

Briefing Note: Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Act 1987

Purpose of the Act

This Act requires Commonwealth authorities (government bodies with 40+ employees) to implement Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs. It aims to eliminate discrimination and promote fair treatment for women and other designated groups.

Definition of Women

The Act explicitly defines a woman as 'a member of the female sex irrespective of age.' This provides a sex-based foundation for women's workplace protections.

Key Features of the Act

- **EEO Programs:** Authorities must design programs to identify and remove barriers to women's participation in employment. - **Consultation:** Women employees and unions must be consulted in program design and implementation. - **Data Collection:** Authorities must collect statistics on gender representation and job categories. - **Reporting:** Annual progress reports must be provided to the responsible Minister, who can issue recommendations.

Impact on Women

- Strengthens protections for women in Commonwealth employment. - Creates accountability for representation and treatment of women in the workforce. - Highlights structural barriers and requires measurable goals to improve women's participation. - Ensures parliamentary oversight of equality commitments.

Limitations

- Applies only to Commonwealth authorities (not private employers, who are covered under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012). - Effectiveness depends on how well authorities design, implement, and monitor their EEO programs.

Conclusion

The Act remains a key legal safeguard for women in federal employment, ensuring sex-based rights are recognised and that structural change is pursued through transparent, measurable action.