

Fran Metcalf – CareerOne

The Courier Mail – 27 March 2010

When it comes to quotas to boost the number of women in workplaces, there are two opposing camps: those who believe women should be hired and elevated on the basis of merit and skills rather than gender, and those who argue that women will never get an equal go in the workplace unless companies are forced to hire and promote them.

The Federal Government is considering a plan to make companies install voluntary 40 per cent female representation at all levels within three to five years. If they fail, mandatory quotas would be enforced by sanctions and penalties.

The thing is that jobs are out there - women simply don't always want them. Recruiter Sophie Macdonald says engineering, oil and gas companies are on the crest of a boom and face daily challenges to fill vacant positions in Queensland.

The jobs come with top-of-the-range salaries and conditions but women aren't interested. In the past, this was because of the traditional male culture, an absence of female mentors and having to work in remote places but this has changed.

Rather, Macdonald says the problem lies in facts like only 11 per cent of engineering students at QUT are women. It's a fair point but surely more young women would be lured into studying engineering if they knew quotas guaranteed them a top-paying job with progression potential once they graduated.

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