



Chiefs for Gender Equity  
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## Submission to the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces

The Chiefs for Gender Equity (CfGE) welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the *National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* and to be part of the awareness-raising that will hopefully lead to a decrease in the occurrence of sexual harassment.

The CfGE are disturbed by the increasing numbers of women reporting that they have been sexually harassed at work. Sexual harassment has risen to the number two area of complaint at the South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission and we know that most people never report this. Not only is workplace sexual harassment an abuse of human rights, it can have a negative impact on employee wellbeing and may be costly to businesses.

As senior business leaders in South Australia, the CfGE are working to progress sustainable change within our organisations and to increase the participation of women at the highest levels of our industry sectors. We believe gender equality is about fairness and respect and that it makes a powerful and positive difference to productivity, effectiveness and innovation. Put simply, it makes business sense.

In addition to gender equity measures, we are committed to ensuring that our workplaces go beyond just having mechanisms in place to support those who experience sexual harassment. We work individually and collectively to inform and influence with the aim of achieving economic growth and prosperity through the equal representation and recognition of women and men across all aspects of community, work and family life. We have therefore chosen to focus our submission on the correlation between gender inequality and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Research shows that power dynamics in the workplace, the primary motivator for sexual harassment, are greatly influenced by gender inequality. This, in turn, contributes to a culture where women are undervalued at work, which intensifies the power imbalance, paving the way for sexual harassment. As with violence against women, gender inequality is a cause and consequence of sexual harassment.

Addressing gender inequality within organisations will not happen accidentally, and, like any other business issue, requires a strategic and systematic approach. As a group, the Chiefs for Gender Equity continue to focus on the following areas:

- Our Leadership Shadow – setting public goals, role modelling behaviour and holding ourselves, and each other, accountable
- Flexible work – ensuring that all employees are empowered to utilise flexible work arrangements that enable them to balance work, family and community matters
- Reducing unconscious bias – addressing stereotypes, calling out behaviours and working to remove bias from workplace practices to ensure women and men have equal opportunities

- Reporting – holding ourselves accountable by measuring our performance against best practice and gender equality goals.

Leaders play a crucial role in building a culture of gender equality in the workplace. We can help shift attitudes and create a place where employees feel empowered and confident that any issues reported will be handled sensitively and treated seriously. It is our role to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to promote a culture of inclusion and respect, and that our Leadership Shadow reflects this.

An organisation's culture impacts on its recruitment, promotion and other employment practices, how achievement and success are perceived and measured, and how career progression can be achieved. Culture also influences the way that employees view leadership and their expectation of the behaviour of leaders and potential leaders. We need to move from the outdated expectation that career progress is related to the visible hours worked. Work is a thing you do, not a place you go.

With a growing number of men taking on the responsibility of caring for children as their partners work, breaking down traditional gender stereotypes is increasingly important. It's time for workplaces to "normalise" working dads and move the discussion from "working mothers" to "working parents". We need senior male leaders who visibly take parental leave and work flexibly as this sends a strong message that you can be an engaged father and a serious player at work.

Senior leaders – both men and women – must step up (and be seen to step up) to advance gender equality. With the support of leadership, equality initiatives can then be built into the DNA of the organisation. The price of ignoring gender equality is high and it is measured in lost potential, lost opportunities and lost credibility.

We encourage all business leaders and employers to embrace and address gender equity for the benefit of their own business bottom line and because it is the right thing to do.

### *About the Chiefs for Gender Equity*

The 'Chiefs for Gender Equity' are a group of senior leaders from prominent South Australian organisations representing key industry sectors (legal, finance/accounting, engineering, construction, food services, aged care, government and education). Brought together with the common aim of advancing gender equity, the Chiefs are working to progress sustainable change within their own organisations and to increase the participation of women at the highest levels of industry. The Chiefs for Gender Equity group is convened by the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity (SA) and aims to educate and encourage other SA organisations to better address gender equity issues in the workplace.