

# Pleas not to sap women-in-work rules

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Women leaders have urged the Abbott government not to change rules requiring companies to provide extensive reports on gender diversity and pay equality.

As reported by *The Australian Financial Review* on Monday, the government wants to cut red tape by changing the threshold at which companies must report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Current rules compel companies with 100 or more employees to detail, yearly, the gender make-up of their workforces and compare rates of pay between men and women.

The Coalition's proposed changes would require only companies with 1000 or more employees to comply, and limit the scope of data collected.

The Business Council of Australia

endorsed the proposal, but it has been met with opposition elsewhere.

**Christine Christian**, the president of professional group Chief Executive Women, said the collection of robust and comprehensive data was well recognised as the best way to achieve gender balance and equal pay goals.

"In any business, measuring performance focuses the mind much faster than good intentions," she said.

Ms Christian added that attempts to cut red tape were welcome, but that did not mean "we stop shining a light on what needs to be done to improve gender balance and, by extension, Australia's productivity".

"[Our group's] mission is enabling women to fulfil their aspirations as leaders, and that is not limited to organisations with more than 1000 staff."

Chief Executive Women is an invitation-only group made up of 300 top

## Key points

Current rules compel companies with 100 or more workers to annually report gender make-up.

Coalition plans to lift that to 1000 or more workers.

women from the corporate, public service, academic and not-for-profit sectors.

Beefed up reporting requirements introduced by Labor will come into full force for the first time from April 1, although Employment Minister **Eric Abetz** can make changes until then.

The resources industry employer group the Australia Mines and Minerals Association said changes were needed after the former government

extended reporting requirements in the wrong direction. "We want a partner, not a policeperson," said AMMA executive director for policy and public affairs **Scott Barklamb**. "We want government to work with industry to help drive change from within workplaces."

Mr Barklamb said an example of this was the Australian Women in Resources Alliance, which aims to increase women in the resources sector from 15.5 per cent to 25 per cent by 2020. An e-mentoring program linking women in remote areas to colleagues elsewhere is at the centre of the plan.

Journalist and women's advocate **Anne Summers**, who helped bring in affirmative action legislation for the Hawke Labor government in the 1980s, said the Coalition's attempts to weaken reporting rules represented a "very sad moment for Australian women".

"The dilution of the ... reporting

requirements will take the pressure off employers to hire and promote women and gives lie to the prime minister's claim to want to improve women's participation," she said.

A woman executive at one of the big four banks, who did not want to be identified as speaking against government plans, said her employer supported the agency's expanded reporting regime.

"We think it is an important benchmark for organisations to assess their progress on gender equity and is the only true and credible industry benchmark to compare various businesses and industries," she said.

The Business Council has said the reporting requirements are onerous, with 30 items to be reported against.

A source close to the agency rejected that assertion, saying much of the information required a "yes" or "no" answer and could be filled out online.