



**Phil Teece**

Advisor,  
industrial relations &  
employment  
[phil.teece@alia.org.au](mailto:phil.teece@alia.org.au)

## Pay equity focus goes west

The focus on pay equity continues to gather pace around Australia. Librarians are well acquainted with the New South Wales government's trail-blazing work in this area. Following that state's judicial pay equity inquiry, librarians, library technicians and archivists were the occupations chosen for the first test case under new equal remuneration laws. Unprecedented pay rises resulted for state government employees. There has been some further flow-on to other NSW library staff since. We would like to see more.

Taking a lead from New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland also conducted pay equity reviews which spawned new remuneration principles in the wage fixing principles of those states. The opportunity now exists for unions in Tasmania and Queensland to mount their own wage cases based on equity arguments.

Now, Western Australia is following suit. Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection, John Kobelke, recently commissioned an independent review to examine unfair discrimination in Western Australia workplaces. He has directed the review to address specifically the state's gender pay gap. The review will be conducted by Dr Trish Todd and Dr Joan Eveline of the University of Western Australia. Both are well-known academics in the fields of industrial relations and gender, respectively. The terms of reference require the review to consider:

1. recent research on the gender pay gap;
2. the extent to which principles of pay equity can be enhanced using the state's wage fixing principles as determined by the WA Industrial Relations Commission, or the extent to which current principles are a barrier to progressing pay equity;
3. strategies to address the gender pay gap, which could be developed on a voluntary basis by key industrial parties;
4. possible enhancements to the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993*

which would have a significant impact on the gender gap; and

5. training which could help to address the gender pay gap issue, including access to training in and management of work and family issues.

In announcing the inquiry, Minister Kobelke noted that the state's female labour force participation rate of 57.4 per cent is the highest in Australia. Western Australian women earn markedly less than their male counterparts and less than Australian women as a whole. Average weekly ordinary time earnings [AWOTE] for Western Australian women rose by 4.7 per cent in 2003. For Western Australian men, AWOTE increased by 6.9 per cent in the same period. Average weekly earnings for Western Australian men stand at \$1014.40 per week, as against \$784.80 for women. In other words, the WA gender gap is \$229.60 or 22.6 per cent. Western Australian women have the second lowest wages in Australia, above only Tasmania.

Submissions have been invited. ALIA has recommended that the review take a similar approach to that adopted in New South Wales. In addition, we believe that point 3 of the terms of reference provides an opportunity for the government to take a lead by conducting targeted review of obviously deserving cases in its own employment areas. We have suggested that in both state government and local government employment, there are strong indications that, relative to other professional and para-professional categories, library workers are unreasonably grouped at lower levels of integrated classification structures. This type of differential concentration, of course, represents a major component of gender pay inequity. We believe that the review should recommend independent assessment of relative classification levels, including proper assessment of the current work value of library professionals.

The review's report and recommendations to the Minister will be completed by mid-September 2004. ■

*Western Australian women earn markedly less than their male counterparts and less than Australian women as a whole...*