



LYNDON MECHIELSEN

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Facing up to power hurdles

Q ENERGY managing director Kate Farrar knows it can be difficult for a woman to rise through the ranks to lead a corporation, but the energy specialist says more women are taking up positions of influence.

Ms Farrar, 46, who completed a degree in music before taking up bond trading in her first decade post-university, said she had also faced gender barriers during her years in the government and private sector.

'I've faced behaviour that is challenging and I've called that

behaviour and I've forced them to face up to it,' Ms Farrar said.

"I was lucky to have good support. For gender reasons you have to be prepared to call it and not enough women do that."

Responding to the results of a Change 2020 survey, which found that 93 per cent of respondents identified men as great Australian leaders, Ms Farrar said there were fewer women in top corporate roles because many were more comfortable leading small to medium-sized businesses.

"In some ways the small to medium-sized business sector is easier than the corporate sector

because women face gender barriers," she said. "But people won't recognise you as a leader because you're an SME. Large businesses are what people see when they nominate a leader."

Ms Farrar, who has a son, 13, left the bonds market because she saw electricity as a growing and moving industry.

As head of Ergon Retail (now Ergon Energy) for 10 years, she oversaw the acquisition of the listed company Powerdirect.

When the Queensland government decided to sell Ergon, she packaged the company and oversaw its sale to AGL for \$1.3 billion—

\$500 million more than anticipated at the time.

She moved to electricity retailer Q Energy as one of only two staff in November 2009.

She has overseen the company's growth to now have 14,000 small to medium-sized businesses as energy clients.

With a national focus on mining and energy production, Ms Farrar said there were few women in leadership roles in the national electricity industry.

"By and large, women are more self-effacing and don't stand up and promote themselves as leaders," she said.

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