



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 14, 2011

Australian Gov't To Punish Companies Not Hiring "Enough" Women

The government in Australia is going to punish companies of more than 100 or more employees if those companies do not employ what the government thinks is the right number of women.

[According to *The Australian*](#), companies will have to report the numbers of women they employ and will also "face spot checks" from government agents to ensure that the number of women working for a company is the right one.

But the government does not tell businesses what the right number is. That, apparently, is left up to the [Ministry on the Status of Women](#).



The Details

Looking for what Women's Minister [Kate Ellis](#) (photo, above) calls "tangible" results, the government will provide \$11.2 million to something called the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. It will collect, [The Australian reports](#), "more information on working conditions for women and provide assistance for firms lagging behind in their employment of women."

As well, company executives will have to sign the reports on the status of women in their employ, and just to ensure the companies tell the truth, the government will inspect companies regularly.

Warned Ellis:

"There will be regular spot checks to ensure that the information that organisations are providing to the government actually matches how they conduct their day-to-day business," she said.

Mobile support teams would also provide assistance to businesses performing poorly in terms of gender equality, including smaller businesses.

The new reporting regime will provide the government with a better insight into pay gaps and trends in female promotion.

"For the first time, businesses will be required to report on the indicators that matter, on the actual figures of gender composition of their organisations and their boards, on their employment conditions and whether they have flexible work practices for women and men," Ms Ellis said.

"No more good intentions — we want outcomes."

To get those outcomes, the government will deprive businesses that fall short of "outcomes" of contracts, Ellis said.

"Government trade with a non-compliant organisation will not just be discouraged, it will not be allowed by law," she said.



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“The government is using our power as a consumer to say unless you are actively pursuing gender equality in your workplace we are not interested in doing business with you.”

No Way To Know

Problem is, businesses won't know whether they have hit the target, [The Australian reports](#), because “there no legislated gender targets imposed on companies under the plan.”

Instead, businesses must meet vague “industry benchmarks” or be deemed “non-compliant.” And a business won't have much time to fix things up, the paper reported.

Businesses will be deemed non-compliant with the new rules if they fall short of “industry benchmarks” and fail to improve over a two-year period.

They will also be in breach of the rules if they fail to lodge a report as required or fail to substantiate their report.

The non-compliant will not only not receive government contracts but also lose industry assistance and grants.

Totalitarianism

[The Coalition](#), an amalgamation of Australia's [Liberal](#) and [National](#) parties, which are moderate to conservative, doesn't think much of the tough new rules. [Bronwyn Bishop](#), the Coalition spokesman, [said the rules](#) were “the sort of thing you would expect from a totalitarian regime”

She also warned that it will harms women.

“What it does is make women permanent second class citizens. It opens the minister up herself to being called a token female in the ministry.”

Ms Bishop described the announcement as “heavy handed, half-baked policy, wasting \$11.2 million dollars.”

Bishop also said the plan was a typical statist intrusion into the affairs of business and will not allow employers to hire and fire on the basis of merit. She also wondered, [The Australian reports](#), “who would conduct the spot checks.”

“Trade unions dressed up as members of the agency?” she asked. “The whole thing just smacks of the dead hand of government.”

The new rules on reporting about women toughen the ones that apply now. In Australia companies on the Australian Securities Exchange must publish their policies on equity between the sexes and tell the government how they plan to achieve them.

In addition, the must publish the number of women they employ in top positions on and boards of directors.

The Australian reports that “[t]he government remains committed to a 40 per cent representation of women on government boards by 2015.”

Ellis On Women

Apparently Kate Ellis, [the womens' minister](#), is something of a fanatic on the subject of women's equality.

[She recently hammered](#) a member of her own [Labour Party](#) in South Australia because he doesn't do



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enough for women in the party. Ellis thinks Mike Rann is suffering a shortage of women in his cabinet:

“I think that our parliaments and our ministries need to be reflective of the broader community, she said, [according to](#) *The Australian*.

“Now, in our broader community we have 51 per cent women; we’ve got a long way to get that far.”

Ms Ellis said she was yet to see a parliament where women were appropriately represented within the numbers and within the ministry.

“I think that we need to make sure that we’re always pushing to increase numbers of women in ministries, in parliament, in leadership positions throughout the community,” she said.



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