



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Creating a positive work environment for female staff to thrive

In July 2021, the Elizabeth Reid Network (ERN) provided a submission to the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces. It details the experiences and stories of hundreds of current and former female staff. It draws on data collected from an anonymous workplace culture survey which 227 ERN members participated in during April/May 2021 as well as data from ERN online forums, research and face-to-face events.

The majority of survey respondents had experienced sexual harassment, gendered discrimination and bullying whilst working as a staffer. There were also many incidents of sexual assault recorded.

Below is a summary of our key recommendations. Through the recommendations we are seeking to achieve **a safer workplace in political offices, with an inclusive and positive culture where women can thrive.**

Our recommendations focus on change in four key areas:

- Complaints handling
- Culture
- Women's participation
- Human resources

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

REACTIVE MEASURES (how to handle incidents of bullying and harassment, once they occur)

Measures to improve complaints handling

1. Establish an independent authority for sexual harassment complaints
2. Provide Staff and MP training on complaints handling
3. Establish and promote professional counselling services
4. Develop a retrospective complaints function

PROACTIVE MEASURES (ways to reduce the incidence of bullying and harassment)

Measures to improve culture

5. Develop a Code of conduct
6. Foster a culture of respect*
7. Develop a protocol on alcohol use
8. Establish and promote alcohol-free networking opportunities*
9. Institutionalise better working hours and conditions*

Measures to increase women's participation

10. Establish a measure for public reporting of female staff participation
11. Set gender quotas for senior staff*
12. Establish mentoring opportunities*
13. Promote professional development
14. Establish a sabbatical program (for staffers to have opportunities for secondments in other workplaces)*

Stronger human resources support

15. Onboarding and management training for staff and MPs
16. Establish an independent HR Department for political staff

*These recommendations are best placed for political parties to lead, with support from the public service, the remainder should be led by the public service, with strong support from political parties.