



GENDER BALANCE IN
FIRE AND EMERGENCY

**GOING
BEYOND**
**‘IT’S THE
RIGHT
THING
TO DO’**

THE CASE FOR CHANGE



About Male Champions of Change Fire and Emergency

Male Champions of Change Fire and Emergency was established in April 2017 with support from the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC).

The group is convened by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Kristen Hilton. It includes Chief Executives, Commissioners and Chief Fire Officers leading 30 agencies responsible for fire, emergency and land management services across Australia and New Zealand.

Involvement in the Male Champions of Change strategy supports and strengthens AFAC's wider focus on diversity and inclusion.



About AFAC

AFAC is the facilitator and custodian of contemporary fire and emergency service knowledge and practice, for the benefit of our members and through them, the community.

We will be recognised and have impact as the National Council for fire and emergency services, through collaboration and influence.



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the practitioners and researchers who have shared their knowledge and guidance to build this document. This includes Celeste Young and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Council (BNHCRC) research team, members of the Male Champions of Change program, Implementation Leaders and the AFAC Diversity and Inclusion Collaboration Group.

Terms	Description
Diversity	All the visible and invisible differences between people in relation to factors, including their social identity – their sex, age, caring responsibilities, cultural background or identity, race, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic background – and their professional identity – their profession, education, work experiences and organisational role. Diversity is about each of us.
Inclusion	Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people (e.g. of different ages, cultural backgrounds and genders) feel valued and respected, have access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their organisation. Inclusion is about all of us.

Introduction

Male Champions of Change Fire and Emergency is focused on advancing gender equality and professional, respectful and inclusive workplaces in the fire and emergency sector.

Attracting, retaining and advancing more and diverse women remains a major strategic workforce planning, capability and sustainability issue for us. Across the fire and emergency sector in Australia and New Zealand in 2019, women represented only 24.2% of overall employees and 22% of employees in frontline service delivery roles.

We've been working on improving this together for some three years now. And while there has been progress, the pace of change is too slow and gains are incredibly difficult to achieve.

Questions we are frequently asked include: 'Why does this matter?' and 'Why do you dedicate so much time to this issue in particular?'

The past year has brought into sharp focus the fact that the traditional roles of firefighter and emergency service responder are evolving rapidly, particularly as our work extends to include prevention, preparedness, incident response and recovery.

This evolution requires new and different skills and capabilities amongst our team which we will have to both recruit for and develop. And we simply won't build the best team possible, if we are creating barriers to entry for 50% of the available talent.

In this report, we hope to demonstrate – through evidence-based research – that our sector must be better equipped to represent, support and engage the diverse communities that we serve.

We share the case for change for building gender balance and other diversity in fire and emergency – one that goes well beyond 'it's the right thing to do'.

We hope that you find this report useful and that it empowers each and every member of our team to personally lead in attracting, retaining and advancing more and diverse women in our sector.



Our fire and emergency services play a vital role in keeping our community safe. The sector and the community will benefit from organisations that are fairer, more diverse and great places for everyone.

– Kristen Hilton, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner and group Convenor



Champions of Change



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Chief Officer,
Tasmania Fire
Service



Paul Baxter QSO
Commissioner, Fire
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Chris Beattie
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Chief Executive, Fire
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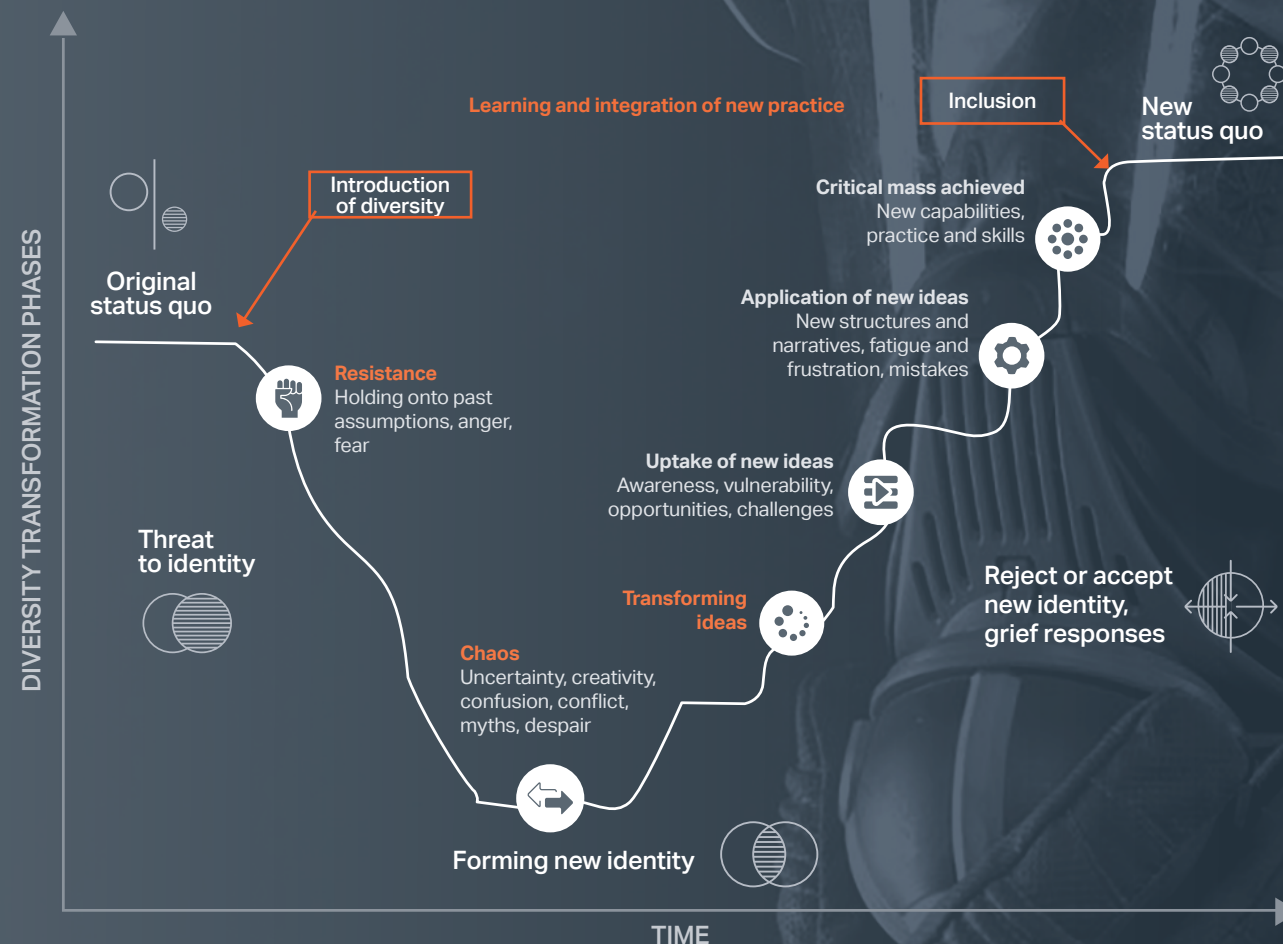
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Convenor
Kristen Hilton
Commissioner,
Victorian Human
Rights and Equal
Opportunity
Commission

There is a clear and evidence-based case for **advancing gender equality** in our sector. When you consider our future needs around leadership, talent, culture, innovation and community engagement – our focus on this strategic priority is both **the right thing to do** and **the smart thing to do**.

Figure 1: Phases of the Diversity and Inclusion Transformation Process.¹



Background

According to World Economic Forum estimates, the global gender gap will take 108 years to close unless progress accelerates.² Such figures continue to raise concerns about equality of opportunity, an important end in its own right.

Achieving gender equality and workforce diversity is important for organisations not only because it is 'fair' and 'the right thing to do,' but because it is also linked to overall performance. Diversity and inclusion is critical to an organisation's success and is a baseline feature of a well-managed and leading sector.

Research also suggests that organisations are missing out on potential performance gains stemming from diversity and inclusion. For example:

- Adding women to all-men teams increases the teams' group intelligence, which accounts for 40% of performance on a wide range of tasks, greater than the impact of individual IQ.³
- Team collaboration and commitment improve by around 50% in gender-balanced teams.⁴
- Individual performance against goals, retention and lift in discretionary effort increase in gender-balanced and inclusive teams.^{5,6}

As the fire and emergency sector evolves, changes in climate, technology and workplaces will require a diverse, highly skilled, trained and resilient workforce. The Australasian fire and emergency sector cannot afford to miss out on the skills, ideas and perspectives of a large proportion of the potential workforce, including a diversity of women and others. Ensuring the development and appropriate deployment of the full spectrum of the total talent pool is critical to the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of our sector.

Given our starting point, such a significant and far-reaching change to the Australasian fire and emergency sector will be a challenging process of transformation to create a diverse workforce supported by an inclusive culture. This process of transformation is shown clearly in a diagram from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre research report, *The Long Road: Building Effective Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management Organisations* (see Figure 1).⁷

The Australasian fire and emergency sector is currently evolving its identity as it moves towards a more inclusive organisational culture. Change to organisational culture is strongly dependent upon individuals making a personal choice to change how they think and behave and are influenced by societal changes in the community.⁸

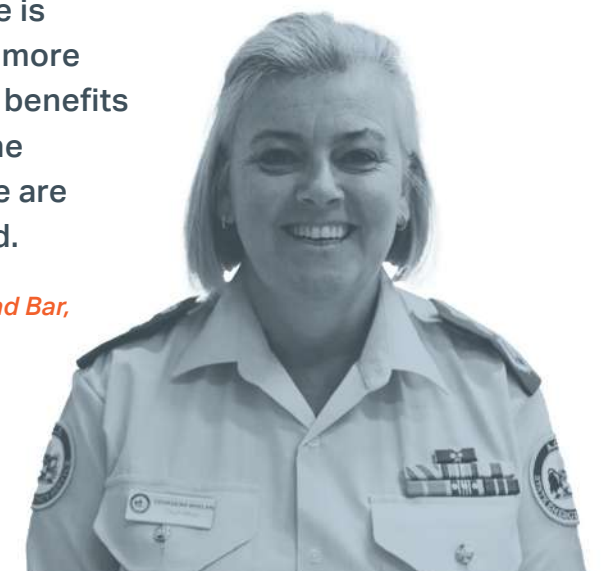
The aim is to make inclusion part of everyday life, where everyone can be their authentic selves in a safe environment, without fear of negative repercussions or detrimental outcomes. To achieve this fundamental change to our sector, we need a clear vision that describes the reasons why this will benefit individuals, teams, organisations and communities.

“Change to organisational culture is strongly dependent upon individuals making a personal choice to change how they think and behave and are influenced by societal changes in the community.¹

“

The research is clear and the evidence is compelling. Our transformation into a more diverse and inclusive sector will bring benefits to our communities, our people and the performance of our organisations. We are ready to take these vital steps forward.

– Commissioner Georgeina Whelan AM, CSC and Bar,
ACT Emergency Services Agency



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a clear case for diversity and inclusion in the Australasian fire and emergency sector by describing the benefits, a rationale and what the future looks like.

There is a substantial body of evidence supporting diversity and inclusion, which includes descriptions of definitions, groups, components, issues, indicators, models, methodologies, risks, solutions, processes, challenges, capabilities and benefits.

A lot of work has been done to describe the problem of a lack of diversity in organisations. In particular, reports developed by the BNHCRC research project have done a very effective job of describing the wide and significant risks associated with not taking action to address the challenge of diversity and inclusion in the Australasian fire and emergency sector.⁹ This document builds on the previous work undertaken by the BNHCRC research project 'Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability' (see further information at www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/diversityinclusion).

However, without a deep knowledge of diversity and inclusion research, it can be difficult to clearly and succinctly describe the reasons why the fire and emergency sector should continue to work hard to improve the diversity of the workforce and create a more inclusive culture and employee experience.

We all feel the moral imperative but it can be difficult to articulate the economic and performance imperatives. The reasons for increasing diversity and building an inclusive sector are complex, interdependent and far-reaching. By breaking down the reasons into specific factors, we can better explain and engage our teams in why diversity matters and what it offers to individuals, organisations and communities.

Leading through action

Male Champions of Change Fire and Emergency is focused on building a more gender-balanced and inclusive workplace. We've formed seven action groups, each leading on a different priority area, that emerged from a series of Listen and Learn forums with staff and volunteers across our sector.

- 1. **Inclusive Leadership:** Prioritising inclusive leadership and psychologically safe workplaces. This includes identifying and calling out any behaviour inconsistent with safe, welcoming and inclusive environments for all employees and volunteers.
- 2. **Flexible Workplaces:** identifying opportunities to normalise flexible roles and mindsets around when and how work is completel, enabling better balance between work and personal commitments.
- 3. **Talent Development:** Pursuing gender balance in identifying and developing talent to capitalise on the diverse experiences and capabilities within and available to our sector.
- 4. **Communication:** Addressing communication, symbols, icons and language that may support exclusionary or 'boys' club' cultures.
- 5. **Community:** Engaging stakeholders in the case for change on gender equality in our sector, recognising we can be better equipped to represent and engage the diverse communities that we serve.
- 6. **Systems:** Applying a gender-balance, diversity and inclusion lens to the development of policies, systems and infrastructure to create working environments that enable all our people to thrive.
- 7. **Reporting:** Designing and implementing rigorous and transparent reporting systems so we can more effectively track our progress on gender equality.

This report has been developed and endorsed by Male Champions of Change as part of Priority 4 outlined above.

THERE IS
A CLEAR
CASE FOR
CHANGE
FOR MORE
DIVERSITY
AND
INCLUSION

Governance and risk management



Governance and risk management are key priorities for the fire and emergency sector to ensure all possible actions are taken to keep our communities and emergency workers safe.

The benefits of diversity and inclusion directly address eight key risk areas (see page 11). Through addressing these risks, the fire and emergency sector will be better equipped in both preparing for and dealing with emergencies.

The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing an inclusive culture supports stronger management of poor behaviour, such as disregarding policies and procedures.• Greater diversity of thought in the experience base of decision makers leads to better identification and management of changing emergency risks.• Effective diversity programs mitigate the significant risks posed by discriminatory practices, destructive behaviours or psychologically unsafe workplaces.• Greater gender balance in key board and committee roles leads to improved decision-making and organisational performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals are able and willing to raise concerns and report poor behaviour.• Organisational decision-making is guided by diverse ideas and approaches.• Organisations are compliant with legal and legislative requirements (e.g. the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities).• Communities are engaged in and trust the sector’s management of issues and risks.

“One of the key planks of building our organisation is to create a culture that includes and celebrates all of our people. Our fire services are repeatedly voted the most trusted organisation in New Zealand. I want to make sure that fire and emergency is as highly regarded by every person who works or volunteers for us as it is by the public. We have a way to go to achieve this and hearing from our people about the things that they love and the changes we need to make is key to that.

– Rhys Jones CNZM, Chief Executive, Fire and Emergency New Zealand



The benefits of diversity and inclusion directly address 8 key risk areas

Risk area	Benefits
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved stakeholder relationships.• Stronger, more inclusive interactions between the sector and the community.¹⁰• Improved community participation in decision-making.¹¹• Greater capacity for collective actions and partnerships.
Health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased workforce well-being.¹²• Fewer physical and psychological injuries arising from sexual harassment in the workplace.^{13, 14}• Lower insurance premiums.¹⁵
Operational and service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More engaged workforce.^{16, 17}• Better attraction and retention of personnel,¹⁸ including volunteers.¹⁹• Better leveraging of capabilities.²⁰• Better management of dynamic, complex and uncertain situations.• Improved decision-making.^{21, 22}• Increased innovation.^{23, 24}
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More available resources.²⁵• Greater workforce productivity.^{26, 27}• Improved organisational effectiveness²⁸ and performance.²⁹
Public safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved community engagement in planning and resilience-building activities.³⁰• More tailored and relevant information provided to communities to inform decision-making.• Increased understanding of risks for vulnerable groups during and after emergencies including domestic violence, discrimination and exclusion.^{31, 32}• Greater engagement and reduced vulnerability in diverse cohorts.³³
Reputational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved perception of the sector that reflects the full spectrum of emergency management activities.³⁴• Broader representation of community cohorts in the sector.³⁵• Increased community credibility and trust.³⁶• Attraction of more diverse and highly skilled personnel.^{37, 38}
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved trust between the sector and its communities.³⁹• More ethical and equitable decision-making.^{40, 41}• Greater contribution to a fairer and more inclusive society.
Legal and legislative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction of legal actions and costs.⁴²• Less diversion of resources to manage legal processes.⁴³• Compliance with legislative requirements.• Adherence to human rights and equal opportunity laws.

Note: This table has been adapted from the risk categories identified in the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre research report, *Risky Business: Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter* (Young & Jones, 2019, pp. 35–37).



SUPPORTING
AND
ENGAGING
THE
DIVERSE
COMMUNITIES
WE SERVE

Community engagement



The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our communities are more likely to trust and engage when they see people in the sector that they recognise and relate to.• Greater engagement with different and diverse cohorts of the community leads to improved resilience and reduced vulnerability.• Greater understanding of the risks experienced by vulnerable groups before, during and after emergencies, including family violence, discrimination and exclusion, enables us to better support them.• Building stronger community partnerships provides greater access to social capital, communication channels and local networks before, during and after emergencies.• The sector is seen as more welcoming and less exclusive, leading to higher community participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals have a strong understanding of the needs and values of communities.• Organisations are responsive to the needs of the communities they serve and provide a high quality of service, in particular for the most marginalised or excluded and those experiencing disadvantage.• The public has a better understanding of the range of roles undertaken by the emergency sector.• Communities have trust in the sector because they see themselves represented and respected by the workforce and its leadership.

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It is critical that we commit to working with everyone across our emergency management sector to advocate for and champion gender equality and diversity. An emergency management sector that reflects the community we serve will benefit us all.

– Commissioner Andrew Crisp APM,
Emergency Management Victoria



Health and safety



The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An inclusive culture provides a physically, psychologically and culturally safe environment for individuals, teams and communities.• Increased employee well-being and improved mental health leads to lower rates of unplanned leave, injury management, time lost and insurance premiums.• Improvements to safety standards and systems including protective clothing and equipment, accommodate a more diverse workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals and teams work in psychologically safe environments where they are engaged and enabled to be highly productive.• Employees and volunteers have safe and appropriate protective clothing and equipment that suits everyone.• Organisations have strong safety systems that protect all members of a diverse workforce.• Communities view the sector as safe, fair and equitable.

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We have a specific focus on building gender equity and inclusion, but it is also clear that changes in our approach and specifically the behaviours that make up our culture will benefit ALL people in our organisation.

– Commissioner Paul Baxter QSO, Fire and Rescue New South Wales



ACCESSING
DIVERSE
PERSPECTIVES
TO IMPROVE
DECISION-
MAKING

Human capital and capability



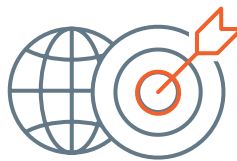
The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is higher attraction and retention of diverse and highly skilled employees and volunteers.The workforce has a broadener skill base, more varied experience and greater output.New people have an easier transition into the sector or organisation.There is greater recognition and value placed on non-response capabilities, including community engagement.The workforce has a greater understanding of the issues and challenges for diverse and/or underrepresented groups.Organisational capacity, capability, knowledge and learning opportunities are increased.Organisations have the greater ability to meet future workforce and organisational challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Individuals are more engaged and everyone feels like they belong, and that individual uniqueness is valued.Organisations have strong, sustainable and resilient workforces.Our sector is recognised as an employer of choice for all members of the community.The workforce represents the communities in which they operate.

“I’m very proud of the team that I have the privilege of leading. They are inclusive and respectful; they bring their diverse talents to work every day. This diversity and inclusiveness mean that our people are supportive, resilient and effective.

– Fiona Gill, Director of Fire Management, Department of Environment and Water SA



Organisational performance

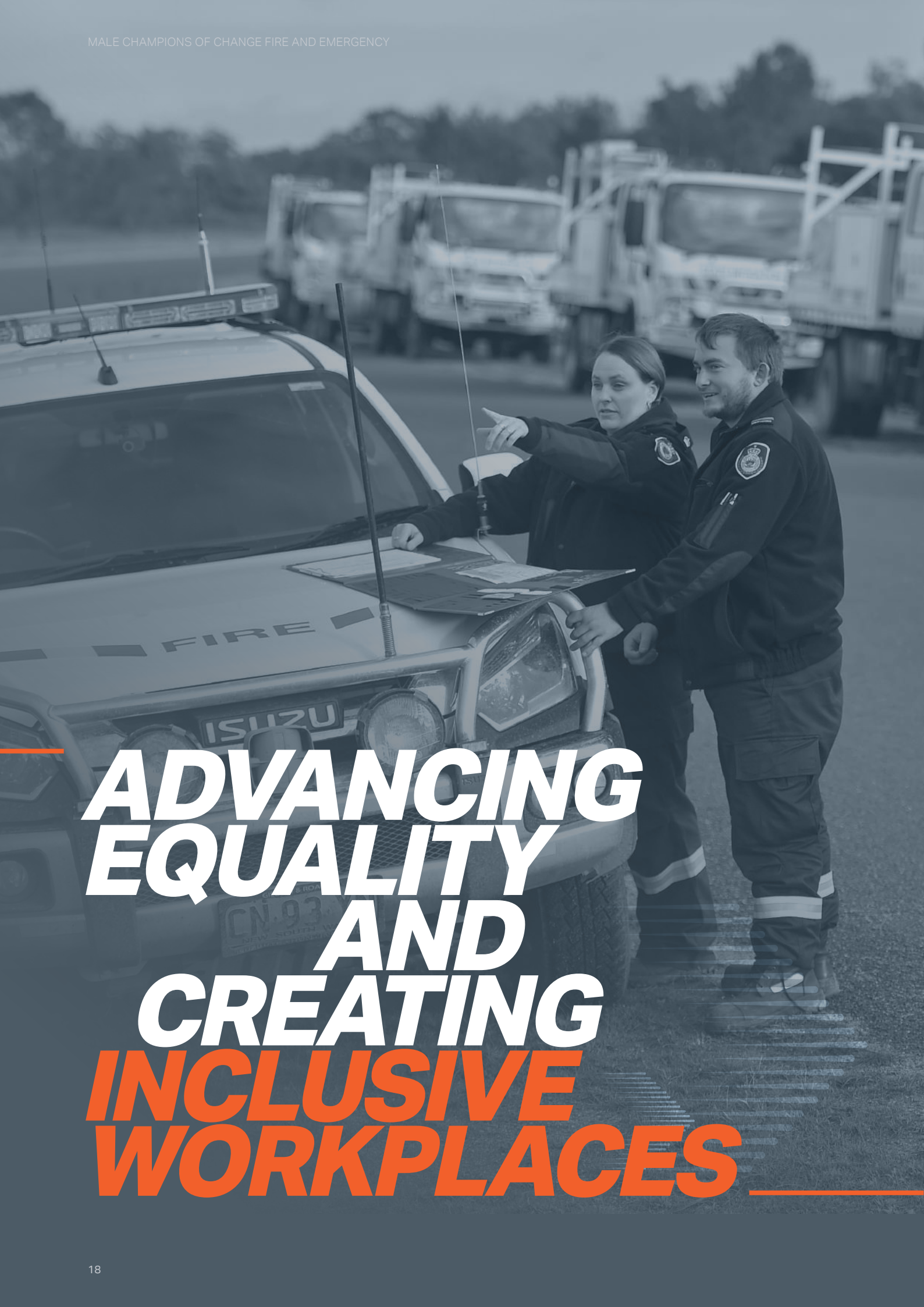


The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Greater diversity of thought, beliefs, attitudes, perspectives and experiences leads to improved problem-solving and decision-making.Greater innovation and positive change management can increase efficiency or improve service, often leading to higher levels of productivity.People who feel included are typically more highly engaged and are more high performing.Increased engagement and collaboration between areas of organisations can improve information sharing, create efficiencies and have a positive impact on the bottom line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Individuals are exposed to a variety of new ideas and encouraged to innovate, which can lead to efficiencies or improved service.Organisations are agile, adaptive and high performing.Communities receive an effective and efficient service that provides strong public value.

“Our communities are changing and so must we. Greater reflection of our community leads to greater understanding enabling us to help build true resilience.

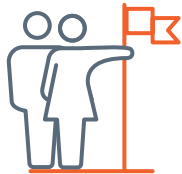
– Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM, West Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services





ADVANCING
EQUALITY
AND
CREATING
INCLUSIVE
WORKPLACES

Leadership



The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive workplaces attract higher quality leaders and provide greater leadership opportunities for diverse and/or underrepresented groups.• Leadership teams with more diverse perspectives have greater variation of leadership styles and are better able to connect with diverse teams and communities..• More inclusive leadership leads to improved organisational management, more innovation and stronger financial performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals at all levels can take on leadership roles, have a voice and influence change.• Organisational leaders are role models for creating inclusive teams, considering individual needs and creating psychological safety within their teams.• The community trusts our sector leaders and contributes to emergency prevention and planning.

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As industry chiefs, and Male Champions of Change we are sending a message to the fire and emergency services sector that women are a part of our life, and women are part of the fire and emergency services. There should be no impediment to women playing a meaningful role – and taking up leadership roles – in any aspect of the work we do.

– Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM,
Resilience New South Wales



Team performance



The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater diversity of skills, ideas and ways of engaging leads to improved team decision making, creativity, innovative thinking and problem solving ability.• Diverse teams consider problems in a variety of ways leading to more effective solutions.• Team environments are more respectful and supportive of all people, knowledge and skills, which improves group dynamics.• Efforts to intentionally include a diversity of thought can interrupt and reduce affinity bias or 'group think', leading to more considered decisions and better outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals feel able to contribute to team discussions, can raise issues and break down silos.• Teams work together collaboratively and make better quality decisions.• Actions are based on robust decision-making, creative thinking and innovative solutions.• Communities see and engage with strong and respectful teams that work together effectively to create public value.

Processes and systems




The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification and reduction of systemic discrimination and interruption of biases in all processes and systems, including recruitment and remuneration, improves diversity and inclusion..• Diverse perspectives allow for more innovations and efficiencies in processes.• Policies and practices better reflect the capabilities required of all emergency roles, including non-operational functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People change their behaviour to be more inclusive, which addresses systemic challenges faced by members of underrepresented groups (e.g. everyday sexism).• Individuals experience fair, balanced and equitable recruitment processes, selection criteria and pay.• Organisational policies, systems and structures are designed to support the entire workforce.• Communities have confidence that the sector has fair, efficient and effective policies and processes.

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Our volunteers are as diverse as the communities they serve. We need the best people throughout all our emergency service organisations – and by definition, the best people include a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives that build strong and effective teams.

– Commissioner Carlene York APM, NSW State Emergency Service



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The increasing demands on fire and emergency service personnel and the shifting nature of their work requires a broader talent pool.

We firmly believe that attracting more women and tapping into new and different skills will be fundamental to meeting Australia’s fire and emergency prevention, preparedness, incident response and recovery needs into the future.

– Stuart Ellis AM, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council



Measurement and evaluation



The rationale	What will success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear time-bound and measurable objectives mean we can focus our efforts in the right areas to address the under-representation of women.• Improved measurement and disclosure of measurable objectives and performance around diversity leads to greater transparency.• Improved organisational trust and legitimacy is gained by demonstrating a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisations publicly identify clear, measurable objectives and publicly report progress.• Individuals can see their experiences represented in public reporting.• Our community has confidence that the sector is working to improve its diversity.

“A robust and consistent approach to reporting on gender equality across the sector will help us to understand the challenges, learn from pockets where there has been success, and identify opportunities for improvement.

– Chris Beattie, Chief Officer,
South Australian State Emergency Service



Frequently asked questions



Q+A on gender balance and diversity and inclusion

Why should leaders focus on this issue?

The case for change is clear and evidence-based. We are focused on accessing the best talent required to lead and support our sector and the community into the future. Our workforce must understand and reflect the communities we serve. And to innovate and improve decision-making and performance, we need to tap into a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. The most obvious way to achieve these goals is by improving gender balance, diversity and inclusion across our sector.

Isn't this just succumbing to the politics of identity?

There is a lot of talk that the focus on gender equality feeds into notions of identity politics, that there should be special benefits or treatment for one group in society based on their identity. At its core, gender equality is about fairness and equality of opportunity. It's about enhancing productivity and innovation. It's about economic advancement and, more broadly, social cohesion. These are values that support and fulfil people; keep organisations operating and performing; build wealth and underpin our society. Gender equality is about benefits for all, rather than any favoured group.

Do male leaders only care about this issue now because they are worried about career prospects for their daughters?

This can't ever be just personal. It's about getting to a better place for everyone. Above all, we want to deliver equality in our workplaces and communities. Often the 'aha' moment doesn't come from the business case alone. Often the 'aha' moment comes from the heart, for example listening to the experiences of people close to you – wife, partner, sister, daughter, mother or female colleague. It's inevitable that the different parts of our lives – personal, business and societal – are intertwined. What's important is not keeping these parts of our lives separate but that our approach and behaviour is guided by the pursuit of equality, respect and fairness for all.

Does focusing on diversity and inclusion cost organisations financially?

The cost of not focusing on diversity and inclusion is far greater than the cost of doing so. Focusing on diversity and inclusion is an investment that has a positive financial return, among other benefits. Greater diversity has a direct, positive impact on an organisation's bottom line as a result of improved retention, productivity and performance.

Q+A on gender balance and diversity and inclusion



Why do we need to change our work environment?

Attracting more women is a major strategic workforce planning, capability and sustainability issue for our sector.

The traditional roles of firefighter and emergency service responder are evolving rapidly, particularly as our work extends into fire and emergency prevention, preparedness, incident response and recovery. This demands new and different skills and capabilities amongst our team.

Given the current make-up of our workforce is predominantly men, it is clear we are only accessing 50% of the best available talent. We also know that in highly masculine environments, gender-based discrimination can become normalised. Diversity and inclusion plays a positive role in challenging gender stereotypes, that are traditionally reinforced in environments that are not gender-balanced, which have potentially harmful consequences for everyone.

We are focused on gender equality because we know women are significantly under-represented in our sector and particularly in operational roles which serve as key pathways to leadership. This work supports a broader focus on diversity and inclusion.

Aren't there more men in the talent pool due to personal choices around caring?

Yes, people do and should be able to choose to prioritise caring responsibilities. We absolutely accept and celebrate that. What we don't accept is a situation where women (and increasingly men) with children or other caring responsibilities want to, or need to work, but can't. And the reason they can't is a lack of workforce flexibility; a lack of affordable, flexible and accessible child care; or a lack of equal access to roles and development opportunities. All of this may subordinate their careers. Our goal is to champion change in the system.

We want to create a system where all people with caring responsibilities can take care of the people they need to care for – and, at the same time, create one that makes it possible to access, advance and succeed in paid work.

Won't this mean dropping our standards? Is this the end of meritocracy?

It's not the end of meritocracy. We must be equally fair and rigorous in performance expectations and management of all employees regardless of gender or other diverse characteristics.

It's how we traditionally think about merit that is the stumbling block. If, by merit, we mean recruiting and promoting like we have always done, all we are really doing is reinforcing the status quo.

Leaders have to ask: Are we looking for people with similar backgrounds, capabilities and experience to 'mirror' others who have achieved in a role? If yes, the risk is that this approach favours people with typical career backgrounds and trajectories, and for our sector, this usually means men.

The community served by emergency services has always been diverse and is becoming increasingly more so. Bias in the recruitment process limits the diversity of an organisation, as a candidate's potential, merit and diverse set of skills can be overlooked. A clearly defined and future-focused role description and set of capabilities required for the role will help to identify the best candidate, regardless of gender, and interrupt gendered bias in recruitment processes.

Q+A on gender balance and diversity and inclusion



Won't this mean dropping our standards? Is this the end of meritocracy? (cont.)

Clearly communicating the rationale for new appointments mitigates against concerns for anyone that recruitment decisions may be driven by targets or quotas.

There is another kind of merit. Fix your eye on what we need for the future by looking beyond the traditional candidate pool. A high performer in the past may not be a high performer in the future. We need to creatively conceptualise roles so that potential is part of the equation as well as track record. This naturally expands horizons about the available talent pool for a position beyond the 'obvious' or typically 'meritorious' candidate. It leads to us elevating diverse experience and diverse thinking. It brings into focus what additional value a candidate will bring to teams and the way we manage our business.

Such a view of merit works to the advantage of everyone. It is critical that women are not seen as being 'parachuted' into roles to meet gender targets.

Do targets naturally mean that men will lose out?

Gender equality is not a zero-sum game. Taking a stand on gender equality means doing something about it. Setting clear targets for improvement is an important signal of commitment. It is a key tool for understanding and managing progress, or a lack of progress.

Asking '50:50, if not why not?' has helped to uncover systemic and entrenched biases in policies and processes that have clearly inhibited the advancement of women. Some have been the beneficiaries of these biases and we make no apologies for the fact that women now have more equal access to opportunities. We know that team performance across a whole range of measures is better with gender-balanced teams.

In general terms, a team made up of 40% women, 40% men and 20% open to anyone is gender-balanced and will deliver real benefits.

Do you think gender equality efforts have given licence for men to be excluded and vilified in the workplace?

We aim to create respectful and inclusive working environments where all employees can thrive and be successful. As workplaces and societies evolve so do norms, expectations and tolerance of certain behaviours.

An easy way for people to appropriately relate to each other in the workplace is to abide by the law and the values and codes of conduct employees sign up to as a condition of employment; and to afford their colleagues the basic respect and dignity they would expect for themselves and those important to them.

How can other men be involved?

Men are equal partners in every sense. They are colleagues, brothers, husbands, partners and fathers that all have a stake in advancing gender equality.

Ultimately, gender equality challenges will be best addressed when the most diverse views and perspectives are engaged and applied to help solve them. Engaging men specifically enables us to understand their ideas and perspectives, how they believe change will impact them (positively and negatively) and what they would do to tackle the problem – even if their view is there is no problem!

Q

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Q+A on Male Champions of Change

What is the focus of the Male Champions of Change strategy?

Male Champions of Change recognise that a long-term focus on achieving gender balance at every level of their organisations is critical to advancing more and diverse women into leadership at Executive and Board level.

MCC members specifically focus on:

- Listening to and learning from people within their organisations to identify high-impact actions to accelerate change.
- Achieving gender equality and advancing more and diverse women into leadership within their organisations.
- Creating the conditions and culture that enable a diversity of women to thrive in the workplace.
- Working together to shift systems of inequality in specific sectors and the community more broadly.
- Sharing resources, progress and results freely and widely so that many more organisations can benefit from this work.

What differentiates the MCC strategy?

CEO-level leaders engage 'head and heart' in the MCC strategy by committing their time, visible leadership, and willingness to be held accountable for their progress on gender equality.

The strategy relies on each champion's deep, personal commitment to gender equality. They listen to the experiences and ideas of their teams. They learn from each other, a diversity of women leaders and successful approaches to gender equality. Together, they develop and implement actions to shift entrenched systems which have historically served to disadvantage women in the workplace and society.

Members see achieving gender equality and advancing more and diverse women in leadership as a business, economic, social and human rights imperative. By working together within and across multiple sectors, the coalition has demonstrated it can make a significant and sustainable contribution to the vision for a truly gender-equal world.

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GENDER BALANCE IN FIRE AND EMERGENCY – THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Q

A

Q+A on Male Champions of Change

Why is the focus on male leaders to achieve gender equality in organisations?

The MCC strategy is about power. We know that women's activism is largely responsible for, and remains essential to, progress on gender equality. However, the levers of power in nations and in organisations today- still largely rest in the hands of men and for too long, men have largely been inactive on this issue. This strategy recognises that gender equality is not only a women's issue, but also a critical business, economic, social and human rights issue.

Research consistently shows that diversity drives business performance – companies with top quartile gender and ethnic diversity outperform peers by 21% and 33%, respectively. Research also shows that CEO commitment is the largest driver of gender equality outcomes. Companies are 22% more likely to have at least 15% women at the C-level when the CEO actively monitors diversity and inclusion programs.

Global studies, however, find that CEO action is still lagging. Only 24% of women and 38% of men see senior leaders communicate the importance of gender diversity. Only 18% of women and 26% of men say that progress is measured and shared across their company.

When MCC was formed in 2010, men led the vast majority of organisations in Australia. The idea was to seek their support to shift this system for the future. Today, while more women are CEOs and hold key executive positions, we still need male leaders actively engaged in achieving gender equality in the workplace.

Doesn't the focus on 'male' champions diminish the role of women?

The MCC strategy is not about men speaking for women or stepping in for them. The strategy is about men stepping up beside women and saying, 'The promotion of gender equality is everyone's business.' It's about male leaders taking up the role they can and should play in creating change.

The name 'male champions' does not imply that the leaders are perfect but rather, that they are genuinely committed to using their leadership and influence to champion change.

How are women leaders involved?

Women's leadership is essential. Women are critical collaborators and advisors. However, the accountability for action in the MCC strategy rests squarely with the men.

From the outset, MCC was established with a formal process of listening to people within member organisations. This listening has underpinned priorities and actions identified and championed by MCC. MCCs have also partnered with groups such as Chief Executive Women; Women's Leadership Institute Australia; Workplace Gender Equality Agency; Our Watch; No to Violence and Rape; and Domestic Violence Services Australia on specific projects.

Women CEOs are engaged members and Special Advisors within each MCC group, and most groups are convened and chaired by highly regarded women leaders. Many women hold the role of Program Director or as each member organisation's Implementation Leader for the strategy.

GENDER BALANCE IN FIRE AND EMERGENCY – THE CASE FOR CHANGE

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Q+A on Male Champions of Change



Why are you focusing on gender equality specifically, rather than diversity more broadly?

MCCs are very clear and specific about their purpose – achieving gender equality and advancing more and diverse women into leadership within their organisations.

We live in a society where men dominate leadership positions. When we focus on gender equality, we capture the missing 50% of our population. We don't view gender as separate from other aspects of identity or life experience such as cultural background, age, disability or sexual orientation. Accordingly, while our work is based in primarily considering gender, other related aspects of privilege or marginalisation feature as well, as they intersect with gender.

Many MCC initiatives, such as improving flexibility for all employees, clearly help to provide greater options and choices for everyone. Valuing and promoting inclusive leadership capabilities is also an intervention championed by members that benefits all.

How are Male Champions selected?

Groups are typically self-forming. They comprise men of power who have the ability to lead, influence and affect change. They come from a cross-section of organisations and sectors to tackle specific and relevant gender equality issues. They include leaders with both track records in advancing gender equality and those who value the opportunity to learn from others.

The focus is often on engaging leaders of large workforces or influential organisations in society where new ideas and initiatives, once implemented, can help build real momentum for change. Other members, such as consulting firms, provide networks and expertise in analysing issues, developing change frameworks, and advocating for the advancement of women at the highest levels.

Importantly, all Male Champions of Change must have the motivation and willingness to listen, learn and visibly lead on the issue and be accountable for their progress. Groups do not tolerate free riders.

Q+A on Male Champions of Change



Are there specific commitments that all Male Champions of Change are expected to support?

Taking action rather than talking about the issues is a cornerstone of the Male Champions of Change strategy.

The power in the Male Champions of Change strategy is the collective commitment to some key initiatives across all group members. Sometimes it is not possible for everyone to act in unison. For example, differing operating approaches, organisational maturity or size may stand in the way of participation by all. Differing governance structures between the public and private sector or local and multinational organisations may also prevent uniform participation in a few cases.

MCCs strive to participate to the extent to which they have the authority and influence to do so – ranging from 'Leaders' to 'Learners' on a particular issue. However, there are some commitments that are consistent amongst all Male Champions of Change.

These include:

- Listening to people in our organisations, learning from them and leading with action.
- Changing workplace conditions, cultures and mindsets to enable everyone to advance within organisations.
- Working to increase women on boards, executive committee and in line management.
- Recruiting, developing and retaining diverse candidates as a priority.
- Developing workplaces where health and safety are prioritized and all forms of violence in the workplace – including verbal, physical, sexual – and sexual harassment, are prohibited.
- Sharing experiences and strategies for advancing gender equality across corporate, government and community sectors.
- Being spokespeople for the promotion of gender equality, both individually and collectively.
- Assessing and publicly reporting on our individual and collective progress and results on gender equality, consistent with local and global leading practice reporting frameworks.

Why is the listening and learning personally led by the Male Champions?

Even the best qualitative and quantitative research – while informative – is no substitute for the 'head' and 'heart' connection that comes from personal engagement through listening to and learning from the lived experience of others. It's also powerful for CEOs to hear well-known but sometimes abstract concepts of gender equality translated into the day-to-day and very human experiences of individuals and specific groups.

Benefits of leading this approach include: gaining a deep understanding of how gender equality issues impact people in their organisation and developing a language and stories that enable leaders to articulate the issues and convince others of the need for action. The commitment to listening also demonstrates how personally engaged CEOs are in responding to the issues and the power of applying a CEO-lens to issues that may have otherwise proven intractable to solve.

What if the major issue to address is outside the Male Champions' ability to influence?

This does occur, particularly on systemic issues which require involvement from multiple sectors and leaders if change is to be achieved. Here, MCCs work to understand the issue deeply, particularly from the perspective of their employees, customers and the communities they serve. They take action where they can directly influence outcomes and work individually and collectively to advocate for change with other key stakeholders within the ecosystem of the issue.

Q+A on Male Champions of Change



How do MCCs track progress?

MCCs use leadership approaches that are applied to any significant organisational priority. They review baseline metrics, agree on targets, develop action plans to achieve them, measure and correct. Some challenges and opportunities are harder to make progress on than others. This is true of any business problem – and increasing the representation of women in leadership is no different. When progress isn't being made, they apply the typical business toolkit. MCCs look at key metrics and what is preventing progress from multiple angles. They intervene or reset the course where needed and share their experiences so that others can avoid mistakes or missteps they have identified.

MCCs share their progress year-on-year through an annual Impact Report and group-specific reports. The MCC Impact Report is considered the largest and most comprehensive voluntary reporting on gender equality, anywhere in the world.

The MCC Impact Report reports annually on actions taken by MCCs and within their organisations, as well as the effectiveness of those actions. MCC outcome measures include:

- Gender balance in leadership, recruitment, graduates and promotions.
- Pay equity between men and women.
- Flexible and inclusive employment experiences.
- Leadership and advocacy.
- Impact of initiatives on gender equality social issues.

MCC effectiveness measures include:

- Women's representation overall – annual progress towards gender balance.
- Women's representation in each of five Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) management categories (or aligned for organisations that don't report to WGEA) – annual progress towards gender balance.
- Women graduates – annual progress towards gender balance.
- Recruitment of women – annual progress towards gender balance.
- Annual level of women's promotions at least equivalent to women's representation overall.
- Biennial reduction overall and within each group of the gender pay gap.
- Annual increase in reported levels of employees' access to the flexibility they need.
- Employee engagement measures for women and men reflecting an inclusive employment experience.
- Annual reduction in numbers of men and women leaving employment during or at the end of parental leave.
- Defined impact (by initiative) on gender equality social issues.
- Growth of visible leadership by MCCs (via speaking and communication metrics, audience reach).
- Successful women executives in MCC organisations who have gone on to become CEOs of prominent organisations and board members in other organisations.

Q+A on Male Champions of Change



What success has MCC seen in this area?

While there is still a long way to go and many stakeholders have driven progress, we know that:

- Australia now has more women in the workforce than at any other time in its history.
- Flexible workplaces are fast becoming a threshold for organisations considered to be 'employers of choice' for the best talent.
- Australian businesses are now leading the way on organisational responses to domestic violence.
- More women are being encouraged and supported into non-traditional sectors such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), where future job prospects are high.
- We now have tools and strategies for understanding and addressing gender pay gaps in like for like roles and overall in organisations.
- We have achieved strong advances in women in leadership across the board compared to 10 years ago, even if representation percentages remain a challenge.
- We see teams demanding diversity of viewpoints in their work and celebrating the business benefits it delivers.
- Australia has a prominent, national and ongoing conversation at the highest levels of influence about how to advance gender equality.

Notwithstanding these outcomes, the pace of progress – particularly at Board and Executive level – is not as fast as MCCs had hoped and more work is required to understand and address the reasons for that and any underlying resistance to change.

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FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES	
ACT Emergency Services Agency	Tina Cox
ACT Parks and Conservation Service	Neil Cooper PSM
Airservices Australia	Libby Keefe
Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council	Madeleine Kelly
Bushfires NT	Andrew Turner
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Fire and Rescue NSW	Wayne Phillips AFSM
Fire Rescue Victoria	Colin Thomas
Forest Fire Management Victoria – Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning	Chris Eagle
Forestry Corporation of New South Wales	Ross Dickson
New South Wales Rural Fire Service	Trina Schmidt PSM
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NSW State Emergency Service	Miranda Gilberg
NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service	Paul Seager
Parks Victoria	Ariana Henderson
Queensland Fire and Emergency Services	Callum MacSween
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services	Rosie Amatt
SA Metropolitan Fire Service	Peter Button
South Australian Country Fire Service	Tammy Moffat
South Australian State Emergency Service	Derren Halleday
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