Wine Australia

AUSTRALIAN women in wine



United Nations
70th Commission for
the Status of Women

Post-CSW70 Insights Report

Themes and practical recommendations for the Australian wine sector

Jane Thomson OAM

Executive summary

In March 2026, I attended the 70th session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at UN Headquarters in New York as part of the official Australian delegation alongside UN Women Australia. My participation was supported by Wine Australia and Australian Women in Wine.

CSW70 focused on ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and addressing the structural barriers that prevent women from claiming their rights. The sessions also reviewed progress on women's full participation in decision-making and the elimination of violence.

The Agreed Conclusions were adopted on 9 March 2026 by a historic recorded vote – 37 in favour, 1 against, 6 abstentions – the first time in its 70-year history that the Commission departed from its tradition of consensus. (The vote against was from the USA and the abstentions were from nations currently involved in the Middle East conflict.) That vote was itself a statement: an overwhelming majority of nations are committed to advancing gender equality, even as a well-funded, globally coordinated backlash against gender and diversity policies and action seeks to wind back progress.

Across the panels, side events and bilateral discussions I attended, a consistent message emerged: we have the frameworks and the data. What we need now is implementation.

Practical, measurable, accountable action in our workplaces, in our industries, and in our homes.

This report distils the key themes I came away with from CSW70 and translates them into practical recommendations for the Australian wine sector, with explicit links to the Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit (the Toolkit) commissioned and funded by Wine Australia in collaboration with Australian Grape & Wine.



About the author

Jane Thomson OAM is a gender equality advocate and the founder of Australian Women in Wine and The Fabulous Ladies' Wine Society. She has championed diversity and inclusion in the Australian wine sector for more than a decade. In March 2026, Jane attended CSW70 at the United Nations in New York as part of the official Australian delegation alongside UN Women Australia, with the support of Wine Australia and Australian Women in Wine.



Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations and CSW70 Chair Maritza Chan Valverde gavels the adoption of the Agreed Conclusions, 9 March 2026. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

CSW70 at a glance

The Commission on the Status of Women is the United Nations' largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's rights. CSW70 ran from 8 to 19 March 2026 and brought together governments, UN entities, civil society organisations and industry representatives from around the world. I was invited by UN Women Australia to attend the first week, where the bulk of the discussions occur.

Priority theme

Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and addressing structural barriers.

Review theme

Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The agreed conclusions

The Agreed Conclusions introduced several groundbreaking provisions relevant to every workplace and industry:

- Formal recognition of community justice workers and paralegals within national legal frameworks
- New commitments on digital justice and AI governance to expand women's access to justice
- Calls for the repeal of discriminatory laws and stronger protections for women's rights at work
- Reinforced national mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, including online violence
- Strengthened commitments to intersectional approaches, recognising the role of civil society, youth-led organisations and industry
- Gender-responsive and survivor-centred justice systems in conflict and crisis settings

What I heard: Key themes from CSW70

Over the week I was there attending dozens of sessions, certain themes surfaced again and again. These are the insights I believe are most relevant to the Australian wine sector.

1. The backlash is real, well-funded and algorithmic

Multiple sessions confronted the reality that the pushback against gender equity is not fading – it is intensifying. It is globally coordinated, well-resourced and sophisticated. And its most powerful weapon is the online algorithm. Outrage generates clicks, clicks generate profits, and the most extreme voices rise to the top.

The consequences are tangible. Research presented at CSW70 showed that 70 per cent of all women experience online violence in the course of their work. Among women in politics and public life, the figure is 85 per cent. Women are disappearing from public discourse, choosing not to put themselves forward because the online space has become so violent and hostile.

This matters for the wine sector because we need women to be visible: as leaders, as spokespeople, as advocates. If the digital environment in which our industry increasingly operates is unsafe, it becomes a structural barrier to women's full participation. Industry bodies and individual businesses need to recognise online safety as a gender equity issue and act accordingly.

Wine sector implication: Include digital safety and online conduct in workplace policies. Support women in public-facing roles with resources and training. Advocate for safety-by-design principles in all technology created by / within / used by the wine industry – embedding user protections at the earliest design stages and placing responsibility for online safety with developers and platforms, not with the individual.



2. Gender equity makes good business: the evidence is in

Nordic nations presented compelling evidence at CSW70 that gender equity is not just a social good – it produces measurably stronger economies, more robust democracies and happier populations. Where gender equity is high, societies thrive.

One of the most striking findings related to parental leave. In countries where men take parental leave in equal proportion to women, the employment bias against women of child-bearing age is virtually eliminated. This is a direct, practical insight that every employer in the wine sector can act on.

Wine sector implication: The business case for gender equity is settled. Gender-diverse organisations perform better financially, retain staff more effectively and are more innovative. The Toolkit makes the same case with Australian data. Wine businesses should frame gender equity not as compliance but as competitive strategy. All gender equity policies should include a focus on how to actively encourage men to take up parental leave and flexible work as a key lever for change.

3. Gender equity starts at home: especially in regional and agricultural communities

A recurring theme at CSW70 was that gender equity in the workplace cannot be separated from equity in the home. In 2026, designated by the UN as the Year of the Female Farmer, this was given particular emphasis.

Gender inequity is consistently worse in regional and agricultural communities than it is in cities. Policies and workplace practices are essential, but equally important is the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Women in agriculture need equity at home to thrive and reach their potential at work.

> *"Gender equity is not just about equal pay and equal representation. It's also about equal responsibility for care. Where the care work of life is undertaken equally by both men and women."*
> — Dr Anna Cody, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, speaking at CSW70

Wine sector implication: As a regional, agricultural industry, the wine sector faces these challenges acutely. The Toolkit's guidance on flexible work, parental leave and career advancement pathways should be implemented with an understanding that many women in wine are managing the double burden of paid work and disproportionate care responsibilities. Policies that support men to share care work – such as genuinely encouraging paternity leave and flexible work hours – have a direct, positive impact on women's capacity to participate fully in the workforce.



4. Singular solutions don't work: we need nuance and flexibility

Several sessions emphasised that the one-size-fits-all approaches to gender equity are insufficient. Women's experiences are shaped by intersecting factors: geography, age, cultural background, disability, caring responsibilities, socioeconomic status. And effective solutions must be flexible enough to meet diverse needs.

Wine sector implication: The wine sector is extraordinarily diverse, encompassing large corporates, small family vineyards, regional cooperatives, urban retailers and international exporters. The Toolkit is designed to be scalable and adaptable to businesses of all sizes and structures. Use the Organisational Assessment tools to understand the specific needs of your workforce and tailor your approach accordingly. What works in a large winery may not be the right fit for a family-run vineyard, and that is fine. The point is to start, to measure, and to keep improving.

5. Training is the missing piece

Across the sessions I attended, a clear message emerged: policies alone are not enough. The people implementing them need the skills to do so. This was discussed explicitly.

Frameworks, toolkits and legal obligations mean very little if the people on the ground have never been trained in fair hiring, inclusive management or how to have difficult conversations about bias and behaviour.

This landed hard for me, because in the Australian wine sector it is common for people to hire and manage staff with no formal training in recruitment, people management or inclusive leadership. This is not a criticism, it reflects the reality of a sector built largely on small, family-run and regional businesses where people wear many hats. But it is a gap we need to close. Training in fair hiring, managing diverse teams, recognising bias and responding to inappropriate behaviour is not optional, it is foundational. Without it, even the best-written policy will sit in a drawer.

Wine sector implication: The Toolkit's Cultural Change section provides a starting point, but every wine business should be asking a simple question: have we actually trained the people who hire and manage our staff to do so fairly? Even short, targeted programs can shift how decisions are made. Good intentions are not a substitute for good skills.

6. Data is power: what is not counted, doesn't count

The critical importance of reliable, current data was a major theme. Policy is made on data, and in an era of misinformation and simplistic narratives, robust evidence is more important than ever.

Crucially, sessions also emphasised the need to count and report on positives, not just negatives. We need ways to measure progress, to celebrate what is working, and to use that data to build momentum for further change.

Wine sector implication: The Toolkit's Organisational Assessment section provides data collection templates and benchmarking frameworks. Every wine business should use these to establish a baseline, set measurable targets and report annually. Critically, we should also be collecting and sharing success stories: data on what is improving, who is leading and what interventions are working. The sector has an opportunity to build an evidence base that drives policy and demonstrates impact.

7. The hidden cost of flexibility: casual and flexible work can disadvantage women

While flexible work is rightly championed as a tool for inclusion, CSW70 sessions explored its shadow side. Women take up flexible and casual work at much higher rates than men, and what appears to offer freedom can result in reduced income, fewer career advancement opportunities, less superannuation at retirement and reduced access to financial products like home loans.

Women are not poorer than men by accident. They are poorer by design. And the structures of casual and seasonal work can entrench that disadvantage.

Wine sector implication: This is directly relevant to an industry characterised by seasonal, casual and part-time employment. Wine businesses should audit their workforce structures to ensure that flexible and casual roles do not create a two-tier system that traps women in lower-paid, lower-security positions. The Toolkit's Retention section addresses flexible work arrangements, but businesses should go further: ensure that casual and seasonal workers have access to training, career pathways and superannuation equity. Design flexibility that supports careers, not just rosters.



8. Gender equity is about men too: including men in all gender equity policies is essential, as is moving away from 'champions' towards engagement

One of the most thought-provoking sessions I attended focused on masculinity and the role of men in achieving gender equity. The key insight was this: gender equity is not something men should 'champion' from the sidelines. The language of 'champions' is itself a product of patriarchal culture. It positions men as competitive winners, which is precisely the dynamic we need to change.

Instead, we should be including men in all gender equity policies, asking them to meaningfully engage and to take responsibility. This means men actively taking up parental leave, sharing care work, challenging the narratives around masculinity that harm both men and women, and participating in the cultural shift – not as heroes, but as partners.

The patriarchy harms men too. Rigid expectations around masculinity affect men's mental health, their relationships and their capacity to live full lives. Gender equity, properly understood, benefits everyone.

Wine sector implication: All gender equity policies in the wine sector should be designed to include and engage both women and men. This means having policies for men, actively encouraging men to take parental leave, normalising flexible work for men, and reframing equity initiatives as shared responsibility rather than women's issues that men generously support. Review the language of your policies and communications: are you asking men to be 'champions' or are you asking them to reflect on and adapt their decisions and behaviours for the betterment of EVERYONE (including themselves)? The latter is what drives real, lasting cultural change.



9. Women's safety online is a participation issue

The digital world is now inseparable from public life, and for the wine sector, it is inseparable from business. Yet multiple sessions presented evidence that the online space remains deeply unsafe for women, and that this directly reduces women's willingness and ability to participate publicly.

Women must not only be present online but actively shaping the systems that design and govern these spaces. The concept of safety by design was repeatedly highlighted: embedding user protections at the earliest stages of development and placing responsibility for safety with developers and platforms, rather than with individual users.

Wine sector implication: Wine businesses and industry bodies that operate social media channels, online communities or digital marketing platforms should consider their responsibility to create safe online spaces. This includes moderating comments and forums, having clear policies around online harassment, supporting women who represent the brand online, and advocating – as a sector – for safety-by-design standards across the digital platforms we use.

Turning CSW70 themes into practical workplace action

The following table maps key CSW70 themes to specific sections and actions within the Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit, providing a practical starting point for wine businesses seeking to align with global best practice.

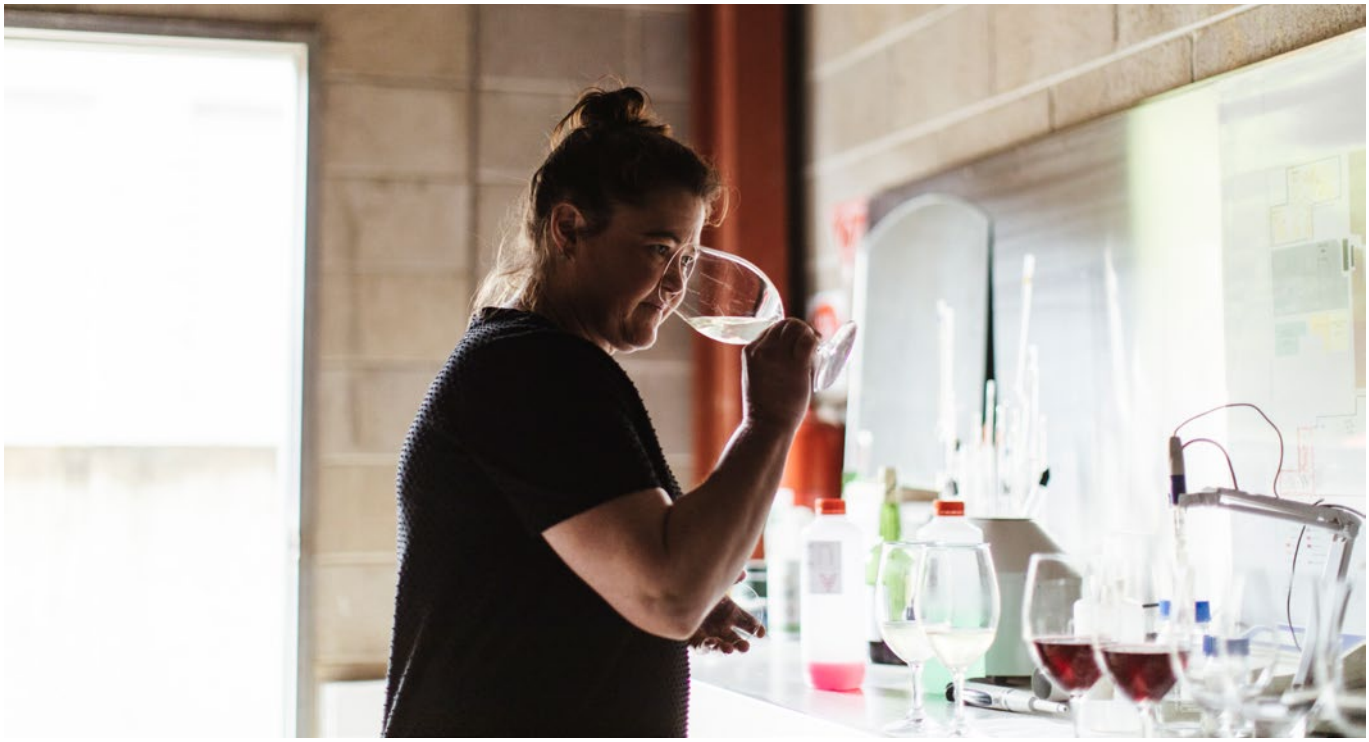
What CSW70 called for	Where to find it in the Toolkit	What wine businesses can do
Address the global backlash against gender equity. Especially online	→ CULTURAL CHANGE Tackle hostile workplace cultures. Address online conduct and digital safety as equity issues.	• Name the backlash in your workplace conversations, don't pretend it isn't happening. • Include online conduct and digital safety in workplace policies. • Support women in public-facing roles with resources and clear protocols for dealing with online hostility.
Gender equity makes good business, and equal parental leave removes hiring bias	→ INCLUSIVE RETENTION PRACTICES Parental leave policies. Flexible work. Career advancement. The business case for equity.	• Frame gender equity as competitive strategy, not compliance. • Design parental leave policies that actively encourage men to take equal leave. • Use the Toolkit's evidence on business performance to make the case to leadership and boards.
Gender equity at work requires equity at home, especially in regional and agricultural communities	→ INCLUSIVE RETENTION PRACTICES Flexible work arrangements. Parental leave. Understanding the double burden of paid work and unpaid care.	• Recognise that many women in wine are managing disproportionate care responsibilities at home. Design flexible work with this in mind. • Actively encourage men to take up parental leave and flexible work – this is one of the most effective levers for change.
One size doesn't fit all: different women face different barriers	→ ASSESSMENT AND BENCHMARKING Templates to collect data, benchmark your business and track progress over time.	• Find out where you stand today using the Toolkit's templates. • Break the numbers down by role, seniority and region so you can see where the real gaps are. • Tailor your approach to your business: what works for a large winery may not suit a family vineyard.
Equip people with the skills to make equity happen, not just the policies	→ INCLUSIVE RETENTION PRACTICES → CULTURAL CHANGE Training in fair hiring, people management, inclusive leadership and recognising bias.	• Invest in training for anyone who hires or manages people, no matter how small the business. • Even a half-day workshop on fair recruitment or inclusive management can shift how decisions are made. • Don't assume good intentions are enough. Give people the tools to follow through.

What CSW70 called for	Where to find it in the Toolkit	What wine businesses can do
Data is power: what is not counted, doesn't count. And count the positives too	→ ASSESSMENT AND BENCHMARKING Data collection templates. Benchmarking against sector and national standards. Reporting frameworks.	• Use the Toolkit's templates to establish a baseline. • Set measurable targets and report each year. Critically, track what's working well, not just what needs fixing. • Collect and share success stories to build momentum and demonstrate impact.
Flexible and casual work can trap women in lower pay, less security and smaller superannuation	→ INCLUSIVE RETENTION PRACTICES Flexible work arrangements. Equal pay. Career advancement pathways.	• Audit casual and seasonal roles for gender imbalance. • Make sure flexible roles still include access to training, career progression and fair super. • Design flexibility that supports careers, not just rosters.
Make gender equity about men too. Shared inclusion and responsibility, not sideline support	→ ALL TOOLKIT SECTIONS Design every policy to engage both women and men. Frame parental leave, flexible work and cultural change as everyone's business.	• Write policies that speak to both genders. • Normalise men taking parental leave and working flexibly. • Stop asking men to 'champion' and instead ask them to engage, take responsibility and modify their own behaviour.
Make online spaces safe and fair for women. Safety by design, not by individual effort	→ CULTURAL CHANGE Address online conduct as a workplace issue. Support women in digital and public-facing roles.	• Check whether new tech (including AI hiring tools) is fair to women. • Moderate your online spaces. Have clear policies for online harassment. • Push the platforms you use to build safety in from the start. Put the responsibility on the system, not on individual women.

Seven priority actions for the Australian wine sector

Drawing on the CSW70 outcomes, the Toolkit, and the insights from the sessions I attended, I recommend the following priority actions:

1. **Commit publicly to the Toolkit.** Every business across the wine supply chain – from vineyards and wineries to suppliers, distributors, retailers, educators and media – should publicly commit to adopting the Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit this year. Not someday. This year. Access it at wineaustralia.com/gender-equity-toolkit.
2. **Measure where you are.** Use the Toolkit's Organisational Assessment templates to establish a gender equality baseline. You cannot improve what you do not measure. Break down your data by role, seniority and region so you can see where the real gaps are, and make sure you're tracking what's working well, not just what needs fixing. What is not counted, doesn't count.
3. **Redesign flexibility so it supports careers, not just rosters.** Audit casual and seasonal workforce structures to ensure they do not trap women in lower-paid, lower-security positions. Ensure flexible roles include access to training, career pathways and superannuation equity. Design parental, family and personal care leave policies that actively encourage men to take equal leave.
4. **Address culture, safety and the online space.** Implement the Toolkit's Cultural Change resources. Establish clear anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that extend to online conduct. Recognise digital safety as a gender equity issue. Support and protect women in public-facing roles.
5. **Train the people who hire and manage.** In the wine sector, many of the people making hiring and management decisions have never had formal training in recruitment, people management or inclusive leadership. Good policies only work if the people implementing them have the skills to do so. Invest in practical training; even short, targeted programs make a difference. The Toolkit's Cultural Change section provides a starting point, but every business should be asking: have we actually trained our managers to manage fairly?
6. **Engage and include men in gender equity.** Don't just ask them to champion. Frame all gender equity policies for both women and men. Normalise men's uptake of parental leave and flexible work. Replace 'champion' language with engagement, accountability and shared responsibility. Challenge narrow narratives about masculinity.
7. **Recognise that equity at work requires equity at home.** Particularly in regional and agricultural communities, the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work shapes women's capacity to participate in the workforce. Policies that support men to share care work, and workplace cultures that normalise this, are among the most effective levers for change.



The global context and why it matters locally

CSW70 took place against a backdrop of intensifying geopolitical tensions. The fact that the Agreed Conclusions were adopted by a recorded vote rather than consensus was itself a statement about the global landscape. The backlash against gender equality is real, well-funded and increasingly embedded within state structures. Anti-rights actors operate transnationally, are well-financed and are adept at using digital platforms and algorithmic amplification to shift narratives.

At the same time, the vote demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of nations remain committed to the work. The message was clear: progress is fragile, but it is not lost. It requires sustained effort, robust data, practical tools and the courage to act even when the political winds are blowing against you.

For the Australian wine sector, this context is a reminder that gender equity work does not happen in a vacuum. Our sector operates in a global market, draws on a global workforce and is shaped by global cultural currents. Aligning with international best practice is not just the right thing to do – it positions Australian wine as an innovative, progressive, world-leading industry.

Looking ahead

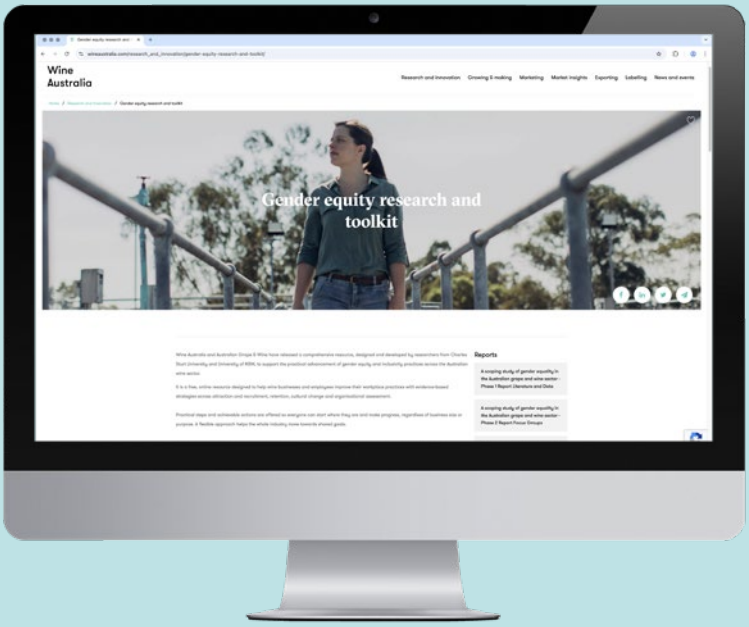
The conversations at CSW70 have not ended. The real test is what happens next.

For the Australian wine sector, the opportunity is clear. We have the Toolkit. We have the research. We have the global frameworks and a sector that has demonstrated genuine willingness to change. Now we need to move from awareness to action, vintage after vintage.

I encourage every wine business and every individual in our sector to take the next step. Access the Toolkit, commit publicly, and start implementing. Measure your progress, share your stories, and hold each other accountable. The future of Australian wine depends on the quality of our people as much as the quality of our grapes. And that means building an industry where everyone can thrive.

Wine Australia

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About the Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit

The Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit is a free, online resource commissioned and funded by Wine Australia in collaboration with Australian Grape & Wine's Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in Wine (DEIW) Committee. It was created by researchers from Charles Sturt University and UNSW Canberra, informed by extensive sector consultation, including women and gender-diverse employees in the industry.

The Toolkit provides evidence-based strategies across four key areas:

Attraction and Recruitment: inclusive hiring, gender-neutral job descriptions, targets and quotas

Inclusive Retention Practices: flexible work, parental leave, mentoring, career advancement, equal pay

Cultural Change: addressing sexism and harassment, inclusive leadership, pay equity, bystander training

Organisational Assessment and Benchmarking: data collection templates, benchmarking, reporting frameworks

Access the Toolkit:

wineaustralia.com/gender-equity-toolkit