

# Two-speed salaries leave women behind

## BY SECTOR

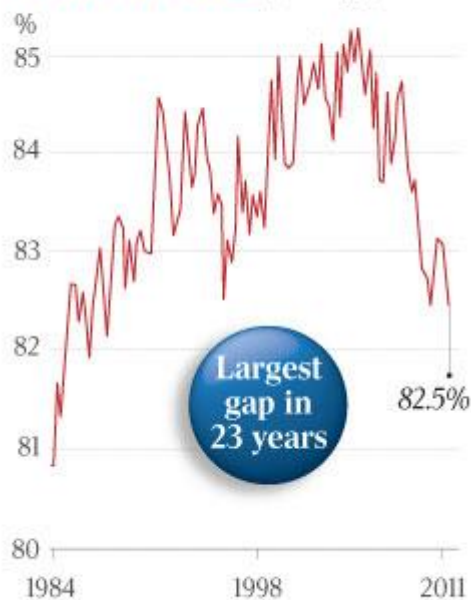


## BY STATE



Source: ABS, CommSec

## FEMALE WAGES AS A PROPORTION OF MALE WAGES (average)



Source: ABS, CommSec

## **THE two-speed economy has morphed into a battle of the sexes.**

And women are losing the fight as the tug of war between the booming male-dominated mining sector and the flagging retail sector, staffed heavily by women, helped to push the gender pay divide to 17.5 per cent in May - the largest gap in 23 years.

As demand for labour to drive trucks and dig minerals out of the ground pushes up wages for men employed in mining and construction, women employed in casual jobs in retail are having shifts cut back, reducing their wages.

A CommSec analysis of the average wage figures, released yesterday, found average male wages now outstrip average female wages by \$12,870 a year, producing the biggest difference in the survey's 28-year history.

"The female wage is 82.5 per cent of the male wage - the smallest proportion in 23 years," said CommSec economist Savanth Sebastian.

Those at the retail coalface are feeling the pinch, with the sector suffering a 1.2 per cent fall in average weekly earnings over the year.

Marie Ritchie, the founder and head designer at Australian fashion label Hussy, which operates four shops in Australia and one in Bali, said it was unfair women were not paid equally.

"Women work just as hard as men do, and they are contributing just as much as men do to each and every business," she said. Hussy employs 17 women across its Australian operations, and one man overseas.

Ritchie said retail was struggling compared to male-dominated sectors such as mining, and blamed the poor economy for retail's comparatively lower wages. "Obviously if retail was doing as well (as mining) we would be able to give larger bonuses," she said. "This is a commission-based business, so a lot of girls have sacrificed their commission to stay in the industry."

In Western Australia, labour shortages are commonplace, with the resources boom soaking up all the skilled workers.

Perth welding specialist James Igasan was unsurprised that male wages were outstripping those of females at record levels.

The manager of JMI Fabrication and Welding in Perth's northern suburbs said while women were hard to find in his sector, they did earn the same money as men. But they were not as dominant at the senior levels.

"The high-ticket-value jobs are predominantly men," he said yesterday. "If you're a boilermaker/welder it would be the same pay rate for a male or female on the floor but you probably wouldn't have as many leading hands or foreman who are women, they would predominantly be male."

Males employed in mining in May were earning an average of \$2180 per week while female retail workers earned less than half that, just \$906.70 a week.

The highest average wage is in mining, at \$110,328. But women employed in mining earn \$1722.50 a week, 79 per cent of a male wage.

Men working in retail earn an average of \$963.80 a week while women earn \$906.70 a week.

In construction, men earn \$1368.50 a week, while women earn \$1105.50. In education and training, men earn \$1482.70 a week while women earn an average \$1326.90. And in the finance industry, men earn a weekly average of \$1827.40, while women earn \$1231.50.

Labor promised to tackle the gender pay gap when it came to government four years ago. It set up a parliamentary inquiry and encouraged new gender pay claims in its industrial relations reforms but to date the measures appear to have been entirely ineffective in lowering the pay gap.

Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency chief Helen Conway says the gender pay gap has hovered between 15 and 18 per cent since 1990 and the reasons are complex.

"This year is the 25th anniversary of the passage of the affirmative action act and the gender pay gap is the same as it was 25 years ago, " she said.

The agency calculates its own pay gap on an annual basis and says this year women will have to work an extra 63 days until September 1 to earn the same wage as a man.

Ms Conway is waiting for parliament to pass legislation that will rename her agency and give it beefed up powers to require that all companies with more than 100 employees submit annual reports to EOWA on the number of women in their organisations, their employment conditions and the availability of flexible work practices.