

Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2030

Summary



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Message from the Secretary

I am pleased to introduce DEECA's Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) 2026–2030. The Plan builds on progress under our previous Action Plan, including work to support career development, strengthen leadership capability and improve equitable access to flexible work.

It has been shaped by workforce data, consultation and the lived experience of our people, giving us a clearer understanding of the structural, cultural and intersectional barriers that continue to affect opportunity, progression and inclusion across the department.

DEECA's Gender Equality Action Plan sets out a practical agenda for change. It is guided by four pillars:

- visible and accountable leadership
- systems and processes designed for people first
- a stronger culture of gender equality
- equitable access to opportunity and growth.

Aligned to DEECA's broader Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2026-2029, the Gender Equality Action Plan supports an active citizenship approach to inclusion and recognises that sustainable change depends on the systems we put in place and the everyday actions we take. The Plan recognises that gender inequality can be compounded by other forms of disadvantage and exclusion, including those related to First Nations identity, disability, cultural background, sexual orientation and age. Applying an intersectional gender lens will help ensure our actions support broader, department-wide outcomes.

Achieving these outcomes is a shared responsibility, and accountable leadership is crucial. Executive and senior leaders set the conditions for change by making expectations clear, modelling inclusive behaviours, acting when barriers are identified, and ensuring decisions lead to fair, measurable and lasting outcomes.

This Plan reinforces the department's commitment to ongoing progress in building an equitable and inclusive workforce where people are treated fairly, barriers are addressed and everyone is supported to contribute fully.



Kate Houghton PSM (she/her)

Secretary, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action



About this document

This document provides a summary of DEECA's Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) 2026–2030. It is intended to make the Plan easier to navigate by highlighting the key workforce insights, priorities and actions that will guide DEECA's work to strengthen gender equality.

Where data is presented by gender, it reflects reporting requirements set by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS) and may include women, men and self-described gender. We recognise that gender is diverse and may not be fully reflected by these categories.

This summary should be read alongside the full Plan submitted to CGEPS, which includes the detailed analysis, measures and reporting requirements that underpin this work. A link to the full Plan is included at [Appendix 2](#).



Gender equality at DEECA

Shifting systems, behaviours and everyday workplace experience take sustained effort, clear accountability and a willingness to keep learning from data, consultation and lived experience.



Gender equality at DEECA sits within a broader organisational commitment to inclusion, cultural safety and respectful workplaces. Our organisational pillars shape how we work and what we expect of each other. We have trusted leadership and inclusive culture, Aboriginal self-determination, strong partnerships and service excellence, empowered people, and high performance all reinforcing the conditions needed for equitable outcomes.

The GEAP is one of DEECA's several identity-based action plans that give practical effect to this commitment, alongside the:

- Access and Inclusion Plan 2026–2029
- Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2025–2029
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2025–2030
- Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020–2025

Together, these plans are supported by organisation-wide enablers such as the Leadership Model, Safe and Respectful Workplaces framework and Staff-Led Networks, which help translate commitment into everyday practice.

DEECA's previous GEAP contributed to meaningful progress across workforce commitments and organisational systems. It supported practical changes to leadership development, recruitment and workplace policy, all helping to build stronger foundations for more equitable outcomes. This progress matters, but it also reinforces that culture change does not happen quickly.

Some of the progress made under the previous GEAP includes:

- ✓ Expanded mentoring, coaching and visibility initiatives to support women's leadership and career development, including women in STEM, women in Water and Catchments, and women of colour.
- ✓ Addressed practical barriers in Bushfire and Forest Services through improvements such as better-fitting protective clothing and changes to leadership pathways and roster design.
- ✓ Strengthened inclusive recruitment and workforce policy settings, including intersectional policy reviews and dedicated guidance to support staff affirming their gender.
- ✓ Built capability and prevention efforts through gender impact assessment uplift and stronger responses to family and domestic violence in policy and practice.

Gender workforce audit*

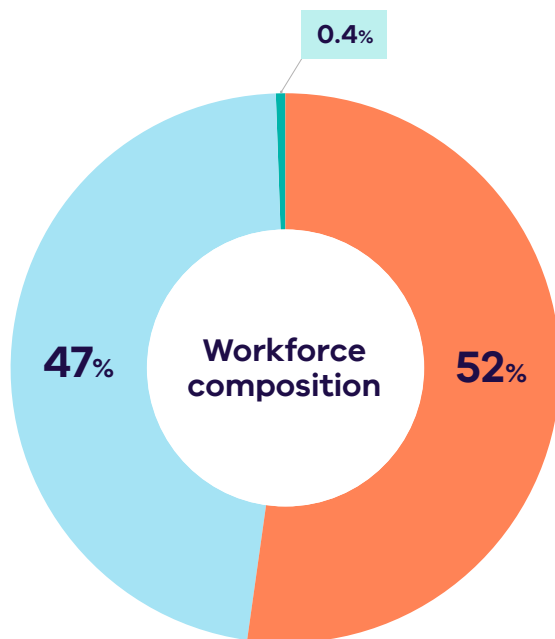
The workforce gender audit looks at DEECA's workforce data across key areas such as composition, recruitment, promotion, pay, flexible work, leave and safety. The summary below compares the department's 2025 results with the previous audit in 2023.

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, except where they are less than 1%.

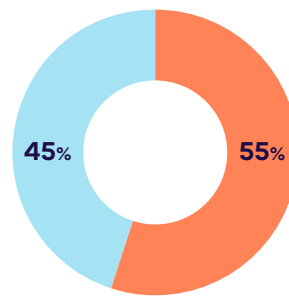


Overall workforce –

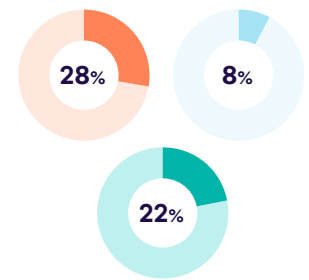
Our workforce is broadly balanced



Senior leadership



Part-time work



● Women ● Men ● Self-described

What this means

While overall gender balance between women and men remains stable, this doesn't always translate to equal workforce participation. Women remain overrepresented in part-time roles and self-described genders are absent from senior leadership.

Caring and flexibility –

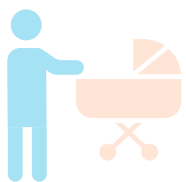
Caring is still unevenly shared

Parental leave:



30 weeks

(up from 29 weeks in 2023)



7 weeks

(up from 6 weeks in 2023)

● Women ● Men

Perceptions of access to **flexible work** are lower for self-described genders (72%) than women (88%) or men (84%)

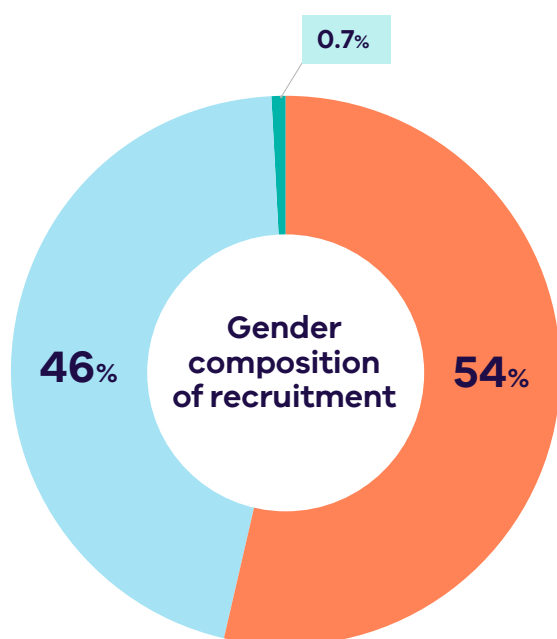
Access to **carer's leave increased for all**, but women still take more than men (34% vs 32% men, 37% self-described)

What this means

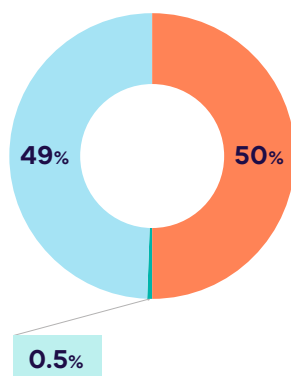
Caring responsibilities remain gendered. While more men than women accessed parental leave in 2025, women still take much longer. While flexible work is available in policy, confidence in accessing it is not equal — especially for self-described genders. Over time, this can affect access to opportunities, progression and pay.

Recruitment and promotion fairness –

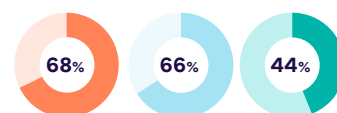
Confidence in recruitment and promotion is not the same for everyone



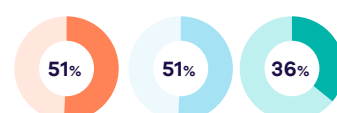
Gender composition of promotions



Perception of recruitment fairness



Perception of promotion fairness



Women Men Self-described

What this means

While outcomes can appear balanced, confidence in how decisions are made varies across the workforce. Not all staff experience recruitment and promotion processes as fair or transparent.

Safety and reporting –

Not everyone feels safe to report harmful behaviour



have experienced sexual harassment (self-described unavailable).

Of these, only 7% of women and 4% of men reported it.

What this means

Harmful behaviour is under-reported, with trust and safety concerns persisting. Intersectional groups (disability, LGBTIQ+) report higher rates of harm.

Barriers to reporting:

I didn't think it was serious enough

(most common)

I didn't think it would make a difference.

I was concerned about negative consequences.

Occupational segregation – Gender still shapes where people work

Community & personal service workers:



72% men

Clerical & admin:



64% women

Professionals:



56% women, 44% men, 0.5% self-described

● Women ● Men ● Self-described



What this means

Even with overall workforce balance between men and women, gender patterns remain across occupations. These patterns all influence progression, pay and access to higher-value opportunities.

Pay equity – The overall pay gap doesn't tell the full story



On average, women's total pay was slightly higher than men's, with the gap shifting from 0.3% in favour of men in 2023 to 4% in favour of women.

Staff with **self-described genders** continued to experience a pay gap in both total pay and base salary, although the total **pay gap reduced slightly from -12% in 2023 to -11%**.

● Women ● Men ● Self-described

The median **base salary gap** remained at 0% for women and 10% for staff with self-described genders.

Pay gaps also remain in some **occupational groups**, including Technicians and Trades, and Labourers.

Why this matters

While overall pay results are positive for women, this does not mean pay equity has been achieved for everyone. Pay gaps can still appear in particular roles, levels or occupations, and staff with self-described genders continue to experience poorer pay outcomes.

Consultation

Together with workforce audit data, staff consultation helped ensure this Plan reflected the lived experience of staff across the department.

Between February and March 2026, department staff, staff representatives, leaders and other key stakeholders were invited to share their experiences and views on gender equality in the workplace.

To support a considered and inclusive approach, GenderWorks Australia was engaged to design and facilitate the consultation process.



Consultation included online and in-person focus groups, individual discussions and an anonymous all-staff survey. This gave people different ways to contribute, depending on their role, location, availability and comfort level.

In total, 115 staff took part in 12 facilitated focus groups.

This included dedicated sessions with staff-led networks and their executive champions, Safe and Respectful Workplaces Champions, Group culture and workforce partners, the First Peoples Employment and Development team, and members of the department's Diversity and Inclusion Council.

Three focus groups were open to all staff, including one in-person session in Melbourne. Two additional sessions focused on the department's key operational and functional areas. Across the consultation process, there was representation from each DEECA Group, helping ensure the Plan was informed by a broad range of operational, regional and corporate perspectives.

An anonymous all-staff survey also broadened participation and captured additional perspectives. The survey received 118 detailed responses and was promoted through internal channels including Ada, Viva Engage and leadership forums. Employee representatives, including the Community and Public Sector Union, were also invited to participate and share the survey.

Senior leaders and other key decision-makers were consulted through targeted discussions. These conversations helped test audit findings, explore system-level drivers of inequality, and consider practical, sustainable and meaningful actions aligned with existing priorities and commitments.

What we heard through consultation directly shaped the priorities and actions in this Plan.

Proposed actions were considered by the People and Culture Executive Team and the Diversity and Inclusion Council before being formally endorsed by DEECA's Board of Management.



Our guiding pillars



1 Leading with accountability and action

Gender equitable leadership at every level.

Gender equality at DEECA is driven through visible and accountable leadership at every level. Leaders shape culture, influence access to opportunity, and address structural drivers of inequality reflected in workforce data, including representation, progression and pay.

This pillar focuses on strengthening governance, capability and decision-making to embed gender and intersectional considerations into everyday practice. While responsibility is shared, leaders set the standard by modelling inclusive behaviours and ensuring systems and decisions deliver equitable and measurable outcomes.



2 Designing for people first

A workplace that works for everyone.

Workplace systems designed with people in mind are more likely to deliver equitable outcomes.

This pillar focuses on embedding gender-responsive and intersectional design across recruitment, job design, flexibility, leave and access to opportunity. Designing for people first means recognising different patterns of workforce participation and addressing barriers early, rather than expecting individuals to adapt. Improving consistency and transparency in how processes are applied will reduce bias, strengthen fairness in progression, and support a workplace that works for everyone.



3

Building a culture of gender equality

Inclusion is how we work, not an add-on.

A culture of gender equality is reflected in everyday behaviours, interactions and decisions.

This pillar focuses on embedding inclusion into how work is done across the organisation, supported by clear expectations, capability development and shared accountability. It includes preventing and addressing gender bias, stereotypes, discrimination and sexual harassment, and strengthening confidence in reporting and response mechanisms. Consistent reinforcement through leadership and practice builds trust, cultural safety and a workplace where all staff feel respected and able to contribute.



4

Supporting people to thrive

Growth, recognition, and opportunity at every stage of the employee journey.

Gender equality is realised when all staff have equitable access to opportunity, development and recognition.

This pillar focuses on improving fairness and transparency across progression pathways, development opportunities and workplace supports. Workforce data highlights ongoing barriers, including unequal access to higher duties, flexibility and career development. Addressing these barriers will support more equitable participation and progression, reduce the risk of pay inequity over time, and ensure staff can grow and succeed in ways that reflect their skills and circumstances.

Pillar 1:

Leading with accountability and action

Action	Timeline	Outcome	Owner
Action 1: Embed an intersectional gendered lens in all new and in-house leadership products to ensure equitable and culturally safe content.	2026-2030	• New and existing leadership initiatives are designed with an intersectional gender lens, fostering leadership capability that is inclusive and culturally safe.	People and Culture
Action 2: Strengthen and maintain DEECA's existing mentoring and career development programs by applying an intersectional gendered lens to support equitable career progression.	2026-2030	• Increased access to mentoring and career development opportunities for diverse employees. • Increased organisational awareness of DEECA's existing programs.	People and Culture
Action 3: Deliver an annual briefing program for the Board of Management and the Diversity and Inclusion Council on diversity, equity and inclusion legislation and compliance obligations.	2027-2030	• Board of Management and Diversity and Inclusion Council members' decision-making is informed by diversity, equity and inclusion obligations, promoting gender-balanced representation across governing bodies.	People and Culture



Pillar 2:

Designing for people first

Action	Timeline	Outcome	Owner
Action 4: Establish regular data collection and reporting to enable the identification of gender equality hot spots and the development of strategies to progress gender equality.	2028–2030	Regular reporting of the intersectional composition of the workforce and experiences will support the development of targeted strategies to ensure greater gender equity across DEECA.	People and Culture
Action 5: Embed recommendations from the Safe and Respectful Workplaces Framework evaluation to ensure support provided in response to reports of harmful workplace behaviour is trauma-informed and person-centred.	2027–2028	- Support provided is trauma-informed and person-centred. - Enhance staff capability to consider the impacts of trauma when receiving complaints and provide active measures to avoid re-traumatisation.	People and Culture
Action 6: Embed the Safe and Respectful Workplaces program into the employee lifecycle to promote consistent behaviours, normalise bystander action, and strengthen capability to prevent bias and harm.	2028–2030	- Employees consistently demonstrate behaviours aligned with Safe and Respectful Workplaces principles, with increased confidence to take bystander action and contribute to a safe and inclusive workplace. - Reduced intersectional gendered stereotypes and bias in the workplace.	People and Culture
Action 7: Maintain and actively promote DEECA's diversity and inclusion recruitment assets to strengthen inclusive recruitment practices.	2026–2030	- Increased applicant confidence in sharing attributes during the recruitment process. - Increased perceptions of fairness in recruitment processes.	People and Culture

Pillar 3:

Building a culture of gender equality

Action	Timeline	Outcome	Owner
Action 8: Embed foundational inclusive recruitment practices within the mandatory Managers Essential training program.	2026-2027	- New and existing managers have increased understanding of gender equality and how it applies to recruitment and promotion processes. - Consistent people leader baseline awareness of equitable, bias-aware recruitment practices, free from discrimination.	People and Culture
Action 9: Enhance guidance, communication and learning products relating to leave and flexible working arrangements (including the appeals process) to ensure they are practical, policy-aligned and inclusive.	2028	Updated flexible work and leave resources (utilising case studies), to provide clear guidance to leaders and support a range of staff seeking flexible work arrangements.	People and Culture
Action 10: Standardise gender equality and inclusive capability into all people leader roles with clear accountability to share and reinforce key workforce information with their teams.	2029-2030	- People leaders can identify any barriers to inclusion in their workplace. - People leaders demonstrate a consistent level of understanding and application of gender equality, ensuring their teams receive accurate, timely and equitable guidance.	People and Culture



Pillar 4:

Supporting people to thrive

Action	Timeline	Outcome	Owner
Action 11: Develop a 'Policy to Practice' series highlighting workplace policies to increase understanding, awareness and consistent implementation in a gender equitable, inclusive, and culturally safe way.	2026–2030	- Increased understanding of the breadth of policies applicable across DEECA. - Increased understanding and consistency in the application of policies by people leaders.	People and Culture
Action 12: Build capability to consistently apply existing policies and frameworks for higher-value duties, acting opportunities and secondments, particularly within field-based roles.	2029–2030	- Increased perceptions of fairness for promotion practices with field-based, frontline roles. - Increased transparency in decision-making in temporary promotional appointments.	People and Culture
Action 13: Embed Gender Impact Assessments (GIA) into business processes for Groups through the development of supplementary tools and guidance.	2027–2028	Gender Impact Assessments support DEECA to deliver policies and programs without gender bias. By embedding a structured approach to reporting on GIAs we can better meet compliance regulations set by CGEPS.	People and Culture



Governance, reporting and accountability

DEECA has established governance arrangements to support the development, implementation and oversight of the Plan. Executive oversight is provided through DEECA's Board of Management and Diversity and Inclusion Council. The Diversity and Inclusion Council oversees the department's inclusion practices and related action plans, including gender equality.

The Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging team within People and Culture will lead implementation in partnership with responsible functional leads and in collaboration with relevant Staff-Led Networks.

A detailed GEAP implementation plan will be finalised, with progress monitored through established reporting processes and periodically reported to the Diversity and Inclusion Council over the life of the Plan. A progress report will be submitted to CGEPS every two years, and any proposed adjustments to actions will be assessed by DEECA's Board of Management.

Progress against the Plan will be monitored using the CGEPS indicators, with data considered through an intersectional lens where possible. This includes measures relating to workforce composition, recruitment and promotion, flexible work and caring, pay equity, and workplace safety. Monitoring these indicators over time will support identification of structural barriers and guide targeted responses.



Records of decisions, actions and progress will be maintained to support transparency, internal assurance and compliance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic).



Appendices

Appendix 1: The strategic environment

Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic): Commencing in March 2021, the Act requires the Victorian Public Sector (VPS) to take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality, reporting to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

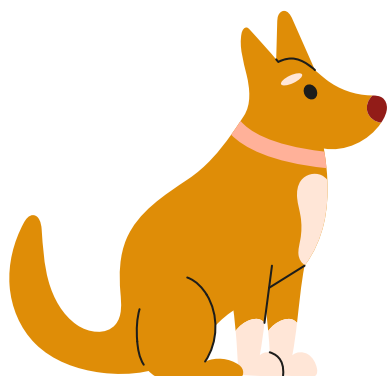
Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth): The federal Act prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination.

Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic): Requires employers to take positive action to eliminate discrimination (including sex discrimination and sexual harassment).

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (Vic): Sets out the basic rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people in Victoria. The Charter requires public authorities, including Victorian government departments, to act consistently with the human rights in the Charter.

Public Administration Act 2004 (Vic): The public sector values and employment principles require that equal employment opportunity is provided and human rights (as set out in the Charter) are upheld.

Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (Vic): Sets out the Victorian treaty process to address historic and ongoing injustices through the treaty process.



Gender Equality Act

This plan is aligned with key Victorian legislation, including the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*. The Act aims to improve workplace gender equality in the Victorian Public Sector, universities and local councils.

Under the Gender Equality Act, we must:

- prepare and implement a gender equality action plan, which includes results of a workplace gender audit and strategies and measures for promoting gender equality in the workplace.
- publicly report on progress on workplace gender equality.
- complete gender impact assessments on all new or revised policies, programs or services which have a direct and significant impact on the public.

Objectives of the Gender Equality Act:

- To promote, encourage and facilitate the achievement of gender equality and improvement in the status of women.
- To support the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs and delivery of services in workplaces and communities.
- To recognise that gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes.
- To redress disadvantage, address stigma, stereotyping, prejudice and violence, and accommodate people of different genders by way of structural change.
- To enhance economic and social participation by persons of different genders.
- To further promote the right to equality set out in the Charter and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Appendix 2: Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)

DEECA's GEAP was submitted to CGEPS in May 2026, in line with legislative requirements. At the time of publishing this summary, the Plan is under assessment by CGEPS.

Access to full GEAP

The full GEAP template submitted to CGEPS is available [here](#).

Reading the full Plan alongside this summary will provide more detail on the gender pay equity principles, intersectionality, and the gender equality indicators, actions and measures that underpin this work. Any updates following the CGEPS assessment process will be reflected in future reporting.



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