

New Workplace Gender Equality Act lays a strong foundation

The Australian Human Rights Commission and the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, have welcomed the passing of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill in Parliament today, saying it is a strong step toward both improving women's workforce participation and closing the gender gap in Australia's workforce.

"This is an important piece of legislation that will provide a solid foundation for improving gender equality in employment and in the workplace," Commissioner Broderick said. "It applies to both men and women in the workplace." To reflect its expanded scope, the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* has been renamed the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*.

Commissioner Broderick said the principal objects of the Act have been amended to promote and improve workplace gender equality, with specific recognition that equal remuneration and family and caring responsibilities are central to improving the workforce participation of women.

"Recognition in the Act of equal remuneration strengthens capacity for closing the gender pay gap," said Commissioner Broderick. "Enabling greater participation of women in the workforce will also make a significant contribution to strengthening Australia's productivity." Commissioner Broderick said there were other important elements that significantly improved the legislation.

"Other improvements in this legislation include: the development of gender equality indicators and related industry-based benchmarks; a new reporting framework requiring relevant employers to report against gender equality indicators; improvements to the transparency associated with compliance and the consequences of non-compliance; and an extension of the agency's advice and education function to all employers," Ms Broderick said.

Commissioner Broderick said the new measuring and reporting frameworks will strengthen the capacity of the Act and the Agency to promote gender equality in workplaces.