Working with Women Alliance

Gender Equity Charter for Australian Aviation

Submission by the Working with Women Alliance (WwWA)

March 2026

Acknowledgment of Country

The Working with Women Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, and we value the enduring connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to this land.

We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

About WwWA

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE).

The WwWA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact.

We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.

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Executive Summary

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Gender Equity Charter for Australian Aviation (the Charter).

Advancing gender equity in Australia's aviation sector is central to building a workforce that supports long-term industry capability. Equality is not only a matter of fairness, but also a necessary condition for strengthening participation and addressing persistent workforce gaps.

This submission raises concerns that the proposed Charter is overly general and not sufficiently responsive to the structural drivers of gender inequality. In particular, there is a clear absence of recruitment practices, where bias at each stage - from job design through to hiring decisions - continues to reinforce gender occupational segregation. It also draws attention to the need to strengthen education and training pathways, noting that gender disparities in STEM participation continue to restrict women's pathways into aviation roles.

In addition, the Charter must recognise the need to embed gender equality beyond representation in traditionally masculine roles in aviation. Namely, the Charter should acknowledge and address the undervaluation of women already in the field who are predominately working as cabin crew.

Further, achieving gender equity requires an approach that recognises the experiences of people whose gender does not align with traditional norms. Current data limitations and binary frameworks obscure the participation and experiences of non-binary individuals, limiting the sector's ability to respond effectively.

The Charter's impact will depend on clarity and consistency in implementation. Clear definitions, along with practical guidance, will be important to support accountability and ensure that commitments translate into meaningful progress across the sector.

Recruitment Efforts

The discussion paper acknowledges that the sector needs to modify its recruitment practices to ensure it attracts women to aviation roles. However, none of the Charter's four principles target the hiring process – arguably one of the most important areas for recruitment.

From the outset, gender-coded wording and imagery in job advertisements can reinforce stereotypes about who is the ideal candidate,[i] exacerbating gender occupational segregation by discouraging women and non-binary individuals from applying for jobs in certain - often male-dominated - industries. Even when women do

apply, research shows their CVs are more likely to be screened out,[ii] especially in sectors where they are underrepresented,[iii] and where evaluators rely on gendered assumptions when assessing ambiguous qualifications.[iv] During interviews, women may be penalised for displaying traits that conflict with gendered expectations[v], like negotiating salary.[vi]

Without explicit attention to bias at each stage of recruitment, the Charter risks overlooking a key driver of gender inequality in aviation.

Pipeline Building

Building a diverse aviation workforce cannot be achieved without addressing the gender divide in education. While WwWA recognises existing initiatives directed towards increasing the participation of females in aviation careers,[vii] women are still underrepresented in many STEM fields[viii] under which aviation and aerospace degrees are classified. Students have identified implicit and explicit bias, sexual harassment, unequal access to resources and funding, and higher advising load as major factors that discourage women from pursuing careers in science and engineering.[ix] Further, identifying role models and mentorship is a challenge for female students due to the lack of women in aviation faculty positions.[x] Gender bias in aviation training materials, such as male-only imagery and lack of gender-neutral language,[xi] perpetuates exclusion by reinforcing the idea that piloting is male-dominated, making those who don't fit the stereotype feel unwelcome during training. Little follow-up is ever done is ensure that the few enrolled female students are retained in the programs,[xii] meaning inadequate recruitment practices are often left unaddressed. The Charter provides the perfect opportunity to strengthen education pathways for female aviation students.

Undervaluation of Existing Workforce

While the first principle of the Charter focuses on salary equity between men and women, it does not address the existing undervaluation of female dominated roles, such as cabin crew. Without explicit acknowledgment of gender inequities faced by the existing workforce, the Charter will not enable organisations to enact stronger, practical commitments on pay, fatigue, working time and other structural issues.

The Charter is not sufficiently responsive to the workplace conditions that shape women's day-to-day employment experiences in aviation. For many workers – particularly cabin crew – gender inequality is embedded in employment arrangements such as rostering practices or career progression pathways. For example, Cabin crew operate in a safety-critical environment, yet do not have the same level of dedicated fatigue regulations as other parts of the aviation sector, such as pilots. In this context,

the third principle of the Charter should be expanded to explicitly commit to inclusivity in employment conditions as well as facilities. This includes recognising critical gaps in part-time protections and the disproportionate impact of caring responsibilities on women.

Gender

While WwWA appreciates an ongoing commitment to advancing women's equality and representation in Australia's aviation sector, it is also important to recognise that gender diversity in aviation extends beyond the experiences of women alone. Achieving genuine gender equality requires acknowledging and addressing barriers faced by all people whose gender may not align with traditional expectations, including non-binary individuals.

Non-binary people are very likely underrepresented in the aviation workforce and may encounter discrimination or exclusion. However, current Australian data provides little clarity on the extent or nature of these experiences. Most aviation workforce statistics and surveys use binary gender options such as "male" and "female", sometimes including a small "other" category that groups non-binary people with those who do not disclose their gender. As a result, evidence about non-binary workers is indirect and often folded invisibly into broader categories.

While many of the structural and cultural issues identified in relation to women's participation are likely to affect non-binary individuals as well, international evidence points to some distinct challenges. Networks such as the National Gay Pilots Association (NGPA) and the European Pride in Aviation Network (EPAN) have reported recurring issues around gendered uniforms and grooming standards, administrative difficulties in updating records and licenses following a legal gender change, and concerns about discrimination during medical certification processes.

WwWA therefore encourages the use of inclusive language in the Charter to help ensure that policies strengthen gender equity for everyone.

Implementation

The success of the Charter will depend on the clarity and consistency of its core concepts. Phrases like 'genuine progress' introduce a level of ambiguity that may undermine effective implementation. Without a shared and clearly defined understanding of that constitutes progress, signatory organisations may adopt different interpretations based on internal capacity or priorities. This risks creating uneven standards across the sector, limiting the Charter's overall impact. To ensure the Charter is both implementable and achievable, greater specificity is needed

around expected actions, benchmarks and outcomes. Establishing clearer definitions and minimum expectations would support accountability and provide organisations with a clearer pathway for action.

The development of practical tools and guidance materials will be critical in addressing this gap. In particular, the Charter would benefit from:

- Clearly articulated examples of measurable targets (for example, representation and remuneration goals across different occupations and levels, retention rates, or promotion outcomes).
- Standardised progress reporting frameworks.
- Evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of initiatives, including both quantitative indicators and qualitative measures of workplace culture and inclusion.
- Case studies or model approaches demonstrating successful interventions within aviation or comparable sectors.
- Guidance on data collection, including intersectional considerations.

Providing this level of practical support would not only reduce ambiguity but also strengthen organisations' capacity to translate commitment into action.

We thank the Department for considering our input and look forward to continued engagement on these important initiatives.

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[i] WGEA, 2019, *Gender equitable recruitment and promotion*, https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equitable-recruitment-and-promotion
[ii] Mladen Adamovic, 2020, *Analyzing discrimination in recruitment: A guide and best practices for resume studies*, International Journal of Selection and Assessment, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ijsa.12298
[iii] ibid.
[iv] Carol Isaac, Barbara Lee, Molly Carnes, 2015, *Interventions That Affect Gender Bias in Hiring: A Systematic Review*, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4554714/
[v] Carol Isaac, Barbara Lee, Molly Carnes, 2015, *Interventions That Affect Gender Bias in Hiring: A Systematic Review*, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4554714/
[vi] WGEA, 2019, *Gender equitable recruitment and promotion*, https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equitable-recruitment-and-promotion
[vii] Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts, 2019, *Women in the Aviation Industry Initiative*, Australian Government, https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/aviation/women-aviation-industry-initiative

[viii] Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Snapshot of disparity in STEM*, Australian Government, https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/advancing-women-stem-strategy/snapshot-disparity-stem
[ix] Caroline Marete, Wei Zakharov, Flavio Antonio Coimbra Mendonca, 2022, *A Systematic Literature Review Examining the Gender Gap in Collegiate Aviation and Aerospace Education*, https://ojs.library.okstate.edu/osu/index.php/CARI/article/view/8523
[x] Caroline Marete, Wei Zakharov, Flavio Antonio Coimbra Mendonca, 2022, *A Systematic Literature Review Examining the Gender Gap in Collegiate Aviation and Aerospace Education*, https://ojs.library.okstate.edu/osu/index.php/CARI/article/view/8523
[xi] William Hart, 2018, *Isolation and Onboarding: Gender Bias in Aviation Training Documents*, https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/eng_tech_comm_capstone_course/19/
[xii] ibid.