

Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 Gender-based undervaluation – priority awards review

PeakCare's Submission to the Fair Work Commission

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Introduction

PeakCare Queensland Incorporated (PeakCare) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Fair Work Commission's Draft Determination issued in July 2025 concerning proposed variations to the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Industry Award. We acknowledge and support the Fair Work Commission's intent to address gender-based undervaluation within the sector.

About PeakCare

PeakCare is a not-for-profit peak body for child and family services in Queensland, providing an independent voice representing and promoting matters of interest to the non-government sector. Across Queensland, PeakCare represents small, medium, and large local, state-wide, and national non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, families, and communities. Member organisations also provide child protection services, foster care, kinship care, and residential care for children and young people who are at risk of entry to, or who are in the statutory child protection system and youth justice systems.

A large network of associate members and supporters also subscribe to PeakCare. This includes individuals with an interest in child protection, youth justice, and related services, and who are supportive of PeakCare's policy platform around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing, and equitable access to life opportunities.

PeakCare's Submission

In our initial review of the Preliminary Decision issued in May 2025, we supported the positions put forward by the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) and the views expressed by key sector organisations, including ACOSS, Community Legal Centres Qld, AbSec NSW, The Centre Victoria, and others. Our concerns related to the risk of wage reductions and loss of Equal Remuneration Order protections; workforce morale, retention, and service impact; and the need for a role-specific, fit-for-purpose classification structure.

Upon review of the Draft Determination issued in July 2025, we commend the Fair Work Commission for recognising the need to consolidate and simplify classification structures and for proposing a structured, nine-level framework with clearer role definitions. The introduction of translation arrangements to preserve existing pay (via Clause C.2.2 and equivalent provisions) is an important step toward mitigating immediate wage regression.

Wage Protections and Equal Remuneration Order Removal

Despite the transitional protections proposed (e.g., Clause C.2.2), PeakCare remains concerned about the revocation of the Equal Remuneration Order without permanent embedding of its outcomes into the base award structure. The draft determination, while preserving the higher of current or translated pay, does not protect new entrants, thereby creating a two-tier workforce and risking long-term erosion of pay equity. As reflected in the translation tables, employees currently earning \$1543–\$2025 (Level 3–5 with Equal Remuneration Order) could be mapped to base rates significantly below these thresholds (e.g., Level 6.1 at \$1500 or Level 7.1 at \$1999), which is unsustainable.

Misalignment with sector complexity

The new structure continues to rely heavily on formal qualifications (e.g., Cert III, Cert IV and degree levels), without adequately incorporating lived experience, cultural expertise, or therapeutic and trauma-informed competencies. These elements are central to child protection, youth work, and family support roles. This structural mismatch risks misclassifying highly skilled roles into lower bands and could disincentivise service continuity, especially in rural and remote communities and locations with high proportions of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Risk to service sustainability

As outlined in PeakCare's Sector Voices Report, which reflects our members' views, the SCHADS Award must align with the funding realities of state-funded contracts.¹ The current draft determination does not sufficiently address the disconnect between new wage obligations and existing contracting arrangements, nor does it guarantee that government funders will adjust grants to match classification outcomes. This jeopardises the sector's ability to implement reforms without sacrificing service delivery or job security.

Inconsistency across service types

The award focuses heavily on Disability and Aged care workers which are generally funded and overseen by federal government agencies. Community services and child & family services, of which PeakCare's membership cohort is largely comprised, are generally funded by and bound by state legislation. There is not a consistent framework across all states and services that aligns qualifications and positions. This could cause issues when applying a qualification-based framework to the work of our members and further exacerbate inequity across the sector.

Recommendations

To address the risks outlined above, PeakCare recommends the following:

- Permanently embed Equal Remuneration Order-derived rates into the base award to ensure parity for all staff, including new hires
- Introduce sector-specific allowances or descriptors that recognise lived experience, cultural authority, and complex client work
- Require federal and state funders to guarantee indexation and alignment of grants with revised award obligations
- Implement a national co-design process for Schedule B descriptors involving employers, workers, and lived experience representatives
- Phase in the new structure only after role-by-role mapping tools and funding transition supports are in place.

¹ PeakCare. (2025) Sector Voices Report. Insights & opportunities from Queensland's child and family sector. Brisbane: PeakCare. [Online]. Available at: https://peakcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/PeakCare-Sector-Voices-Report_Final.pdf (Accessed 29 July 2025).

Conclusion

PeakCare supports the intent behind the Commission's draft determination but urges stronger safeguards to ensure reforms improve gender equity without unintended workforce and service disruptions. Equity cannot be achieved by lowering the floor for some to raise it for others. We advocate for a sustainable, inclusive award that reflects the true value of this workforce and enables service excellence across Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Allsop

Chief Executive Officer