So you think you don’t need feminism?

For most of my life I have been surrounded by women.

Most of my teachers and a fair few of my bosses have been women.

These are women who know, and get, what they want.

But for most women in WA, management is leadership can be a distant concept in their careers.

We are the state with the largest and growing gender pay gap at over 25 per cent. Companies without women on their boards are more likely to be headquartered in Perth than any other city.

The WA Government has only three women in 17 cabinet roles, and the Supreme Court has only three women out of 21 judges.

On Wednesday, the Committee for Perth launched their Filling the Pool report, where lead researcher, Dr Terry Fitzsimmons, noted that gender diversity and equality made social and economic sense.

"The data and evidence is there," he said.

This was a call echoed by the Minister for Women’s Interests, Liza Harvey, who said that for WA to continue to lead the nation, we needed to invest and back diversity.

Of the women interviewed by Dr Fitzsimmons, 90 per cent found that taking flexible work actually halted their career. And while managers say that direct discrimination is a “thing of the past”, 50 per cent of the women who took part in the study could cite current experiences.

These are neither new nor shocking realisations.

WA business needs to ask how this can be changed - even when the process seems long and arduous.

I am the first to admit that this journey won’t be easy, but the Filling the Pool report is a road map.

Given that a lot of the research around gender diversity can be Sydney and Melbourne centric, this report provides many answers for WA specifically.

Perth can be a harsh city. It can be cliquey, complex and confined.

In light of this, Perth-based managers and CEOs don’t consider it a strategic priority, even though global businesses such as McKinsey, Goldman Sachs, PwC and many others have been telling us for more than a decade that it is.

If the men who run corporate Perth want to change the game, build the economy, their businesses and support women, it's simple: they can.
The interviewees all pointed to a lack of quality, affordable and accessible childcare. This is an undeniable impediment to supporting women's workforce participation.

By recommending that organisations must consider this issue from the top, the duty lies with managers to think deeply about what they can do. Are they biased against women? Are they reaching diversity quotas? Are they acting in the best interests of their organisation?

Resolving the childcare issue is paramount. With only one childcare centre in the CBD - at the bottom of Brookfield Place - and the next closest one in West Perth, we are at crisis point. The demand is high and the need is there.

However, no woman, or person for that matter, wants to be a token to simply fill a quota.

Just by being considered for a position already means certain requirement standards have been met.

But a seat at the table is a seat nonetheless.

By not using the talent of women in our city we all lose, this is a brain-drain of astronomical proportions. The flow-on effect is that not only do women fail to utilise their education in the workforce, the recruitment base for industry becomes significantly more shallow.

We cannot sit on our hands anymore.

Conrad Liveris is an advocate, adviser and researcher on the politics and economics of diversity.