

Gender Responsive Legislation:

What will it take?

Convened by the University of Technology Sydney, and with support from the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the “Gender Responsive Legislation: What will it take” roundtable discussion took place on 23 February 2022. The roundtable saw a network of global gender equality specialists come together to engage in a form of ‘collective sense-making’ in response to a simple but timely question: if we know what it takes to achieve gender equality, why does Australia remain such a gender unequal nation? The result of the network’s discussion is an academic and policy framework designed to help broaden the debate around feminist law making and to suggest what needs to be done in Australia.

Proposal: A National Gender Equality Act

We call for a **National Gender Equality Act**, in order to help foster a national ambition for a gender equal society. We call for pre- and post-legislative scrutiny to guarantee the enactment of gender-responsive legislation and its implementation, and the resources to do this. This heightened accountability could be achieved through a **Gender Equality Standing Committee in Australian Parliament**.

We also call for **greater accountability from the public sector** for the enactment, implementation and monitoring of those gender-responsive laws, including by the Australian Law Reform Commission. This will necessitate the systematic collection and dissemination of intersectional gender data by the public service, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Collectively, these initiatives would help Australia to meet our international women’s rights obligations.¹

When it comes to the design and enactment of a National Gender Equality Act, we have at hand global good practice² and emerging practice,³ as well as the benefits being reaped from Victoria’s Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)⁴ to learn from.

We do not attempt to speak for all individuals or groups of women but rather encourage existing gender equality consortiums, networks, collectives, community-based organisations, and other members of civil society to consider how a National Gender Equality Act may advance their priorities. Where relevant, we encourage you to incorporate this call for a National Gender Equality Act into your agendas for legislative change.”

Authors: Ramona Vijayarasa, Tina Huang, Heather Douglas AM, Jacqueline Mowbray, Susan Harris Rimmer, Leonora Risse, Marian Sawyer AO, Miranda Stewart, Commissioner Niki Vincent

¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Australia*, UN Doc CEDAW/C/AUS/CO/8 (25 July 2018) 5.

² European Commission (n2).

³ The White House Briefing Room (n4).

⁴ Victoria’s Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) <<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/gender-equality-act-2020>>.