WA women do not want quotas that would force companies to have a certain number of women on boards.

The lead researcher behind a study released yesterday said that overwhelmingly Perth women did not want to follow Europe and use the method to address gender inequality.

Terrance Fitzsimmons of the University of Queensland said women believed quotas at board or executive level would lead to doubt about whether women in senior roles got there on merit.

Report attacks boys club culture

The Committee for Perth- commissioned study was based on interviews with 173 women and men in Perth over two years.

"What was being said - and the research backs this up very clearly - is that quotas raises doubt in everyone's mind," Dr Fitzsimmons said.

"The person who is the beneficiary of the appointment wonders whether they got that on their strengths or whether they got that because they were a number and everyone around them - and this is probably more important - undermines that position. It gives them an excuse to attack."

The study also reported concerns quotas could lead to "less capable people" taking on roles.

Dr Fitzsimmons said opposition was "overwhelming" across all groups, which included chief executives, chairpersons, executive recruiters, graduates and women who had left the corporate world.

As a result, the study's recommendations for how companies could
tackle gender inequality did not include quotas. Instead, it proposed “targets with teeth” and policies to deliver them.

Some European countries, including Norway, Spain and France, have introduced affirmative action quotas in an attempt to boost the number of women in senior roles. In Norway, though equality was achieved at the boardroom level within about 18 months, it did not translate into more women chief executives.

Australia’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick has backed introducing quotes in Australia, where they have long been contentious.

The study painted a picture of Perth’s corporate “boys’ club” where women were excluded from jobs, promotions and networking opportunities. Other recommendations for companies were to conduct pay equity audits and consider on-site childcare.

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