

Key Policy in discussion

INTEGRITY, GENDER AND THE JUST USE OF POWER

Portfolio and or agency

Multiple

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Budget Measures

Australia's ranking in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index has dropped from 85 out of 100 to 73 over the last decade. When governments prioritise their own and insider outcomes over the public interest, it is very likely to be at the expense of women (among other outsider groups) and noticed by women. We need well-resourced accountability bodies and transparency measures around women's access to Commonwealth resources and decision-making.

In our [pre-budget briefing](#), we raised a number of questions about funding for Australian transparency and accountability measures, emphasising Gender Responsive Budgeting as critical to the allocation of all Commonwealth resources. We also focused on the Commonwealth's broader national accountability for women's access to decision-making in public life and the unfinished business of the Australian Human Rights Commission reports on *Respect@Work* and *Setting the Standard*.

We now have the answer to a number of our questions from budget measures, budget design, and budget silences.

1. Will your government commit to introduce a substantive Gender Responsive Budgeting approach across government and an independent Women's Budget Statement?

The 2022-23 Women's Budget Statement (WBS) does not try for Gender Responsive Budgeting. It is no more than the old government whitewash with a yellow cover. It examines the 0.3% of total expenditure in the budget that specifically targets women and broadly ignores the remaining 99.7%, where the big spending is on male dominated industries, male dominated skills training), and the implementation of tax cuts for those with high incomes, men again. Creative re-labelling and re-announcement make the absolute budget numbers and new spend difficult to establish for these three categories of expenditure, but the construction industry itself is [74%](#) male, apprenticeships (even if you include traineeships) are more than [72%](#) male. Two thirds of the recipients of the tax cuts will be men as male incomes are higher than women's incomes. In contrast, the LMITO, which benefits people earning between \$37,000 and \$120,000 pa and affects men and women equally, will be withdrawn from the end of the current financial year.

The National Foundation for Australian Women is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. NFAW is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations.

Authorised by the National Foundation for Australian Women, Canberra: President Ms Jane Madden.

A **substantive Gender Responsive Budgeting approach across government** begins, conversely, with a strategic national approach to guide whole of government decision-making to achieve gender equality. This would include gender impact assessments on both cabinet submissions and new policy proposals before budgets are actually settled. And after they are settled, there should be an annual WBS to assess the impact new budget measures have on women and how the allocation of public resources effects gender equality.

Labor's WBS commits to each of these measures. What NFAW would add to these commitments are the need for formalised consultations with women in the while budget proposals are still in development, and the need for the annual WBS to be in independent hands, most eligibly those of the Parliamentary Budget Office. This should prevent the grab-bag approach to a future WBS.

The 2022-23 WBS grab-bag is smaller than last year's – only just over 60% of it in fact. Measures on violence against women and women's health are addressed in our media release. The remaining WBS section on women's economic security is a classic of how not to do a women's budget.

In the first place, it has no policy strategy. It assumes, in common with much of the rest of the budget, that things will fix themselves, arguing for example that 'strong economic performance and a tight labour market' will reduce the gender pay gap, together with 'the range of initiatives included across the entire 2022 23 Budget'. In fact, the entire budget has nothing whatever to say about the undervaluation of work in the care sector, which is by far the largest sector of the Australian workforce, and 80% female. The silence of the WBS on work value issues is consistent with the Government's repeated refusal to endorse work value cases in aged and child care; nevertheless, it is in the care sector that changes to the gender pay gap lie.

Instead of looking to where women work, the WBS appears generally to be underpinned by the conviction that the best that can be done for women in the workforce is to move them out of the female-dominated sector into male-dominated STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and non-traditional work or their own business. Given about 80% of Australians work in services (and 90% of working women), this continues to be a nonviable strategy. There is, nevertheless, 'a grand total of \$348.5 million for various #GirlBoss initiatives designed to "train", "boost", "revive", "support" and "checkpoint" women into leadership positions in "better paid" male dominated industries and entrepreneurship'. As a pay equity policy, it is the equivalent of subsidising a few new deck chairs on the Titanic.

Many of the measures collected in the WBS may do some good, even though they totally miss the point. Some, however, actually compromise women's economic security. Take, for example, the proposal (on p. 46) to amend the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act 2009 to ensure redundancy payments 'more fairly reflect working hours over the course of a person's employment'. It is hard to see how this would not end up in actually cutting women's access to redundancy pay.

Or take the changes to paid parental leave. Without any discernible consultation with families, women's organisations, gender equality or parental leave experts, the Government decided to remove the last vestiges of encouragement for fathers and partners to share in the care of their newborn babies.

We know it is at this crucial early stage that families establish their gender norms. Already men are much less likely to take Dads and Partners' Pay (DAPP), with the 'use it or lose it' provision. The new provision means that either parent is able to take up to the full 20 weeks of available leave. It also enables single parents to take the full 20 weeks. While any added support for single parents is positive, NFAW is disappointed that the availability of leave for this group has potentially been extended at the expense of incentives for men and partners to share in the care of their babies. We do, however, welcome the amendments that will enable fathers and partners to take Parental Leave Pay in conjunction with employer-funded leave, in the same way women currently can. This is a minor, but welcome, reform.

The Government also introduced a change to the means testing of Parental Leave Pay, to create a single household income threshold of \$350,000 household to the existing limit of the birth parent earning \$151,350. Again, this has not been identified by women's organisations or parental leave experts as a priority, and NFAW considers it to be regressive.

The ALP Women's Budget Statement notes only that a Labor government would "...work to make [the Paid Parental Leave scheme] stronger". NFAW would like to see clearer commitments than this.

The Prime Minister [announced](#) in 2021 that he would establish a Cabinet Taskforce for Women's Safety and Economic Security' to drive 'my Government's agenda' for women. There was a National Women's Safety Summit and a July National Cabinet meeting on women's economic security. This is what has come of the latter. Let us hope that Labor's promised independent Women's Economic Security Taskforce consults more widely on economic security issues for women than its own Cabinet.

2. How will your government ensure Indigenous women's voices drive and determine policy that affects Indigenous women? Will your government work with Indigenous women to develop a separate national Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women?

The Budget continues to fail Indigenous women. NFAW is very concerned about extremely limited funding to address the significant economic, housing and safety concerns of Indigenous women. In failing to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and foregoing the opportunity to ameliorate the often-appalling disadvantage in which Indigenous women and men live, the Government is condemning another generation of Indigenous women to marginalisation, discrimination and insecurity.

Despite the Women's Budget Statement claiming that it takes an intersectional approach, there has been no consideration of the particular position of Indigenous women in mainstream services and sectors. For example, many Indigenous women work in the caring sectors and education, either in mainstream or community-controlled positions. NFAW is concerned that there is little substantive consideration in the Budget for the particular needs of Indigenous women within these sectors. The Government must do better to integrate an Indigenous perspective and take an intersectional approach to all Budget measures.

Take the example of the Community Development Program (CDP). The Government has provided \$98m for 2022/23 for further supplementary funding only. While there are significant, well-grounded concerns about punitive and discriminatory approaches to the current CDP, properly designed community development support is crucial for Indigenous community development, and for Indigenous women and men, in remote areas where formal employment opportunities are limited. The National Indigenous Affairs Agency has been conducting detailed consultation on the future of the CDP.

The Government intends to continue pilot programs to replace the CDP and then fully roll out the *Remote Engagement Program* as a replacement from 2024. "The *Remote Engagement Program* will replace the *Community Development Program* and support remote communities by targeting job creation and skills development." (Budget Paper 2, p. 164). Unfortunately, there is little new money for this measure, which relies on existing *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* funding (Budget Paper 2, p. 164). It is unclear how the new program will respond to the good faith engagement in consultations by Indigenous organisations and to the outcomes of litigation and ongoing Indigenous community concerns. NFAW is looking forward to seeing the culturally respectful, community development and gender equality focus of the new program.

The [ALP Women's Budget Statement 2022](#) (p. 27) includes a commitment to hold a referendum to establish a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament, with a guaranteed gender balance. Importantly, the ALP has also committed to conducting a National First Nations Women's Summit, chaired by the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. NFAW welcomes these commitments but will be looking forward to seeing the funding allocations and timelines should the ALP form government.

3. How will your government progress the unfinished business of *Respect@Work* and *Setting the Standard* reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission?

The Budget includes a few very small but welcome initiatives to advance the *Respect@Work* recommendations. The Government claims in its WBS that it has already spent \$66m in implementing these recommendations and commits a further \$3.4m in this Budget (p. 25). This will be applied to an ‘industry outreach team’ in the Australian Human Rights Commission (whose overall funding is being substantially cut – see below) and to a \$1.8m ‘grant opportunity’ that would enable the two remaining Working Women’s Centres to provide advice on sexual harassment for three years (WBS, pp. 18-19 and 26).

Labor has committed to implementing all the *Respect@Work* recommendations in its Women’s Budget Statement, but without providing information on funding or timing.

4. How will a federal Anti-Corruption Commission introduced by your government hold government to account and prioritise the broader public interest?

We noted in our briefing paper that [accountability mechanisms are important where the withdrawal or allocation of resources will affect different groups differently](#). We raised concerns about the scope for [electorally skewed multibillion dollar grants decisions](#) and election [pork barrels](#) while care industries remain underfunded and care work undervalued. [Electorially skewed infrastructure grants](#) and a real wage decrease in carers’ wages are what the 2022-23 budget has indeed delivered.

This is beyond disappointing, but of a piece with the budget’s underlying confusion between the well-being of the public and the well-being of political candidates. That confusion is reproduced in the budget papers themselves. We have conferred with a number of non-government organisations in the preparation of our post-budget analyses. As common view has emerged that the budget, which is intended as a crucial national transparency and accountability measure, is itself shifty. Sums of money are re-announced as new, moved between programs whose name has been changed and then re-announced as new, divided over differing numbers of outyears, and added up in mysterious ways to make the totals released by ministers to the press.

What is clear is that national integrity bodies whose function is to call out opacity and confusion in the allocation of resources and the administration rights of will have their ongoing capacity to do so cut. [Analysis by the Centre for Public Integrity](#) shows

- a \$255,517,962 or 17.67% cut in real terms to the funding for the ABC, compared to 2012 levels, and
- a \$11,317,618 or 9.12% cut in real terms to the funding ANAO, compared to 2012 levels.

The Attorney-General’s Department has made a generous contribution to the election war chest with significant cuts whose impact can be expected to increase significantly in real terms:

- The Australian Human Rights Commission will see its budget cut by over one third over the forward estimates, from \$32.6 million in the estimated actual expenditure for 2021-22 to \$20.2 million in 2025-26 (Attorney-General’s Department PBS, Table 2.1.1 p. 136).
- The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman will see its budget cut from \$47.7 million in 2022-23 to \$41.9 million in 2025-26. (Attorney-General’s Department PBS, Table 2.1.1 p. 305).

- The Information Commissioner will have its budget cut in half from \$29 million in 2021-22 to \$15.9 million in 2025-26 (Attorney-General's Department PBS, Table 2.1.1 p. 287).
- Law Reform Commission will see its budget cut from \$3.1 million in 2021-22 to \$2.75 million in 2025-26 (Attorney-General's Department PBS, Table 2.1.1 p.151).
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal will have its budget cut from \$201.4 million in 2021-22 to \$181.5 million in 2025-26 (Attorney-General's Department PBS, Table 2.1.1 p. 52).

The budget also only allowed \$67m over four years for the Coalition's proposed anti-corruption commission model, which it has so far failed to legislate, despite promises to do so. The Opposition speech in reply and WBS did not refer to its intentions in this regard.

5. What will your government do to ensure women are equally represented in your party, in Parliament and in leadership positions across society?

The [Women's Budget Statement](#) points to good progress in women's leadership, including within the APS where women now represent 50% of Senior Executive positions, and on government boards, where women have likewise achieved parity (pp. 45-46). This is good news.

In the broader public debate, the Coalition remains completely silent about any steps it might take to address the serious imbalance it faces in preselecting women in winnable seats. This was one of the primary recommendations in the [Set the Standard](#) report (rec 5, p. 174), which the Government has said it accepts. However, the preselection process does not appear to have responded to this recommendation in any way.

As the ALP [Women's Budget Statement](#) (p. 3) notes, equality will not simply appear – it is something that needs to be worked actively towards. The ALP Statement recommit the ALP to equal representation in parliament, recognising (p. 7) that when “more women are at the decision making table, Australian women know their interests and values are being represented”.

NFAW sees this as a matter of urgent priority for the Coalition.