potential issues in implementation. Council currently reports on a range of indicators and progress of its plans and policies on a regular basis via its Annual Report, including gender statistics. It would be appropriate to also include this reporting within the Annual Report. If this process highlights that organisations do not meet the requirements, there should be support available to ensure they are able to address the reasons around why they do not comply e.g. capacity, skills, and knowledge.

Recommendation: ensure there is flexibility within actions to be able to reach targets as well as address unique organisational needs.

Recommendation: provide a twelve month trial period for the indicators to ensure organisations have internal processes in place.

Recommendation: reassess strict 50/50 quotas, and consider a move towards 40/40/20 to allow for flexibility within the workforce, the ability to build skills within gaps, and ensure all staff feel included.

Organisational Support

Some organisations will be more ready than others. It is suggested that training, information and experts be available to support organisations in the development and implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plans.

Training should also include tools or methods for implementation e.g. culture change within the organisation, pathways to increase non-traditional gendered roles via actions such as mentoring, traineeships, secondments, and scholarships in universities which have a clear pathway to employment in the public sector.

Recommendation: provide support for organisations in relation to gender equality training as well as tools and methods on how to increase gender equality.



Procurement Guidelines

Implementing gender ethical procurement and ensuring the public sector commits to source goods and services from suppliers who meet certain gender equality criteria may be an effective way to further increase gender equality within organisations across a range of sectors, however these sectors may require support. It is important that the Government will be providing advice and online tools for suppliers, however further training, promotion and grants may also be required to ensure organisations are undertaking effective gender equality actions.

Recommendation: closely monitor procurement guidelines to ensure organisations have the support they need in order to meet requirements using best practice.