



AUSTRALIAN SENATE
CANBERRA, A C T

2 June 1983

Statement from Senator Susan Ryan, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on
the Status of Women

INTRODUCTION OF SEX DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

The Sex Discrimination Bill was introduced into the Senate today by the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, Senator Susan Ryan. In introducing the Bill Senator Ryan said she was delighted to be able to move the introduction of a major piece of legislation on a matter which so deeply affects the rights of women and men.

" The Bill is designed to give effect to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Government will ratify this Convention in the near future.

Under the Bill discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy will be unlawful in the areas of employment, education, accommodation, the provision of goods, facilities and services, the disposal of land, the activities of clubs and the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs. The Bill will give people who experience discrimination in all these areas the opportunity of redress and it will be a significant deterrent for persons and organisations who indulge in discriminatory practices.

The Bill will also prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions so far as is possible.

The Bill closely resembles the Sex Discrimination Bill 1981 introduced into the Senate by me as a private member's Bill. Following the introduction of that Bill extensive consultations were undertaken and the present Bill incorporates a number of very useful suggestions made during those consultations.

Statistics on women's employment, unemployment, income levels and dependence on government social security benefits give clear evidence of deeply imbedded structural inequalities in our society. This Bill offers an opportunity to combat some of these inequalities and attempts to promote the recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle of equality between men and women.

Commonwealth and State experience has shown that most discrimination occurs in the area of employment. In this regard the Bill makes unlawful discrimination against applicants for jobs and employees generally and also against persons who are commission agents or contract workers.

The Bill will afford protection throughout Australia as far as is constitutionally possible and will provide protection not only to the Commonwealth's own employees or applicants but to employees of other institutions such as trading or financial corporations.

With regard to education, it will be unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy against a person applying for admission as a student or against a student. Single-sex educational institutions are exempted from the legislation.

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Administration of the Bill is vested in the Human Rights Commission. The functions of the Commission will include holding enquiries into and making determinations on, complaints; hearing applications for exemption from the Act; undertaking research and educational programs; and examination of existing and proposed legislation to ensure its consistency with the provisions of the Act.

A major part of my earlier private member's Bill - the part concerning affirmative action - is not included in this Bill. The Government will issue a green paper setting out options for further legislation providing for the introduction and implementation of affirmative action programs.

It is clear that the benefits of affirmative action programs in employment are not widely understood and the Government recognises the need for employers, employees, unions, and the community generally to be better informed. The Government has therefore decided that it is more appropriate to generate public discussion and understanding of its proposals and to have wide ranging consultations in advance of the introduction of the legislation.

The introduction of this Bill represents the initial step towards the fulfilment of the Government's major election commitment to women. The Bill will be debated early in the Budget Session. The Government hopes that further to the consultation that has already gone on with trade unions and employer and women's organisations, interested persons will use the time between now and the Budget sittings to examine the Bill carefully and to put forward constructive comments on it."