



**WOMEN
IN THE
AWU**

EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE

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For more than 60 years the ideal of equal work for equal pay has been internationally recognised. In 1951 a meeting of the International Labour Organisation passed convention C100. The convention asked each member country to “by means appropriate... promote and, in so far as is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and workers for work of equal value”.

At home things took a little longer. During World War II, workers were needed to replace the men who had been shipped overseas for service, and women enthusiastically filled the labour shortage. In 1943, in response to rising pressure from women’s organisations, the government established a Women’s Employment Board securing women war workers around 75 percent of the male wage. With the return of the male workforce at the end of the war in 1945, there was a sharp decline in women’s employment participation.

It wasn’t until 1969 that the first wage equity decision was made by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (later the Australian Industrial Relations Commission). This introduced ‘equal pay for work of equal value’. The ruling officially set the female wage at 85% of the male wage. A follow up decision in 1972 awarded women wholly equal pay.

EQUAL PAY IN 2012

In the 40 years since the landmark 1972 decision there has been very little improvement statistically. The gender wage gap has hovered at around 17% for the entire 4 decades and work that is traditionally dominated by women is still much lower paid.

However, this year on 1 February 2012, a full bench of Fair Work Australia made its first equal pay ruling. In the landmark case the majority of the bench accepted a joint submission from the federal government and unions to increase the pay rates in the Social,

Community, Home Care and Disability Industry Award 2010 by up to 41%.

The joint submission argued the wage gap between SACS sector workers and public sector workers could be attributed to gender, as the majority of work being performed by SACS workers is “care” work.

Gendered industry sectors and corresponding wage rates are just one element contributing to the pay gap. Women are also more likely to work part time, have responsibility for care and other household work and are less likely to get bonuses or overtime pay.

CLOSING THE GAP

To address this gap the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) requires that all organisations with 100 or more employees annually report on their progress in narrowing the gap and addressing gender imbalances in the workplace.

However, the recent Equal Pay decision shows clearly how influential union action can be in creating change. The Australian Workers’ Union will continue to actively pursue the best possible outcome for members including closing the gender pay gap and ensuring that all members are paid fairly for the work they perform.

COURSES OF ACTION

If you suspect that you are earning less than fellow male employees in the same role, because you’re a woman, call your AWU organiser to talk about your concerns, or you can Free Call the union on 1300 885 653.



Do you feel your workplace is not equal? Call the AWU free on 1300 885 653.