



Gender Equality Action Plan

2021–2025



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Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us.

Chief Executive Officer's message

I am pleased to present the Essential Services Commission's *Gender Equality Action Plan 2021–2025*.

We have been working towards gender equality and enhancing the experience of our diverse workforce for some time now. Our journey towards gender equality was accelerated in 2017 with the introduction of our flexible work toolkit and formation of our Empowered Women's Network. The network is driven by staff with an executive sponsor and full support of senior leadership. The Empowered Women's Network supports, promotes, empowers and recognises all women who are part of the commission by:

- supporting and assisting women with their own development
- creating an awareness of women's gender issues in the workplace
- providing a forum to promote all causes for the betterment of women and all staff.

Our flexible work toolkit promotes ways to work flexibly and the benefits flexible working can have on work-life balance. This toolkit led to more employees working flexibly at the commission. Prior to 2020, we had nearly 40 per cent of staff undertaking a flexible work agreement.

In addition to the internal work we have done on gender equality, we have also released our 'Getting to fair' strategy. This strategy aims to break down the barriers vulnerable consumers can face when accessing and engaging with essential services.

I am happy to see that the results of our workplace gender audit indicate that we are performing well in the gender equality space with an even representation of men and women at all levels of our organisation, including a good gender balance in our governing body.

While these results are very positive, there is still more we can do for gender equality. This plan has been created to support our endeavour to do more. It was created by considering the gender equality principles in the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, analysing data from the workplace gender audit and two rounds of consultation with our Board, executive team, special interest groups, staff and the union. The information gained contributed towards the strategies and measures outlined in this plan.

The *Gender Equality Action Plan 2021–2025* has been reviewed and endorsed by our Board, who have demonstrated strong interest and support throughout this process.

We are committed to this essential work as all should feel safe and equal in the workplace.

John Hamill

Chief Executive Officer

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Baseline audit analysis

Our key findings

Key highlights	
	<p>We have 78 (50.6 per cent) women and 76 (49.4 per cent) men</p> <p>At executive level we have four men and one woman</p>
	<p>Governing body gender split is equal between men and women</p>
	<p>Remuneration for women is higher than men at our most senior levels</p> <p>Mean remuneration begins to reverse at the VPS5 level and below</p>
	<p>No reported incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace</p>
	<p>89 per cent of People Matter survey respondents believe that gender is not a barrier to success</p> <p>There was no significant gender imbalance in recruitment, higher duties or internal promotions</p>
	<p>Eight women and seven men took parental leave in 2020–21</p>
	<p>Having family and caring responsibilities is not seen as a barrier to success with over 90 per cent responding favourably to those questions in the People Matter survey</p>

Data limitations

Where possible, we were required to report on intersectional data. Intersectional data is data that is separated by gender as well as attributes other than gender, such as Aboriginality; age; disability; ethnicity; gender identity; race; religion; or sexual orientation. Our payroll system does not collect data on cultural identity, religion or sexual orientation so we are limited in our reporting on these intersectional factors. We have used our People Matter survey results to understand our intersectional data where possible. Later in this report, we will explore strategies and measures to obtain intersectional information.

In some instances, where we can collect intersectional data such as disability and gender identify, we do not have any staff who have identified.

Consultation and engagement

Consultation was conducted in two rounds as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 – consultation outline

Activity	when	group
Audit outcomes and idea generation	October– December 2021	Board, Executive, staff, internal groups and networks, People and Culture and the union
Draft gender equality action plan progress and endorsement	February–April 2022	Board, Executive, staff, internal groups and networks, People and Culture and the union

Consultation round one

Our first consultation round started after our workforce data collection and analysis. As the results of our audit did not highlight any high-risk areas suggesting gender inequality, the discussions were focused on participant’s experiences in the workplace and how we can further improve gender equality at the commission.

The topics discussed included the executive gender balance, recruitment and promotion, typically gendered skills, flexible work, intersectional data, and prevention of sexual harassment. The information gained from these sessions was used to inform the strategies and measures in this action plan.

Consultation round two

For the second round of consultation, we went back to the same groups and invited all interested staff to participate. We discussed the strategies and measures that were created from the previous round of consultation and sought feedback from each group on whether it was an accurate reflection of discussions and any suggested amendments. We took the findings from this consultation and used them to finalise our strategies and measures.

The union held an additional session for their members and invited all staff to attend.

Case for change

Vision statement

People of all genders play a key role in the success of our commission. We aim to foster an inclusive culture where all are valued equally.

Why gender equality is important

Women have historically experienced discrimination and disadvantage based on their sex and gender and we aim to work towards rectifying this in our workplace using the strategies and measures outlined in this plan.

In addition to gender inequality, intersectional attributes such as Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, and sexual orientation can heighten discrimination. We see this as an important issue for the commission in both our approach to regulation and the way we work. Our *Gender Equality Action Plan* complements the commitments we have made to consider, include and support these groups in our Getting to fair strategy.

We support and consider the gender equality principles set in developing and implementing our actions within this plan.

Gender equality principles

All Victorians should live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

Gender equality benefits all Victorians regardless of gender.

Gender equality is a human right and precondition to social justice.

Gender equality brings significant economic, social and health benefits for Victoria.

Gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.

Advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the Victorian community.

All human beings, regardless of gender, should be free to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives without being limited by gender stereotypes, gender roles or prejudices.

Gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes.

Women have historically experienced discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of sex and gender.

Special measures may be necessary to achieve gender equality.

Strategies and measures for 2021–2025

Focus Area 1: Better data to inform our priorities

Strategy/action	Accountability	Success indicators	Timeline
Encourage commission staff to share relevant intersectional data	People and Culture Diversity and inclusion working group	Diversity survey increases our understanding of intersectional attributes within the commission.	30 September 2022
Improve our Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations data inputs	People and Culture	Meaningful comparisons can be made through analysis of our Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations data.	30 September 2022

Focus Area 2: Ensuring the right balance

Strategy/action	Accountability	Success indicators	timeline
Maintain balanced gender composition of our Governing Body by advocating to ensure this is considered in any recruitment for new commissioners	Chair	Continued balanced representation of genders is maintained.	2025
Monitor and maintain gender pay equality	People and Culture Executive	Continued equal remuneration and improvements made where identified necessary.	Deep dive completed in 2023 and 2025
Recruitment strategies support gender equality	People and Culture People leaders	Balanced gender representation at application and interview stages of recruitment.	2021–2025

		Gender composition at the commission continues to be balanced across all levels, divisions and occupation types.	
Foster development of women in male dominated roles at the commission (e.g. economics)	People and Culture	Improved gender balance across male dominated roles at the commission.	December 2023
Proactively encourage learning and development	People and Culture People leaders	Continued gender balanced representation of genders across learning opportunities.	2021–2025

Focus Area 3: A safe workplace for all

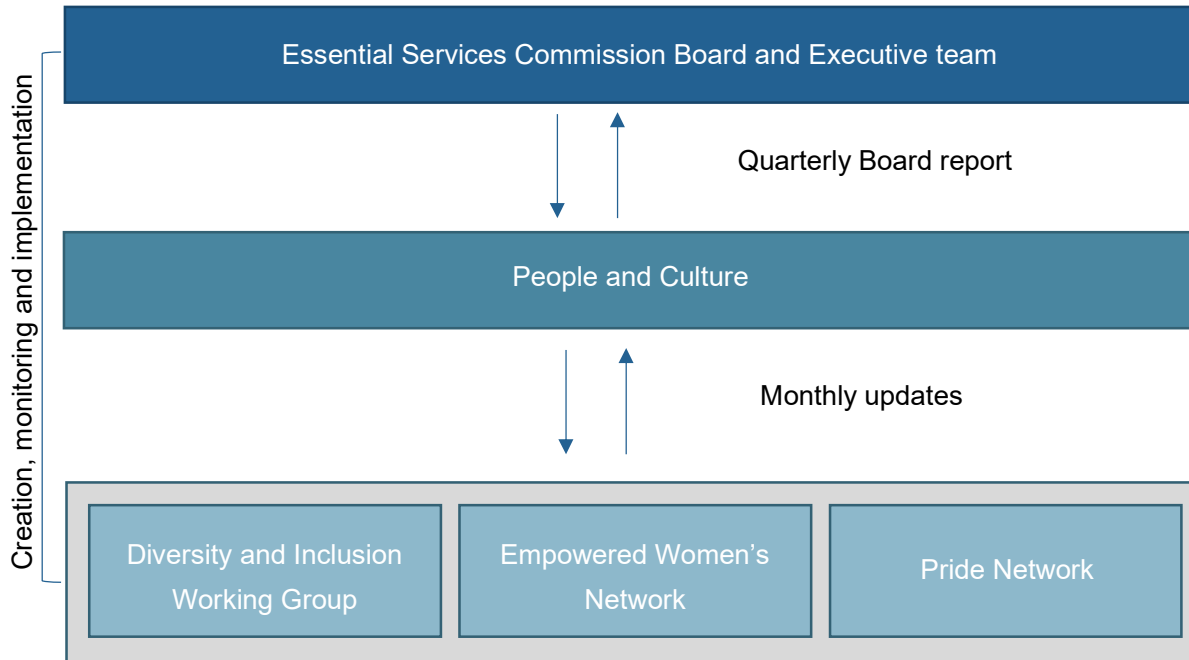
Strategy/action	Accountability	Success indicators	timeline
Prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace – continuing our positive obligation practices	Board Executive People leaders People and Culture	Our staff know how to and feel comfortable reporting inappropriate workplace behaviours including sexual harassment.	2021–2025
A safe space for people experiencing family violence	People and Culture	Our staff know how to access our family violence resources and feel comfortable in accessing support if required.	2021–2025

Focus Area 4: Flexibility and workplace participation

Strategy/action	Accountability	Success indicators	timeline
Foster a culture of flexibility	Board Executive People and Culture People leaders	Our staff know how to find information on flexible work and feel comfortable requesting it. Staff using flexible work have access to same opportunities as those who do not. Balanced representation of flexible work uptake.	2021–2025

Leadership and resourcing our Gender Equality Action Plan

Governance structure



Our Board and Executive team were engaged and involved in consultations which assisted us to develop and refine this *Gender Equality Action Plan*. They are committed to supporting and improving gender equality at the commission.

Members of the People and Culture team completed the workplace gender audits, ran two rounds of consultation and prepared the action plan. Many of the strategies and measures fall under the remit of People and Culture and staggered implementation of activities will occur throughout the five-year plan.

One of the actions in this plan is to create a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. This group will work towards the goals and objectives under our people strategy and will also support and complete some of the actions in this plan, particularly intersectional actions.

The commission's Pride Network and Empowered Women's Network will also support this plan and assist in carrying out the actions. They have played a key role in contributing to the plan through the consultation sessions.

Measuring progress

The implementation of the *Gender Equality Action Plan*'s strategies and measures will be closely monitored and reported on to ensure that they are being actioned in a timely fashion.

Responsibility

People and Culture will have oversight of the strategies and measures and will monitor progress. People and Culture be supported by the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, commissioners and executive.

Reporting obligations

We will complete progress reports for the Commission for Gender Equality 31 October 2023 and 2025.

The strategies and measures will be reported to our governing body in our quarterly board meetings. We will also report to the executive team and broader commission regularly.

Internal review

We will conduct a review to evaluate this *Gender Equality Action Plan* at the start of 2025 and the process we went through to create it. We will identify what worked well and what could be improved for the 2025–2027 process and plan.

Tracking mechanism

We have tracked all our strategies and measures on a Gantt chart, which will be closely monitored and regularly updated.