

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Employment and Workplace Relations

*Inquiry into Pay Equity and Associated Issues Related to
Increasing Female Participation in the Workforce*

Public Hearing

Canberra
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OPENING STATEMENT

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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Thanks for the opportunity to provide evidence to this important Committee.

The Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations (ACCER) advises the Australian Catholic Bishops about employment relations issues.

Catholic Social Services Australia is the peak body for many Catholic Agencies that provide a range of services to people in need across Australia.

While we don't want to dwell on the figures it should be noted that in August last year the FaHCSIA statistics show the gender pay gap for full-time, adult, ordinary time, female employees was 16.7 per cent. The gap is increasing. This inequity has flow-on effects for women's ability to accumulate superannuation.

As noted in our submission, the Catholic Church in Australia is both a major employer and a major advocate of fairer workplace arrangements. In fact the Catholic Church is one of the country's largest employers employing in excess of 100,000 employees.

We have made a number of points in our submission, including;

- The inadequacy of current data collections to properly assess and monitor equity outcomes in employment;
- The need for policy and legislative reform, particularly the need for paid maternity leave, in order to overcome some of the systemic barriers to equity;
- The particular plight of low paid female workers dependent on the Federal Minimum Wage who have faced systematic discrimination in terms of their pay and conditions due to the inadequacy of the Australian Fair Pay Commission's calculation of the Federal Minimum Wage;
- Our concern that erosion of the capacity for collective bargaining has seen some very vulnerable employees face further disadvantage;
- Award pay rates in the community sector do not reflect increased demand for a better skilled workforce in community services. Pay rates do not reflect the increased work value in this sector.

We do want to make the point that equity issues disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. As the submission from the ABS shows, women in professional and managerial roles probably enjoy the most equitable post-maternity leave and workforce participation arrangements, and yet still they face conditions less favourable than their male counterparts. How much more difficult, then, are the challenges faced by women in unskilled, labouring and caring roles – frequently in work that is casualised or part-time. These workers consequently miss out on other entitlements such as sick leave, holiday pay and bereavement leave. In addition, the unpredictable hours in casual employment make it difficult to access adequate child care arrangements. Women in these roles also have lower access to training and more limited opportunities for promotion and career development.

As we have mentioned, the Catholic Church is a partner with state and federal government in the provisions of a very diverse range of social and community services. In education, healthcare, aged care and social and community services governments provide the vast majority of the funding that ultimately pays the workforce we deploy. In that context, we would encourage the government to fast track some of the consultations underway to develop a Compact between government and the "Third Sector". The pay and conditions of most of the sector are

determined by contracts and service agreements between government and third Sector organisations. To the extent that these agreements fail to meet the real cost of service provision, they impede the capacity of organisations to provide employment conditions that are supportive of equity outcomes.

Catholic agencies strive, albeit imperfectly, to achieve workplace equity for women and low paid workers. We employ a very substantial workforce directly, and provide services and other support to low paid workers, the unemployed and those not in the workforce.

Government reform, an improved legislative framework and better data collection and monitoring will play an important part in bringing about the cultural reform required to achieve equity across the population.

Thank you.