

## Women executives stuck in the minority in top 2000 Australian companies

Timna Jacks and Clancy Yeates

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Senior positions in Australia's top companies have grown by 20 per cent in the past five years. But less than one-fifth of those roles belong to women.

An IBISWorld analysis shows women are still being kept out of senior management and board positions at the country's top 2000 companies.

Women make up just 23 per cent of leadership roles – a modest rise from 20 per cent five years ago.

And women have remained out of the top jobs, with the lowest female representation in the roles of chief executive officer, chairman of the board, chief information officer and chief operating officer.

"This means that there is still significant work to be done in achieving equal representation of women in top positions," said IBISWorld senior industry analyst Brooke Tonkin.

The data comes as Westpac on Friday unveiled a new effort to lift the number of senior women in the bank, via a program to recruit experienced female leaders from industries outside banking.

Chief executive Brian Hartzler also confirmed the bank would retain its goal of having 50 per cent of its leadership positions filled by women by 2017, compared with 44 per cent today.

The other big four banks also have diversity targets and are taking steps to meet them. [But the Abbott government last month watered down mandated gender reporting requirements](#), with ANZ boss Mike Smith saying it could dent the ability of companies to meet targets to increase women.

Aside from the symbolic value of targets such as these, Mr Hartzler stressed that gender diversity should be seen against the "economic imperative" to lift female participation in the workforce.

"This is not just another corporate social issue, although it is that," he said. "It is actually a really important business issue for the nation."

The IBIS World analysis also showed sectors dominated by men are continuing to put men at the helm, while female-dominated companies are putting women in positions of power.

The proportion of women in senior roles was the highest in healthcare and social assistance (40 per cent), education and training (36 per cent), administrative and support services (31 per cent) and finance and insurance services (28 per cent).

Female representation was lower in mining (14 per cent), agriculture, forestry and fishing (15 per cent) construction (17 per cent) and manufacturing (17 per cent).

"Women have made their mark in the healthcare and social assistance sector, particularly within hospitals and state health departments," Ms Tonkin said.

IBISWorld senior industry analyst David Whytcross said low female representation in the mining sector was due to the discrepancy in the numbers of men and women with engineering qualifications, coupled with a long history of men working within mining companies.

But data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency indicated male-dominated industries like mining and electricity, gas and waste services, are doing better at putting women through the management levels.

Executive director of Women on Boards Australia Claire Braund said the government sector should lead the way for the corporate world on gender equality in the workplace.

"If government exists to lead in society, then government has an obligation to go beyond that of the corporate sector. You can't go around telling the corporate sector what to do if you're not doing well yourself."

She said it was not good enough to have programs in place designed to bolster women in leadership, without genuine support from senior executives.

"You can't just say HR is taking care of it while the CEO carries on doing whatever they were doing. It takes a cultural shift from the bottom to top. And that can't be quite hard."

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/women-executives-stuck-in-the-minority-in-top-2000-australian-companies-20150306-13wq5h.html>*