

Ms Antonella Rodriguez
President - Women Lawyers' Association of South Australia Inc

12 October 2025

Marie Boland
Chief Executive Officer
Safe Work Australia

Dear Ms Boland

Re: Safe Work Australia Best Practice Review of Model Work Health & Safety Laws & Regulations

The Women Lawyers' Association of South Australia Inc. (**WLASA**) thank Safe Work Australia for the opportunity to provide input into the Best Practice Review of Model Work Health & Safety Laws & Regulations.

We acknowledge that the Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable Anthony Albanese MP has declared a National Crisis of Gender-Based Violence.¹

When the risk is serious harm or death, as it is with work-related gendered violence, regulatory intervention is imperative. In this National Crisis of Gender-Based Violence, our model work health and safety laws and regulations remain largely silent on this issue.² This gap leaves women, particularly women with intersecting identities, vulnerable to violence at work.³

With approximately **2.7 million workers** experiencing work-related sexual harassment and approximately **1.8 million workers** experiencing work-related bullying each year, and fewer than **1% of workers making a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission and Fair Work Commission**, our current approach to preventing work-related gendered violence remains largely reactive and complaints based.⁴

WLASA therefore urgently calls upon Safe Work Australia to amend model work health and safety regulations to specifically prevent work-related gender-based violence, including harassment and bullying, as a safety hazard, placing the responsibility for prevention in the hands of employers and ensuring that those with decision-making power are held accountable for preventing harm before it occurs.

This is an issue that holds importance to our members and stakeholders because these issues affect our everyday working lives and the lives of the people we represent. Like many other women, we have seen and experienced the impact of unsafe, unequal, or dismissive workplace cultures. Sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of gendered violence are not abstract risks. They are real, harmful, and far too common.

¹ The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister of Australia. (2024). No more: National rally against gender based violence march. Prime Minister of Australia. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/no-more-national-rally-against-gender-based-violence-march>.

² Parsons, S., and Haban-Beer, A. (2024). Safety Regulation for Primary Prevention of Gendered Violence. Australian Women Lawyers. <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/1-Australian-Women-Lawyers-Submission-31.7.24.pdf>.

³ Parsons, S., and Haban-Beer, A. (2024). Safety Regulation for Primary Prevention of Gendered Violence. Australian Women Lawyers. <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/1-Australian-Women-Lawyers-Submission-31.7.24.pdf>.

⁴ Smith, B. (2023). Respect@Work Amendments - A Positive Reframing of Australia's Sexual Harassment Laws. Australian Journal of Labour Law. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4640802.

As women working in the legal profession, we are also in a unique position. We not only navigate these challenges ourselves, but we also support and empower clients who face them. We see the damage caused when workplaces fail to prevent harm, and we know how difficult it can be for people, especially those already facing disadvantage, to come forward or seek justice under a system that places the burden on individuals to make complaints.

That is why we believe prevention must be at the centre of our work health and safety laws. It should not be up to workers alone to speak out after harm has already occurred. Employers and regulators need to take clear and proactive steps to create safe environments from the outset.

For us, this is about more than regulation. It is about fairness, accountability, and the kind of workplaces we all deserve. Making gender-based violence a recognised safety risk under work health and safety laws is a critical step toward ensuring that no one has to choose between their safety and their job.

Yours faithfully



Antonella Rodriguez

President

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