

White Ribbon Australia ASX Submission

White Ribbon Australia comments on the fourth edition of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Principles and Recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Principles and Recommendations.

We commend the focus of the draft fourth edition on a listed entity's 'social licence to operate'. In this submission, we draw the Council's attention to the role listed entities can play in leading social change, as well as reflecting social expectations about how they operate. We also recommend the fourth edition explicitly refer to the critical role listed entities, as workplaces, play in preventing men's violence against women, supporting women experiencing violence at work and at home and holding perpetrators to account.

The proposed changes can better align with policy on ending men's violence against women.

The Council may be aware of national, state and territory policy on men's violence against women and Change the Story, the national framework for preventing violence against women and their children. Most of these recognise workplaces as key sites of social change that can drive the prevention of men's violence against women¹. Statistics indicate that over 60% of women experiencing violence from a current partner are working².

As places where many people spend a large part of their day, workplaces are key to the 'whole of community' approach to ending men's violence against women and promoting gender equality. This approach ensures that violence prevention messages reach multiple people in multiple settings, helping reinforce attempts to change people's attitudes and behaviours.

Workplaces being active in preventing men's violence against women also meets social expectations: 94% of employees agree employers should take a leadership role in educating their workforce about respectful relationships between men and women³. However, an Australian survey revealed that 48% of respondents who had experienced domestic violence disclosed it to a manager or supervisor, and only 10% found their response helpful⁴.

For many women experiencing violence and abuse, the workplace provides a safe space and network away from the abuser. It is critical that listed entities, as workplaces, understand violence against women and the role workplaces play in preventing and addressing this violence. This will help women secure economic independence, stay in work and access the support they need. Addressing men's violence against women by ensuring appropriate risk assessment has taken place will make workplaces safer for everyone. Workplaces also have a pivotal role in addressing the underlying causes of men's violence against women by promoting gender equality.

“Gender inequality, and the violence that often goes with it, are pervasive issues in our society. The workplace provides unique opportunities to address this, so as employers we have a responsibility.”

Simon Earle, CEO
Maritime Employees Training Ltd

“As a victim of family violence I turned to my workplace for help. It is hard to find the words to express how grateful I am that I chose to disclose. Colleagues (at all levels) have been amazing. I have amazing support and my manager, coordinator and team have gone above and beyond. The support I have received from my workplace has helped me tremendously through a very painful, expensive, emotional and confusing journey.”

Employee at a White Ribbon Workplace

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The proposed changes to the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Principles and Recommendations will support achievement of policy priorities by emphasising codes of conduct, zero tolerance for bullying and harassment, and promotion of gender diversity on boards. The emphasis of the Principles and Recommendations on the social licence to operate can underpin these efforts.

Given the policy context and available data, we recommend the Council include the following in the fourth edition of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Principles and Recommendations:

Explicit reference to men's violence against women as an example of behaviour for which ASX listed entities have zero tolerance.

A recommendation that managers of listed entities receive training in violence against women and managing disclosures of violence.

A recommendation that listed entities have policies and procedures in place to support women experiencing violence (for example, provision of additional paid leave or flexible work arrangements), and hold perpetrators to account.

Promote the need for listed entities to support women's leadership at all levels in an organisation.

Becoming a White Ribbon Workplace means we have taken meaningful steps towards embedding a culture in which our people treat each other as equals...

It's a commitment to support our people in role modelling respectful relationships... to champion equality and respect at work, home and in the community.

Alison Campbell, Executive GM,
People and Culture, REA Group

Workplaces are creating change.

We are confident that listed entities are capable of responding positively to the revisions of the fourth edition.

Five ASX100 listed entities have achieved accreditation as a White Ribbon Workplace: Carsales.com.au; Mirvac; REA Group; Rio Tinto and Telstra. These organisations are examples of companies that recognise the true value of the social licence to operate; they go beyond reflecting what society expects of them to become active change agents in areas of concern to their stakeholders.

We encourage the Council to reflect on the unique and important role workplaces play in creating social change in the fourth edition of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Principles and Recommendations. We also recommend more explicit reference to the issue of men's violence against women in the fourth edition and discussion of the ways listed entities, as workplaces, can support women experiencing violence. This will reflect the current policy context and recognise the key role workplaces play in preventing men's violence against women.

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Role of leadership

As recognised in the fourth edition change to Recommendation 3.1 (to become Recommendation 3.2), the ‘tone at the top’ is vital to creating a positive organisational culture. This corresponds with our experience implementing the Workplace Accreditation Program and is recognised in the structure of the accreditation framework (see Appendix 1).

This focus recognises the contribution that leaders, including those that govern, manage and represent and organisation, make to organisational cultures. Leaders can positively model, influence and embed a culture of gender equality, respect, safety and support. Leadership support facilitates the whole of organisation approach to violence prevention that drives sustainable social change. Ensuring board oversight of organisational culture will also support achievement of Recommendation 1.5.

Appendix 1: Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program Standards and Criteria

Standard One: Leadership and Commitment

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6
Leadership Commitment	Commitment of Resources	Internal Communication	External Communication	Collaboration	Demonstrated engagement with the issue of violence against women

Standard Two: Prevention of Violence against Women

2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6
Policies, Procedures and Documentation	Communication of Policies and Procedures	Manager/ Supervisor Training	Staff Training	Risk Assessment	Expectation of Contractors

Standard Three: Responses to Violence against Women

3.1	3.2	3.3
Response to victims	Response to perpetrators	Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Endnotes

1. For example, but not limited to: Free from Violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women (2017); NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2017-2021 and Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026.

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Personal Safety Survey 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS. Retrieved from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>

3. Pennay, D. & Powell, A. (2012). The role of bystander knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in preventing violence against women: A full technical report. Melbourne: The Social Research Centre. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/1osZjYt>

4. McFerran, L. (2011). Safe at Home, Safe at Work? National Domestic violence and the workplace survey. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Retrieved from: https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/FASSFile/National_Domestic_Violence_and_the_Workplace_Survey_2011_Full_Report.pdf p. 13.