



Affirmative Action Agency Annual Report 98/99

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A F F I R M A T I V E A C T I O N A G E N C Y

The Hon Peter Reith MP
Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

In accordance with section 12(1) of the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986*, I am pleased to present you with the thirteenth Annual Report of the Affirmative Action Agency.

The report covers the period from 1 June 1998 to 31 May 1999.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Fiona Krautil'.

Fiona Krautil
Director of Affirmative Action
5 October 1999



A F F I R M A T I V E A C T I O N A G E N C Y

Mission

*To achieve progressive improvement
in equal opportunity in employment
for women in the Australian workplace.*

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Foreword

In the last month of the reporting period I became Director of the Affirmative Action Agency, taking over from Catherine Harris who had dedicated five years to consolidating women's participation in Australian workplaces through the Agency.



Fiona Krautil

I have taken the reins just as the Affirmative Action Act and the Agency are entering a new phase. My staff and I are committed to this new direction. We are passionate about contributing to improved equal opportunity for women in the workplace, and look forward to working in partnerships with business and other key organisations to assist in delivering more effective EEO outcomes for Australian organisations and Australian women.

The Agency, operating under the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986*, has achieved some important

successes, from establishing harassment-free workplaces to putting family-friendly practices and training for women on the map.

My own experience spans more than 10 years of managing and implementing equal opportunity and diversity programs in the public and private sectors, so I have seen the positive results that EEO can deliver business.

Over this time I have learned that EEO has to be mainstreamed and linked to key business objectives, and line managers have to 'walk the talk' of the new policies and practices to create a workplace that is inclusive of the needs of women as well as men.

More and more Australian businesses are beginning to realise the bottom-line benefits of providing equal opportunities for women and effectively managing their diverse workforce. In 1998-99, due to the best practice quality of their affirmative action programs, 291 organisations were eligible to have their reporting requirements waived, representing 12 per cent of all organisations reporting to the Agency.

I want to speed up the rate at which organisations reach best practice in affirmative action, by educating and 'opening the eyes' of Australian business to the benefits of equal opportunity and diversity. I believe companies that take action now will gain a competitive edge.

This is why I'm so pleased with the direction the new Act will take us. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 1999 has been presented to the Commonwealth Parliament during the spring sittings. It follows the regulatory review of the Act which took place during 1998-99. The review recommended less focus on compliance and more resources to be committed to working in partnerships with business and other key organisations, such as employer groups, to deliver improved outcomes for women in workplaces.

We've already done a significant amount of work in setting the future direction of the Agency, and have been rewriting our mission and reassessing our resources. Although we are still in our old reporting cycle, we are looking forward and developing a team structure that will allow the Agency to be more flexible and adaptable.

From 2000, the reporting cycle will change to every second year and Agency resources will be freed up, allowing staff to focus on our new mission.

The Government welcomed the recommendation by the review that an Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Board be formed. The Board is to advise the Minister on particular matters relating to EEO for women and the operation of the Act, and it will also build strategic links with the business community. This will help the Act, and its administration, to be relevant and responsive to the organisations it covers.

The Advisory Board is therefore in a position to provide valuable assistance to the Agency as we implement other review recommendations, including:

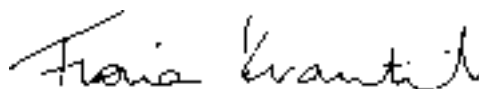
- formulating a new optional report format
- developing guidelines to assist organisations comply with the new Act
- implementing revised waiving arrangements

The review commented that the Agency was perceived to be prescriptive and out of touch with business needs. In the coming year, we will be

- consulting more closely with business and other stakeholders to address this perception
- building closer relationships with business through
 - the Advisory Board
 - consultation regarding the new reporting requirements
 - identifying and addressing information/education needs
 - forging partnerships with employers and representative bodies

I congratulate the Independent Review Committee for its report on the Affirmative Action Act, *Unfinished Business*, and look forward to working with the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, The Honourable Peter Reith, and the Board on implementing the new Act.

We can all look forward to the rewards this renewed approach to EEO for women will bring to our workplaces and Australian society.



Fiona Krautil
Director, Affirmative Action Agency