Top women push harder for equality

WA has the highest gender pay gap in the nation, but many of the state’s female business leaders are working on addressing equality in the workplace.

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A NUMBER of influential Western Australian businesswomen are keen to use their recent national recognition to push for more action on gender equality in the state.

Committee for Perth chief executive Marion Fulker told Business News enacting change required a long-term concerted effort.

Ms Fulker said the committee’s research, Filling the Pool!, had revealed state-specific barriers stopping WA women staying in work or progressing to executive levels and had provoked many conversations.

Ms Fulker, one of six WA women recognised last month in a national award for 100 women of influence, said she was proud the report’s roadmap of recommendations for women, men, government and organisations had driven home the point that equality for women was not just a women’s issue.

She said she had spent the past few months presenting the findings to interested companies and industry groups and would continue to engage with them to push for change.

Erica Smyth, who was also recognised in the awards, run by the Australian Financial Review and Westpac, told Business News she would still like to see more women running not-for-profit organisations, particularly to encourage greater and more regular donations from females.

The prominent resources leader, board member and Diabetes Research WA chair, said women in leadership positions often liked to focus on and recognise people, in a more personal approach that helped motivate workers to be more productive and happier in their jobs, and also reduced staff turnover.

Founder and chair of Women in Oil and Gas, Veena Mendez, GE Oil & Gas regional director Mary Hackett, and construction and mining leader Sharon Warburton were also recognised as one of 100 women of influence.

Ms Warburton, who this year founded Steelheels.com.au as an online toolbox for women seeking advice on how to progress their careers, said she wanted to be a role model for other women to make an impact in traditionally male-dominated industries like construction and mining.

‘I hear often from emerging leaders that they wish they could see more female role models, it is important we are active and visible to (be able to) help others,’ she said. Elizabeth Constable, WA’s longest-serving female state minister and current vice-chancellor’s fellow at the University of Western Australia, told Business News, the political sector still had a long way to go in facilitating greater female participation.

‘If you look at the numbers of women that have been in the Western Australian parliament ... since 1890, there’s been 83 women,’ she said.

‘There were only eight women before 1983 and then when I was elected in 1991, I was the 21st (woman). That’s just extraordinary.’

The former education minister, who was also named as a top 100 woman, said while women outnumbered male schoolteachers, leadership positions such as principals were often held by men.

However, she said she was pleased to see especially in state schools and universities, including UWA, that a lot more had been achieved and was continuing to encourage women into leadership positions in the education sector.

The mining sector has also become a more welcoming place for women, according to Bronwyn Barnes, who recently was named exceptional woman in Australian resources in the women in resources national awards.

The executive chair of Windward Resources, who is a proponent of quotas and targets as a way to promote greater female participation, said the focus now had to be on getting women into more senior roles and changing gender-biased language.

‘Women can sometimes be called bossy instead of having leadership potential, manipulative as opposed to having strategic leadership skills,’ she said.

Fellow winner in the women in resources national awards was oil and gas company Santos for its gender equality program that has contributed to women now making up 25 per cent of its workforce.

As part of a range of initiatives, including pay equality, training programs that remove unconscious bias and gender-balanced graduate intakes, Santos has set up a superannuation top-up program during parental leave, in recognition of Australian women on average having about half the super of men.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our client, the Building and Construction Industry Training Board manages the Construction Training Fund which has the key strategic goal of increasing the number of skilled workers in the building and construction industry.

Since its inception, the Construction Training Fund has supported the training and employment of more than 48,000 apprentices and trainees and has helped over 140,000 industry workers to upgrade their skills.

With the pending retirement of its current Executive Director, the Building & Construction Industry Training (BCIT) Board now seeks to appoint a new person to this key leadership position.

The Executive Director will lead a team of approximately 20 and be focused on supporting the BCIT Board in its strategic planning and management of the Construction Industry Training Fund. The Fund uses resources derived from a training levy on construction projects to support training and employment programs within the industry.

We seek an individual who has initiative, advanced leadership capabilities and the capacity to build and maintain respected relationships across the construction industry and its key stakeholders. The Construction Training Fund is self-funded and therefore the Executive Director must have the capacity to apply strong commercial aptitude whilst working in a public sector environment.

An Application Pack may be obtained by contacting Kerian Greenaway at Lester Blades – Executive Search, Selection & Retention at kerian@lesterblades.com.au (please quote Reference L8101793).

Applications close 5.00pm Monday 12 October 2015.

Telephone enquiries may be made to Tony Lester on 08 9221 0744.

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