



**The art of theory, the reality of practice: Embracing  
or exploring the contrasts for meaningful gender  
outcomes in parliaments.**

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*53rd Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference, Adelaide, July 2024*

## Introduction

It has long been understood that we are seeking increased participation of women in parliaments and in public life. It has been a long and winding road since the first women were elected to an Australian parliament in 1943<sup>1</sup>, however, once the door was opened, it did not close. The first ACT Legislative Assembly (the Assembly) was formed in 1989 and was, as a national first, led by a female Chief Minister<sup>2</sup>. At this time women represented only 23% of elected members in the Assembly, however, the following term in 1992, this number rose to 35%<sup>3</sup> and in the second Assembly, the positions of Speaker, Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition were all held by women. Today the Assembly boasts a greater proportion of elected women than men and has since 2016.

Developing gender sensitive parliaments based on the four dimensions (see Appendix A) presents an opportunity for more diverse and inclusive representation of our communities. Notably, diverse and inclusive representation extends beyond gender and whilst the first dimension of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) gender sensitive parliaments focuses on equality of participation as it relates to those [identifying as] women, parliaments should actively seek and aspire to reflect diverse participation across a range of human characteristics, traits, experiences and backgrounds.

## Gender sensitive parliaments self-assessment

The Assembly was the first CPA Branch to participate in the Gender Sensitive Parliament (GSP) Self-Assessment. Moving forward, the GSP has been promoted through the CPA and there can be little doubt developing assessment tools and recommended measures to increase women's participation and identify ways parliaments can look to dismantle structural and systemic barriers to access, is itself a positive reflection of the ambitions and change still to come.

For the Assembly, the GSP exercise was one of highs and lows and it would be remiss not to accept that audits such as these do present challenges, particularly when harmonising concepts of academic policy and ambition, with the realities of responding to ambition in a way that effects meaningful outcomes and change. The relationship between academia and those tasked with implementing theories and frameworks, or in this case recommendations, calls for a balancing act with regard to generating ideas and implementing relevant, practical knowledge. It is also never easy when despite best intentions, efforts and personal drive, the deficits experienced by women in parliamentary settings, are easier to highlight than the seemingly small steps that eventually lead to large strides.

A mid-stride snapshot of the current legislature shows 56% female representation, five out of eight committee chair roles held by women, five out of nine ministerial roles are held by women, both the leader and deputy leader of the opposition are women, and I have been the third woman to occupy the role of speaker in the Assembly and am the longest serving speaker in the Assembly's history. There is in fact no doubt the Assembly has a powerful history of women occupying leadership and executive roles. In addition to gender representation, we have a broadly diverse parliament with members reflecting diverse attributes connected with ethnicity, religion, sexuality and neurodiversity.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit\\_Parliament/Art/Stories\\_and\\_Histories/Australias\\_first\\_women\\_parliamentarians](https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit_Parliament/Art/Stories_and_Histories/Australias_first_women_parliamentarians)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/visit-and-learn/resources/timelines/timeline-1900-1989>

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.elections.act.gov.au/elections\\_and\\_voting/past\\_act\\_legislative\\_assembly\\_elections/1992\\_election/list\\_of\\_elected\\_candidates\\_1992\\_election](https://www.elections.act.gov.au/elections_and_voting/past_act_legislative_assembly_elections/1992_election/list_of_elected_candidates_1992_election)

## Gender and diverse representation

In undertaking the GSP assessment, we thought the legislature would be well placed and potentially offer lived experiences of the increased and long-standing representation of women, and the intentional work which has been done to remove and reduce access barriers inside its walls. Accepting more work can always be done, it was a surprise to learn that from the GSP audits perspective, there were so many recommendations of structural and systemic changes needed to improve gender outcomes. (See Appendix C for full list of recommendations).

The Assembly, whilst notably making meaningful gains in many respects, was not met with recommendations suggestive of a parliament leading the way or championing gender and diverse representation. Rather, it seems from the lens of academia and understandable reliance on surveys and interviews as a primary source of information and data gathering, that we had some ways to go. Whilst we all accept the adage ‘there is always more we can do’, some in the Assembly were reminded, that between planning, achievements, aspiration and the ultimately desired outcome, there continues to be a dichotomy between theory and practice.

It is widely agreed and accepted, in both research and practice, that a plethora of evidence exists highlighting gender and diversity inequities in parliaments around the globe. Gender and diversity deficits are regrettably not an experience unique to parliaments, rather, reflected in organisations widely. It is often understood - certainly highlighted in research - that women remain underleveraged in many occupations and positions. Research often signals entrenched biases and systemic hurdles, however, it is also important to recognise that whilst it is easy to highlight deficits, in the context of achieving meaningful and realistic change, the Assembly is a parliamentary institution with tangible evidence of increased gender representation, female-led leadership, standing orders reflective of family-friendly practices and political parties committed to leveraging the strength, diversity, intellect and capacity of women.

When parliaments participate in audits and assessments such as the GSP, we must ask ourselves what is it that we are genuinely seeking to achieve and how can this be done in such a way that change is meaningful, able to be replicated and sustained. Appreciating the political environment always sits in the broader cultural and social framework that parliaments serve is contextually relevant when considering GSP report outcomes. It is also important to consider unintended consequences of developing gender and diversity quotas, for example, gender mainstreaming can have the intent of transforming gender inequalities, however, focusing on gains for one subset of society’s demographics, can lead to unintended outcomes such as reinforcing other inequalities for another demographic subset<sup>4</sup>.

Professor Childs in her report entitled ‘*The Good Parliament*’ identifies reforms which aim to make parliaments more representative, can be made on the grounds there is a connection between ‘who’ is present in our political institutions and the quality and legitimacy of our democratic processes. Signalling the representational relationship at the aggregate level between the institution of parliament and the people that it seeks to represent, descriptively, substantively and symbolically<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> MacDonald F and Zorianna A, eds (2020) ‘*Turbulent Times, Transformational Possibilities? Gender and Politics Today and Tomorrow*’, Ontario; University of Toronto Press, Print.

<sup>5</sup> Childs S (2016) ‘The Good Parliament’, University of Bristol, <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/news/2016/july/20%20Jul%20Prof%20Sarah%20Childs%20The%20Good%20Parliament%20report.pdf>

## The Assembly's representation

For its part, the Assembly and its members, are very clear on embedding principles of equity, fair representation, and inclusivity and whilst there is always more work that can be done to increase diverse representation, from a population and demographics lens, the Assembly is statistically and socially a reasonable reflection of the community it serves.

The ACT has approximately 466,500 citizens with a makeup of 48.3% males and 49.5% females<sup>6</sup>. A little over 300,000 members of our community are enrolled to vote<sup>7</sup>, and we have a unique regional makeup with multi-member electorates. The ACT has the Hare-Clark method of proportional representation as our electoral system. This gives voters a substantial choice at the ballot box not only between candidates representing particular political parties, but also between candidates within political parties. More women get elected where voters are able to have direct input into the choice of candidate with their preferred political party. Multi-member electorates similarly offer the advantage of having more diverse representation in each electorate, reducing homogeneity.

Through the gender lens, the election of women to political office—particularly where women's presence is highly visible to the public—has been shown to build greater connections between women and the democratic process. For women, seeing more women in positions in parliaments and politics, changes attitudes and orientations toward the democratic process<sup>8</sup>. Research is also very clear that empowering women in politics is intrinsically valuable to overall social development<sup>9</sup>. The Assembly, as should be the case with all parliaments, seeks to reflect the archetypes of our community broadly and this applies beyond the scope of gender. Accepting it is the community who we are seeking to mirror, contemporary representation in parliaments, as previously highlighted, extends to numerous attributes, experiences and characteristics.

The GSP report, through certain recommendations, invites the Assembly to gather, collate and disaggregate statistical data as it relates to gender and diversity inclusion through participant engagement in committee work. Whilst it is accepted having disaggregated data provides point in time measures for identifying areas which have been improved, or signal the need to focus on for improvement, it is, in my view, of greater importance that those operating within parliaments embed practices, attitudes and cultures that encourage inclusion and diverse representation in every aspect of the work they engage with and undertake. For inclusion endeavours to be sustained and meaningful, they must be more than statistical moments and ambitions in time. Evidence shows organisations focused on ticking gender and inclusion boxes, run the risk of entrenched unconscious biases linked with narrow concepts of diversity<sup>10</sup> and complacency when boxes have been ticked. Such a focus often achieves data-driven outcomes at the hands of a few individuals championing the cause, rather than every participant behaving in a way that is intended to be the cultural 'norm' and can lead to a mistaken belief that once a certain number or dataset is achieved, the work is done, rather than viewed as an ongoing and iterative process.

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra region data <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=gccsa&rgn=8ACTE>

<sup>7</sup> Elections ACT, 2020 Election data [https://www.elections.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/2198822/Stats-book-2020.pdf](https://www.elections.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2198822/Stats-book-2020.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Hinojosa M and Kittilson M (2020) *Seeing Women, Strengthening Democracy: How Women in Politics Foster Connected Citizens*, Oxford University Press, Print.

<sup>9</sup> Hornset N and de Soysa I (2022) 'Does Empowering Women in Politics Boost Human Development? An Empirical Analysis, 1960-2018', *Journal of human development and capabilities* 23(2):291–318.

<sup>10</sup> Brenneman R (2020) 'Discovering and Expanding Diversity with Authenticity', *Strategic HR review* 19(3): 141–142; Doyle N and McDowall A (2022) 'Diamond in the Rough? An 'Empty Review' of Research into 'Neurodiversity' and a Road Map for Developing the Inclusion Agenda' *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 41(3): 352–382; Pleasant S (2017) 'Crossing the Boundaries of Employee Engagement and Workplace Diversity and Inclusion: Moving HRD Forward in a Complicated Sociopolitical Climate', *New horizons in adult education & human resource development* 29(3):38–44.

## Audit recommendations and realistic limitations

The GSP further asks the Assembly, through the Office of the Legislative Assembly (OLA), to gather data on the gender balance among parliamentary staff, the OLA, and also to produce diversity disaggregated data that tracks disability, ethnicity and other protected characteristics of parliamentary staff; further, to regularly gather, monitor, and produce sex and diversity disaggregated data on the diversity and gender balance of witnesses that appear before committees during inquiries.

The OLA, as others within the ACT and Australian Governments broadly, does not and cannot compel staff to provide personal information as it relates to any protected characteristics or attribute. The ACT Human Rights Commission identifies more than 20 characteristics, circumstances or attributes which are protected by anti-discrimination laws, including the right to maintain privacy as it relates to certain characteristics and attributes, should individuals wish to<sup>11</sup>. With this in mind, careful consideration must be given to progressing any recommendations that could have the undesirable effect of making staff and witnesses feel they are inadvertently and unintentionally being the subject of discrimination or intrusive practices. Where appropriate, data may be obtained through a voluntary survey and must adhere to relevant data protection requirements. However, before proceeding with any data-gathering exercises, weighing the undefined benefits of gathering this data against reluctance of participants and staff to provide it, must be understood. A question for parliaments in the context of the suggestion for broader data collection is what the benefit for committees is, and in turn the wider societal benefit.

The Human Rights Watch notes a strong global movement has improved respect for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people around the world. However, at least 67 countries have national laws criminalising same-sex relations between consenting adults. In addition, at least nine countries have national laws criminalising forms of gender expression that target transgender and gender nonconforming people<sup>12</sup>. The World Bank in their 2024 report into women, business and the law, identify significant and varied legal rights and protections for women globally, and makes clear the gap between the legal rights that women have on paper and the reality they face on the ground, where implementation of their rights often falls short, remains problematic<sup>13</sup>. These findings further highlight the need to be mindful of the purpose, intention and aims of implementing GSP recommendations and with this background, the Assembly and parliaments more generally, need to carefully consider the method, reasoning and future endeavours at the heart of diverse data collection.

The GSP report comments on opportunities for political participation, and rightly reflects there has been an ongoing increase in women both elected as members and working in the OLA<sup>14</sup>. However, the report goes on to recommend the Assembly hold an inquiry following elections to look into diversity within political parties with a view to identify mechanisms in place to increase diversity of candidates in future elections. Accepting this functionally could be adopted through the Assembly committee system, it is nevertheless important to recognise an inquiry of this nature would have no capacity to compel parties to change or implement responses to findings, and this recommendation does not accommodate the potential future election of independent candidates. Moreover, given the statistical makeup of the Assembly reflects a higher-than-

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<sup>11</sup> ACT Human Rights Commission, <https://www.hrc.act.gov.au/discrimination>

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch [https://features.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt\\_laws/](https://features.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/)

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, Women Business and the Law 2024 Report, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>

<sup>14</sup> CPA GSP Report page 16 [https://www.cpahq.org/media/g12jri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpahq.org/media/g12jri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)

average proportion of female representation in Australia<sup>15</sup> (see Appendix B) an inquiry of this kind lends itself to public criticism of appearing to be little more than an exercise in political party navel-gazing. From the perspective of generating party-political momentum for diverse representation, it is incumbent on parties to identify through their rules, governance processes and platforms, what they are able and willing to implement and achieve for gender and diverse representation. There can be no doubt there is opportunity for utility in the work of Assembly committees in so far as the application of a gender and diversity frame, however, committee work is often undertaken in accord with broader legislative and societal expectations.

## Women, keep up the heavy lifting

A consistent and perhaps detrimental theme with gendered research on women in parliament, is the emphasis on not only increasing the number of women in political institutions, but then expecting women to “do” the representative work to continue increasing female participation whilst simultaneously working to improve broader social outcomes and access for women<sup>16</sup>. Not only does literature highlight the underrepresentation of women in political and leadership roles, it also all too often relies on women to do the heavy lifting needed to facilitate change. Whilst recommendations in the GSP report are of course interchangeable across gender lines, none are geared specifically at ways in which men directly can lift the status of women and break down structural barriers, often traditionally embedded by patriarchal practices and norms.

Consistent with this, the primary recommendation in the GSP report, whilst linked to the role of speaker, emphasises the need to create a ‘Speaker’s Reference Group’ to oversee and implement audit recommendations. A recommendation made at a time when the speaker is a woman. Through the internal machinations of the Assembly, the Speaker chairs the Administration and Procedure Committee (APC), tasked with overseeing all administrative and procedural functions of the Assembly. Three quarters of the membership of APC are women. The suggestion to create a Speaker’s Reference Group, in turn inadvertently increasing the workload and gendered representative expectations of the speaker, would be more appropriately addressed through APC, already positioned to engage with actions and opportunities to reduce and remove internal structures which may limit or impede access. Evidence of APCs effectiveness and commitment to reducing structural barriers can be seen through Standing Order and procedural changes. The next Assembly may well change the makeup of the APC but the notion of creating a separate group to deal with gender participation, however, the burden remains the same.

It is fair to say there are several recommendations found within the audit report that ultimately go to the heart of visual representation as a means of demonstrating to the broader community that women have a seat at the table, and in the case of the Assembly, women not only have a seat, but it is often the seat at the head of the table.

The Assembly is the youngest parliament in the Australian region and yet, despite this, it proudly holds the record for many “firsts” gender and diversity milestones. Not least of which is the fact we were the first parliament in the country to have a higher proportion of women than men. We have enshrined parental and adoption leave into our Standing Orders<sup>17</sup>, strengthened our code of conduct to make very clear that members must eliminate and minimise health and safety risks in the workplace and adopt a zero-tolerance

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<sup>15</sup> CPA GSP Report page 19 [https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Bjorna H (2012) ‘Women in Charge: Politics in a Women Majority Local Council in Australia’, Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance, (10), 51-69. <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.v0i10.2689>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/2465722/Standing-Orders-as-at-6-June-2024.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2465722/Standing-Orders-as-at-6-June-2024.pdf)

approach to bullying, sexual and other harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination; created amendments to Standing Orders to allow for members caring for small children to bring them onto the floor for short periods; and, this same change accommodates a nursing infant being breastfed by a member on the chamber floor.

Further, the Assembly has introduced a carers' room to provide, amongst other things, a space for breastfeeding mothers or parents who wish to have access to a space which provides suitable changing facilities. These adjustments in the scheme of things are quite minor, however, they are structural barriers which we have recognised and long removed. GSP findings aside, there are things the Assembly has done and will continue to build on to further enshrine the practices developed that enable and encourage broad participation and representation.

## Concluding thoughts

The art of theory dwells in the realm of ideals and aspirations. It envisions parliaments as microcosms of diverse voices, echoing with the perspectives of women from all walks of life. It embodies the belief that gender equality isn't just a buzzword, but a fundamental cornerstone of a truly democratic society. It affirms the value of policies and initiatives that aim to dismantle barriers and nurture an environment where every voice, regardless of gender, is not only heard but heeded.

On the other hand, the reality of practice often unveils a different landscape. It is where the theoretical ideals confront the robustness of historical norms and systemic resistance. We must recognise and harmonise academia and reality. Our first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, endured many a pointed gender-based comment. It highlights the arduous journey that women often face in their quest for meaningful representation and influence. It exposes the need for deliberate action to bridge the disparity between the gender composition of the population and that of parliamentary bodies. It raises poignant questions about the entrenched biases and socio-political structures that impede the realisation of equitable gender outcomes in parliaments. It also invites thoughtful consideration from those who have spent time operating within the structures of the system we seek to break down. From this perspective, whilst there is little doubt the academic research reflects systemic changes that are needed, the contrast between the research and the experience needs to be complementary if it is to reach congruence of achievable change and desirable outcomes.

That women are increasingly visible in political leadership is important. Each time a woman is elected or appointed to high office, the level of community acceptance for gender equality increases and the view that has held sway for much of human history—that politics and leadership is the domain of men—further recedes into the background. The prominence of women in political leadership is an important catalyst in motivating other women to become involved. Increased participation of woman has a snowball effect because the visibility of women in these positions encourages other women to become politically active and seek out these positions.

As we broach the intriguing question of embracing or exploring the contrasts between theory and practice, one thing becomes abundantly clear: meaningful gender outcomes in parliaments require a proactive and multifaceted approach. It calls for a collective commitment to confront the uncomfortable realities, challenge the status quo, and take deliberate steps to align the art of theory with the exigencies of practice. It calls for parliaments to truly accept 'there is always more to do' and that understanding any work and

change process must sit alongside the reality of doing what can be achieved and sustained, rather than being so ambitious it creates a sense of overwhelm, and in turn leads to very little, or worse, to nothing.

Meaningful gender outcomes in parliaments are not a distant ideal or an abstract theory, they are a tangible imperative, pivotal to the vibrancy and efficacy of our democratic institutions. However, if a legislature such as ours, who have created visible paths to access and inclusion, are seen to be substantially inadequate, how do parliaments who need to not only change their internal structures but also their societal ones, begin to make small steps, let alone big strides. The contrast between the theory and the practice must be synchronised and recommendations need to accommodate the practicalities and lived experiences of all those who are tasked with forging change. When properly managed, inclusive interactions among diverse members of any organisation, facilitate the social connections and deeper understandings needed for greater equity and shared understandings. Likewise, through interplays such as these between the research and practice, we can create partnerships in which success evolves.

Thank you to Professor Childs and the GSP audit team, it is very much acknowledged that work such as this must continue and despite what may appear to some other CPA member parliaments as a report that discourages them from undertaking their own assessments for fear of outcome overwhelm or change that feels insurmountable, I encourage parliaments to willingly ask themselves if they are prepared to engage with the academic research process, explore the contrasts, and strive for achievable and demonstrable change.



The ACT Assembly election is to be held 19 October 2024, as I have chosen not to seek re-election, I will have no opportunity to follow through on the GSP recommendations, which I have included below for further context to this paper. Prior to my departure from the Assembly, I plan to offer my ideas, shaped through my lived experience in the Assembly, to the Clerk and Office of Legislative Assembly and I am confident they, together with the next Assembly will give my views and the recommendations due consideration and continue working with the CPA to continue the important work that parliaments do.

## Appendix A

### Four Dimensions of a Gender Sensitive Parliament



Source: CPA Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessment, final report, page 10,  
[https://www.cpaHQ.org/media/q12iri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpaHQ.org/media/q12iri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)

## Appendix B

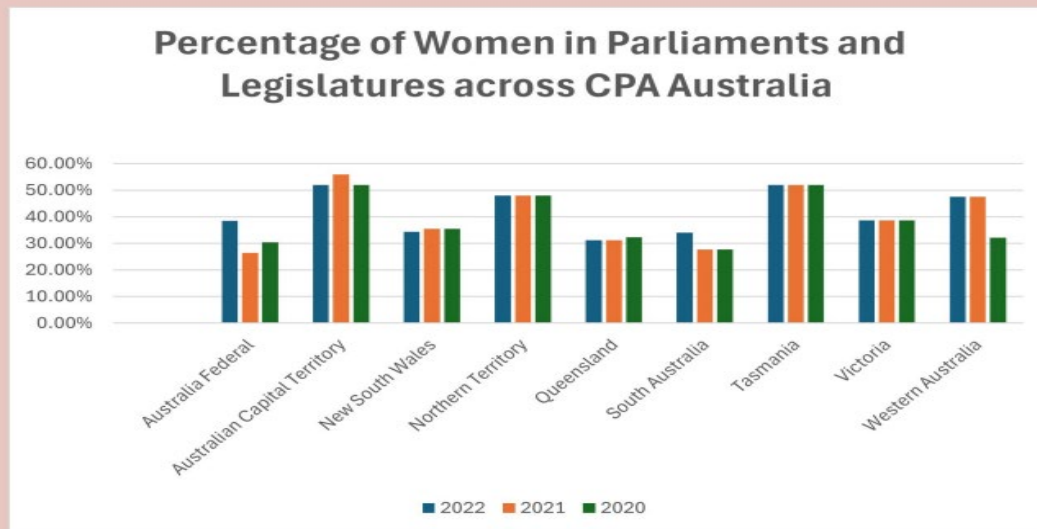
### Women in the Assembly and Parliaments in Australia

#### BOX 2: Women Members of the Legislative Assembly in the last four elections

Year of General Election	Australian Labor Party		Liberal Party		ACT Greens		Total number of women in the Assembly	Total Percentage of women in the Assembly
	No.s of women	Percentage of women	No.s of women	Percentage of women	No.s of women	Percentage of women		
2020	6	60 %	5	44.4 %	3	50 %	14	56%
2016	6	50 %	6	54.5 %	1	50 %	13	52%
2012	3	37.5%	3	37.5 %	0	0 %	6	35.2%
2008	3	42.8%	1	16.6%	3	75 %	7	41.1%

Source: CPA Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessment, final report, page 17,  
[https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)

#### BOX 3: Percentage of women in parliaments and legislatures across CPA Australia



Source: CPA Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessment, final report, page 19,  
[https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)

## Appendix C

### Consolidated List of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:**

The Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety in its inquiry of the 2024 elections to review matters related to the diversity of candidates and recommend that the ACT Electoral Commission introduce a breakdown of the diversity of candidates similar to the breakdown it already provides of gender in its reports of the ACT general elections.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion to hold an inquiry following the elections scheduled to be held in October 2024 on diversity within political parties to identify what mechanisms are in place to increase the diversity of candidates in future elections.

**Recommendation 3:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly to work with community groups and organisations that support, advocate and promote the rights of persons with disabilities and/or have experience assisting employers employ persons with disabilities to advertise the diverse jobs within the Assembly or other opportunities when they become available.

**Recommendation 4:**

In addition to gathering data on the gender balance among parliamentary staff, the Office of the Legislative Assembly is to produce diversity disaggregated data that tracks disability, ethnicity and other protected characteristics of parliamentary staff who work in the Assembly over a four-year period. Data to be gathered in the form of survey as the Office of the Legislative Assembly does not compel staff to provide personal information, data should be obtained through a voluntary survey. Data produced must adhere to relevant data protection requirements.

**Recommendation 5:**

The Administration and Procedure Committee to propose a rule that requires the number of Chairs of Committee to reflect the numbers of women and men Members.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Administration and Procedure Committee to propose a rule that requires each Committee to have both a Chair and Deputy Chair, and that these must be gender balanced – comprising a woman and man.

**Recommendation 7:**

A meeting to be coordinated with all party Whips after political parties develop their list of Members for each and all parliamentary committees to prevent the possibility of any single-sex committees. This might involve determining what measures will be put in place within and across parties to ensure committee gender balance.

**Recommendation 8:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly's Business Support Branch to look into the practicality of the function of the breastfeeding/first aid/prayer room and to develop guidelines on the usage of the room including advice on what persons are to do in the event the room is occupied. Over time when there is less of a constraint on space in the Assembly, it is suggested that individual rooms are found for these activities, and that such reviews also look into the need for a family room.

**Recommendation 9:**

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure to amend Standing Order number 22 to include the entitlement of paternity and/or parental leave to a Member who is the biological and adoptive father of the child or the expectant parent's spouse or partner.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Assembly to amend its protocol on the operations of pairing to include the entitlement of paternity and/or parental leave to a Member who is the biological and adoptive father of the child or the expectant parent's spouse or partner. The Assembly is to also review and determine whether the system of pairing should be replaced with a proxy voting system, in line with best practice elsewhere.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure to consider the inclusion of a Standing Order or Continuing Resolution that requires the scheduling of Assembly sittings, and all other parliamentary activities to reflect 'core business hours' and to not coincide with school holidays unless in exceptional circumstances.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly's Parliamentary Support Branch to include a note in the committee guidelines that advises committees where possible to ensure that the scheduling of committee meetings, hearings and all other parliamentary activities reflect 'core business hours', and to not coincide with school holidays unless in exceptional circumstances.

**Recommendation 13:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly's Parliamentary Support Branch to review the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPWD) Inclusion Guidelines for Parliaments – Facilities Inclusion to support already existing efforts to create an accessible and participatory environment within the Assembly.

**Recommendation 14:**

The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion to review how it applies a gender lens in beyond committee membership by reviewing its activities, remit, resources, and impact since its establishment in December 2020.

**Recommendation 15:**

Members of the Australian Capital Territory women's caucus to complete the CPA Parliamentary Academy course on 'Effective Women's Parliamentary Caucuses' before the end of the Assembly term and have a discussion on best practices it could potentially adopt to strengthen its impact and effectiveness.

**Recommendation 16:**

The Assembly to consider the establishment of a Speakers Reference Group that would be led by the Speaker that will oversee the delivery of the report's recommendations in this report and the Assembly's progress towards gender sensitivity, including through commissioning further research where appropriate.

**Recommendation 17:**

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure to adopt both a diversity and gender lens towards the Standing Orders and Continuing Resolutions of the Assembly at its triennial review that has begun in 2022 and all future review of its Standing Orders.

**Recommendation 18:**

The Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure in their next review of the Standing Orders and Continuing Resolutions is to ensure that there is an explicit statement or principle in the Code of Conduct that condemns sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

**Recommendation 19:**

The Legislative Assembly to engage a gender and inclusion expert to deliver an annual bullying and sexual harassment workshop(s) that is to be attended by both Members and mandatory for parliamentary staff. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Assembly cannot oblige Members to attend in-person workshops, it is to strongly encourage Members to attend.

**Recommendation 20:**

The Business Support Branch of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to include an explicit statement condemning all acts of violence in the Office of the Legislative Assembly staff code of conduct.

**Recommendation 21:**

The Business Support Branch of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to regularly conduct a survey specifically on bullying and all forms of harassment in the Assembly and produce a report of its finding.

**Recommendation 22:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly to develop and make publicly visible the Assembly's commitment to gender equality and diversity.

**Recommendation 23:**

The Assembly to also develop a gender equality plan to detail efforts and ambitions for each of the four CPA dimensions, indicating which recommendations included in this Report will be prioritised, and in what time frames, and with what reviewing actions in place.

Serious thought to be given to the gathering, publication, and review of comprehensive and systematic gender disaggregated data across each of the four CPA dimensions. These might include, but are not limited to those covered in the self-assessment questionnaire, reproduced in Appendix 2.

**Recommendation 24:**

Members of the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality Committee to determine (i) if gender-related matters are well suited to its remit, and (ii) to identify if it applies a gendered approach in the delivery of its responsibilities. Where the former is found to be negative, Members of the of the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality Committee to advise that the Assembly establishes an additional committee on Gender and Equalities.

**Recommendation 25:**

The Parliamentary Support Branch of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to work with external gender expert(s) to develop a guideline on gender mainstreaming in ACT Legislative Assembly Committee drawing on international best practice, and to make this available to all Members and parliamentary staff and, update the committee guidelines to incorporate best practices on gender mainstreaming. Once completed this could be complimented with mandatory training on gender mainstreaming.

**Recommendation 26:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly to consider the development of a four-year strategic plan that will guide work on how the Assembly will be a gender sensitive institution and plan to effectively introduce gender mainstreaming across all its activities.

The plan to also include a diversity and inclusion strategy which will identify ways in which the Assembly can improve representation and attract talent from a wide range of backgrounds. It is advised that the plan is to be drafted with a gender expert or an organisation that promotes gender equality.

**Recommendation 27:**

The Parliamentary Support Branch of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to regularly gather, monitor, and produce sex and diversity disaggregated data on the diversity and gender balance of witnesses that appear before committees during inquiries.

**Recommendation 28:**

The Assembly to encourage all committees – and not just those with a gender remit or conducting an inquiring on a gender-related topic – to make use of Standing Order 238 which allows for the appointment of gender specialist advisers to support their work.

**Recommendation 29:**

The Parliamentary Support Branch of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to start to gather, monitor and produce sex and diversity disaggregated data on the diversity and gender balance of all specialist experts called to support the work of committee and regularly to monitor data regarding which committees they support.

**Recommendation 30:**

The Office of the Legislative Assembly to establish links in the form of partnerships, knowledge exchange, collaboration with civil society organisations committed to promoting gender equality and focus on combatting gender discrimination.

Source: CPA Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessment, final report, pages 44-47

[https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024\\_gsp\\_act\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpahq.org/media/q12jri0w/2024_gsp_act_report_final.pdf)