

# MEDIA RELEASE

3 MAY 2017

## NEW WHISTLEBLOWING RANKINGS OPEN NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR BUSINESS: RESEARCH LAUNCH

A world-first ranking of the strength of whistleblowing processes across Australia's business and government sectors has been released.

The results from 634 organisations across 18 industry groups and public sectors provide the first benchmarks for enabling organisations to assess strengths and weaknesses in their whistleblowing processes, as part of the *Integrity@WERQ* phase of the groundbreaking Whistling While They Work 2 research project, also being launched today.

Project leader Professor A J Brown, from Griffith University's Centre for Governance and Public Policy, said the results vividly show the extent of challenges faced by business in trying to improve their whistleblowing and integrity regimes, and the imperatives for better standards and guidance.

"It's apparent many private and not-for-profit companies are making concerted efforts to establish workable whistleblowing practices, and now we can see more clearly, who's making progress as well as the major tasks ahead for all – including many governments."

Focusing on five key areas in the whistleblowing process: incident tracking, support strategy, risk assessment, dedicated support and remediation, the 'Strength of Whistleblowing Processes' report is the first internationally to collate and analyse data across such a range of sectors.

The research showed most organisations had systems for recording and tracking wrongdoing concerns, but

- 23% of organizations had no particular system in place, nor any particular support strategy for staff who raise wrongdoing concerns; and
- over 80% did not have processes for providing compensation or restitution to whistleblowers if they suffer detrimental outcomes.

Professor Brown said the gaps between better and worse sectors were large and real.

"Government institutions perform better in the analysis, but it's clear there are still shortcomings. Significant differences between Australian governments show that the level of commitment governments and oversight agencies put into these systems really does make a difference."

"Similarly, in private industry, the finance and insurance sector have clearly been making stronger efforts than other industries – but the variations show there is plenty for different companies and sectors to learn from each other, through better research and smarter benchmarking."

Officially launching the Integrity@WERQ phase of the project, **Louise Petschler** of the **Australian Institute of Company Directors** said the timing was perfect for new evidence to inform current debate around whistleblowing practice and policy.

“The full research will provide an invaluable snapshot of the effectiveness of whistleblowing practices, and allow individual businesses to know their performance in an anonymised way – a tremendous opportunity,” Ms Petschler said.

“With the current Parliamentary Joint Committee inquiry into Australia’s whistleblowing protection laws, substantive change is certainly on the way.”

“If whistleblowers are to be protected in their endeavours to bring corporate wrongdoing to light, business must be identified and treated as a genuine partner in these reforms.”

“That is why it is so important that all stakeholders, especially those who have a responsibility for designing and implementing internal whistleblowing processes, play a meaningful role – and why we encourage all companies to consider participating in the *Integrity@WERQ* research, to help build data which will inform this historic reform opportunity.”

Former National Australia Bank whistleblower, **Dennis Gentilin** of Human Systems Advisory, told the launch that businesses were rapidly becoming aware how important integrity, ethical culture and good ‘speak up’ processes are to fulfilling the corporate mission.

“Whistleblowing is not just about wrongdoing that ends up in the media because it is poorly handled,” Mr Gentilin said.

“It is about how companies use whistleblowing to identify and address problems prior to them deteriorating into significant scandals. Ultimately the goal is to build a culture where those problems are swiftly and appropriately dealt with.”

“Research like this is powerful because it enables us to see the types of factors that contribute to positive whistleblowing outcomes. By sharing these more broadly, companies are better placed to know if they have the systems to deal with the integrity challenges that inevitably arise in any organisation, no matter how well run,” Mr Gentilin concluded.

Australian Securities & Investments Commissioner **John Price** also spoke at the launch.

***Whistling While They Work 2*** involves Griffith University, Australian National University, University of Sydney and Victoria University of Wellington. It is supported by the Australian Research Council and 23 partners including the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, Australian Institute of Company Directors, Transparency International Australia, the leading public integrity agencies of all Australian and New Zealand jurisdictions, and launch host, CPA Australia.

**For full details** on the **Integrity@WERQ** phase of the project, and the new findings:

**[www.whistlingwhiletheywork.edu.au](http://www.whistlingwhiletheywork.edu.au)**

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