

Client services

The objective of the Affirmative Action Agency is to achieve equal employment status for women and assist in the elimination of employment discrimination.

This year the Agency continued to deliver education services to meet the needs of our clients. These client groups include employers covered by the legislation, community and women's organisations, government, students, international bodies and the broader community.

To meet the need for information and assistance from this broad range of stakeholders, the Agency targets its resources carefully and uses the following means to communicate with our clients: training programs, site visit training, sector briefings, a telephone advisory service, speeches, presentations, media and a website.

Services during this year have sought to respond to the renewed awareness and interest generated by the review of the legislation. The review has charged the Agency to increase its education function to meet business and community needs.

Education and training

The Agency delivers training and educative programs on affirmative action. The focus is on assisting organisations to develop relevant, strategic programs that can be effectively implemented into the workplace and deliver bottom-line benefits throughout the organisation.

Training programs

The Agency has continued to run its highly successful training programs, 'Writing your affirmative action report' and 'Best practice in affirmative action' in conjunction with the

Australian Industry Group. These programs attract different organisations. Many human resource managers, new to the task of affirmative action, attend the 'Writing your affirmative action report' program.

These courses were offered and run in every state in Australia, except in Tasmania, due to low numbers. Due to high demand, three courses were run in Melbourne and four in Sydney.

In total, 233 organisations attended the training. Evaluations indicated that participants felt that presenters were expert and practical in their advice.



Agency staff visiting Lend Lease.

Table 1: Training Programs

Programs offered	No. conducted in 1998	No. conducted in 1999
Senior management training	28	24
AA committee training	23	6
Writing an affirmative action report	6	1
Total	57	31

It is envisaged that the type of programs run over the coming year will change with the proposed changes to the legislation flowing from the review of the Act. The Agency intends to offer advice and training to assist clients to meet these new requirements.

Site visit training

In April 1998, the site visit program was advertised in *Action News*. Over the past year the Agency has made 88 site visits to 72 organisations.

The site visit service offers a number of programs (see above). The most popular is training for senior management and affirmative action committees. Both these programs contain elements of best practice at an industry level.

The service was used by organisations from a variety of industries in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. Monies from the generic training program fund the site visit program allowing the Agency to deliver training at a set fee, regardless of where an organisation is located. Despite this, we still have low level interest in the program from Tasmania, Western Australia and Northern Territory, although it should be noted these states have the smallest number of reporting organisations.

Evaluation of the site visit program shows that the program is highly effective in increasing

awareness of issues and valuable in gaining management commitment to equal employment opportunity.

In the coming months, the Agency will be reviewing its education strategy and consulting with industry, to ensure a clear understanding of client expectations in this area. This will position the Agency to best serve clients' education and information needs.

The Advisory Service

The Advisory Service operates a telephone hotline from 10am until 4pm (EST) Monday to Friday. Two to three full-time advisers provide assistance to clients Australia wide. Primarily the advice is provided to organisations covered by the Act but members of the public and other interested parties also contact the Agency and receive assistance. The service is an efficient means of communication with the large number of employers nationally.

The service provides information on affirmative action and on issues confronting women in the workforce, as well as examples of best practice programs, sample policy statements, employee surveys and statistical data.

Organisations covered by the Act contact the service to discuss how to improve their affirmative action programs and compile their reports. The information provided covers a range of employment issues including:

- meritorious selection and recruitment practices
- occupational segregation barriers
- equal remuneration
- flexible work options to enable balance of work and family
- training and career development opportunities
- dealing with sexual harassment and workplace culture
- coverage of organisations by the legislation (4%)
- policy and issues surrounding contract compliance (1%)

Program development calls

One of the most important services offered to relevant employers is the provision of specific advice on issues affecting the organisation's affirmative action program. The Advisory Service assisted 210 employers implement effective programs to remove barriers for women in the workforce. This represents a 48 per cent increase from the previous year (142 in 1997-98). Program development calls involve discussion of strategies to implement change in targeted employment areas such as:

Operation of the Advisory Service

In 1998/99 staff received 4,534 requests for assistance and information. Of these requests, 3,192 were from relevant employers (ie employers covered by the Act). The remaining 1,342 requests were from a variety of other organisations and members of the public.

Although the majority of requests are received by telephone, clients often visit the Agency in person.

The degree of assistance provided to clients can range from a call lasting only a few minutes to more extensive service involving several follow-up discussions and/or further information being sent to the client.

Calls from employers covered by the Act

Relevant employers are the Agency's major client group. They represented 70 per cent of requests for information received by the Advisory Service. The type of advice sought included:

- career development (25%)
- non-traditional employment for women (12%)
- work and family flexibility (11%)
- consultative process (9%)
- women in management (7%)
- recruitment (selection, interview panels) (6%)
- sexual harassment (3%)
- surveys (3%)
- general discussion about the program covering a range of areas listed above (10%)
- other (including benchmarking best practice, AA/EEO policy statements, workplace culture, occupational health and safety, pay equity and statistical information) (13%)
- reporting administration advice and assistance (57%)
- requests for publications (17%)
- information on affirmative action and equal employment opportunity, including industry standards and benchmarking information (14%)
- developing, implementing and improving affirmative action programs (7%)

Website calls

This was the first year the report form was available on the Agency's new website. A total of 503 organisations used this service to access their report forms. The Advisory Service assisted 111 employers download the forms for fast access.



Agency staff discuss equal opportunity benefits for women at IBM.

Calls from other clients

In addition to requests from relevant employers, the Advisory Service receives requests for information and assistance from a variety of other sources. Such requests may involve providing general information to students, consultants, EEO practitioners/training providers, women's groups, community groups, tertiary institutions, the media and the general public. The Agency received 1,342 calls from these other clients, representing 30 per cent of requests received.

The majority of calls from other clients, a total of 819, were for information on affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Information requested can relate to the Act and particular events, such as the recent review of the legislation, benchmarking and employment matters, statistics and, importantly, referral advice on discrimination matters. The service received 122 enquiries which necessitated referring the enquirer to a more appropriate organisation. Of the remaining calls (other than requests for information discussed earlier), 353

requests were for publications. Queries about contract compliance policy and the list of non-compliant organisations accounted for 81 calls, and coverage queries and concerns accounted for 50 calls.

Media

Publicity through the media is an important means of communication with the broader community about equal employment opportunity for women. The Agency has successfully used opportunities to gain positive media publicity throughout the year.

As in past years, the Agency's major media event coincided with the tabling of its 1997/98 Annual Report in Federal Parliament. We concentrated on the progress of EEO in industry and future directions for the Agency. In particular, we focused on women in management and the need for organisations to find new, innovative ways of doing things.

We achieved substantial coverage throughout Australia, with in-depth stories appearing in

newspapers such as the *Age*, the *Australian*, the *Canberra Times* and the *Adelaide Advertiser*. We also obtained regional press coverage, for instance in the *Gundagai Independent* and the *Newcastle Herald*.

Although some articles tended to concentrate on the 'blacklisted' firms, the majority of the press tackled issues such as flexible hours and workplace culture and had stories on best practice organisations.

The former Director, Catherine Harris, appeared on television on *Business Sunday, 11AM* and the *Midday Show* in the week that the Annual Report was tabled and featured in nearly 30 radio interviews.

The Agency also received media interest about its data, in particular data produced in the publication *Facts & Figures*, which contains Agency statistics on equity.

Other media enquiries concentrated on the results of the independent review of the legislation and the appointment of the new Director, Fiona Krautil.

As in previous years, the media continue to seek informed comment about women in the workplace from the Agency.

Liaison

International liaison

The Agency hosted a number of international visitors who were interested to hear about the Agency's work and aims. These visits raised the Agency's profile within the international community and provided the Agency with useful information about equity issues and strategies adopted in other countries.

The Agency liaised with the following international visitors to Australia in 1998-99: the South African Commission for Gender Equity in June 1998, the British Minister for Employment in October 1998, the Swedish Ombudsman for

Equal Opportunities in November 1998, a Japanese Parliamentary Delegation in November 1998, and a South African study tour in April 1999. The international visitors were provided with briefings about the Agency's role and an overview of issues concerning women in the Australian workforce.

Speeches and presentations

The Director of the Agency was invited to address a number of forums during the past year. The speeches and presentations covered topics such as workplace diversity, corporate sustainability, women and leadership, the future of affirmative action and the impact of the review of the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986*.

The major conferences at which the Director and Assistant Director gave keynote addresses were the Women, Management and Industrial Relations Conference (Macquarie Graduate School of Management), the Workplace Diversity and EEO Conference (IIR), and the Corporate Sustainability Conference (Australian Graduate School of Management).

The number of speaking engagements reflects the importance the Agency places on raising community awareness about equity issues facing women in the Australian workforce.

Sector / industry briefings

In 1998-99 the Agency provided briefings to various industry sectors and stakeholders on topics, such as women in management, best practice EEO programs, business benefits of EEO programs, industry-specific issues and updates on the review of the legislation.

The Agency participated in briefings hosted by a diverse range of organisations and associations, including:

- Australian Industry Group
- Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry

- Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association
- Cosmetics, Toiletry and Fragrance Association of Australia
- Lane Cove Small Business Association
- Chief Executive Women
- Victorian EEO Practitioners
- NSW EEO Practitioners
- EEO Network
- HRM Practitioners (Western District, NSW)
- ACT / NSW Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education (EOPHEA)
- Parramatta Catholic Education Office, and Macquarie University MBA students
- Public Sector Merit and Protection Commission
- NSW Premier's Department
- Austrade

In November 1998, the Director gave the keynote address at an Affirmative Action Awards Seminar and Luncheon hosted by the Australian Industry Group. At this event, organisations which had achieved a best practice rating for their affirmative action / EEO program received recognition.

Publications

The Agency produces a range of publications to assist organisations to develop and implement successful affirmative action programs. These publications complement and support the Agency's training and education programs.

The publications are designed to:

- assist organisations to comply with the legislation
- provide organisations with examples of best practice and benchmarking data within their sector

- provide solutions to equity problems confronting particular sectors
- provide training materials to assist organisations educate their employees

In 1998-99 there was a 59 per cent increase in the number of publications sold or distributed free of charge.

One of the new publications produced was *Building EEO in the Construction Industry*. This publication was designed to provide detailed assistance to employers in the construction industry and was developed with the assistance of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) and launched in conjunction with NAWIC and the Building Science Forum.

Another publication, *Facts & Figures*, examined equity and industry performance in the private sector between 1994 and 1996. The publication was later updated to include the 1997 data.

Both these publications were provided to the public free of charge.

The Agency's newsletter, *Action News*, was produced twice last year. It provides vital information on current equity issues. It has a circulation of 9,000.

In addition to this range of publications the Agency provides information such as example policy statements and sample climate surveys and fact sheets.

Website

The Affirmative Action Agency's website was evaluated in 1998-99 and a new site created in February 1999. One of the key issues raised with Agency clients was the need to be able to access the report form by Internet. This was achieved as part of the development of the new site and proved successful as 503 organisations, roughly 20 per cent of reporting organisations, submitted a report form downloaded from the Agency site.

Further changes to the website will:

- increase the amount of information available on the site
- enable organisations to complete the form online
- enable organisations to purchase publications and training online
- participate in consultation forums online.

International Women's Day

In March 1999 the Agency participated in the Sydney Women's Festival which commemorated International Women's Day. An information stall was set up and managed by Agency staff to raise awareness about affirmative action and the range of equity issues facing women in the workforce.



Agency staff set up an International Women's Day stall at the Domain, Sydney.