



Viva Energy: A progressive focus on increasing diversity

INTRODUCTION

Viva Energy Australia plays a pivotal role in the Australian energy sector, supplying approximately a quarter of the nation's fuel requirements. The company's operations span a wide variety of facilities, from the Geelong oil refinery to supply terminals and aviation refueling operations. Viva Energy's operations also includes the recently acquired Coles Express retail convenience business which includes a network of over 700 convenience fuel stores.

Viva Energy employs 7,500 people nationwide.

In recent years, Viva Energy has taken significant actions to increase gender diversity across the company's numerous sites and operations. This case study will examine how they achieved this, specifically in aviation refueling and the Geelong refinery.



TRANSFORMING REFUELING TEAMS

Historically, the aviation refueling industry has been male-dominated, and Viva Energy openly acknowledges facing challenges in attracting women to the industry and diversifying its workforce. Yet Viva has grown from having just one female refueler to having women in refueling roles at all major airports. How did they reach this achievement?

Viva's aviation diversity journey began with a fundamental idea: identifying and removing existing barriers to women working in refueling roles.

BARRIERS TO GENDER DIVERSITY

Viva Energy recognised barriers to gender diversity in aviation refueling that needed dismantling. They began by opening their traditional employment model to provide on-the-job opportunities when the refueling team started training a single, motivated female administration worker from the Melbourne airport to take on refueling tasks. This approach sparked a change in perspective.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Traditionally, three distinct constraints perpetuated the male-dominated nature of the refueling role:

1. Refuelers were mandated to hold a Heavy, Rigid (HR class) heavy vehicle license, requiring years of heavy vehicle driving experience.
2. A license for transporting hazardous materials was a requirement, primarily held by males in the tanker driving sector.
3. The role is physical in nature which had led to a perception that it is more suitable for men and that women were not interested in the role.

Revisiting the prerequisites, Viva Energy asked: "Could we eliminate these barriers and provide on-the-job training to empower women to join our workforce?" The result was a surge of interest from women with diverse backgrounds and varying experience, with some having a background in aviation and others without industry training at all.

INITIATIVES TO ATTRACT FEMALE TALENT

Alongside this shift away from traditional applicant prerequisites, several initiatives were instrumental in attracting and retaining female talent:

- Viva Energy established an Aviation Traineeship Program that combined training with on-site experience.
- Targeting opportunities for female athletes such as AFLW players allowed Viva Energy to reach a new pool of talented women. Viva then worked with them to provide flexibility in training schedules, accommodating commitments outside of work.
- Lengthened training programs extending to six months instead of the standard three enabled individuals to balance training (or other personal commitments) alongside work responsibilities.



OUTCOMES DELIVERED FOR THE REFUELING TEAM

As a result of these initiatives, Viva Energy has increased the proportion of female refuelers over the past few years to 14% of the workforce, with women now holding roles at all major airports nationwide. And the company's progressive focus didn't stop there.

Female refuelers are now 14% of the workforce, and women fill roles at all major airports nationwide.

A FOCUS ON SAFETY AND INCLUSIVE PROCESSES

With an increasing number of women joining the workforce, Viva Energy recognised the need to address other crucial aspects of their workplaces to ensure the company supported all employees to perform the job successfully and safely. These safety initiatives involved engineering and equipment adjustments to accommodate individuals of varying sizes, including:

- Pit lifting tools to assist with the lifting of heavy access lids. These tools are now mandatory and support men and women to work safely.
- Platforms that aid workers with shorter stature to safely perform refueling tasks.
- Development of stair hooks which are designed to lower the height for operators to hang refuelling couplings onto step ladders reducing over shoulder height lifting.

As is often the case, these engineering improvements have benefited men and women, allowing for previously strenuous tasks to be completed with greater safety and ease.

REFINERY TEAM ADVANCEMENTS

The Geelong refinery team has also embraced the journey towards greater gender diversity; the team's focus has been increasing female representation in shift-based/frontline operator roles.

As with the refueling team, they began identifying two critical barriers that stood in the way of diversity:

1. The assumption that workers could only perform operator roles on a full-time, 24/7 roster rotation.
2. The mandatory prerequisite to hold a trade qualification.

Once the Viva team had identified employment barriers, they could focus on making changes.

These adjustments included:

- Redefining roles to include job share and part-time options.
- Shifting from a focus on mechanical experience to a focus on the mechanical aptitude of applicants, their transferable skills, and values alignment. This shift in focus gives more opportunity to women who might not have the correct mechanical background.
- Running an advertising campaign focused on flexibility, on-the-job training, and policies that supported parents while removing any unintended bias in language and images.
- Building training programs specifically for new intakes who don't have industry experience to set them up to succeed.

“You can learn anything with the right attitude. The people hired with less industry experience are flourishing. Someone out of high school can aspire to a great career with these training processes, the right attitude, and a desire to learn.”

JOB SHARING IN SENIOR 24/7 SHIFT POSITIONS

Job sharing in 24/7 roles significantly impacts female representation in senior operations-based positions and offers multiple advantages to employees and businesses. Benefits include continuous shift coverage without exhausting employees, reduced burnout, improved work-life balance, enhanced productivity from rested staff, knowledge transfer between job sharers, diverse problem-solving perspectives, talent retention, and increased employee satisfaction through flexible scheduling.

For companies new to the idea of job sharing, it's helpful to acknowledge that while there are some steps to go through to put it in place, once it's incorporated into regular routines, the benefits are ongoing. Implementing job sharing in 24/7 roles involves:

- Assessing feasibility and defining precise arrangements
- Communicating with stakeholders and providing training
- Coordinating schedules and facilitating technology use
- Establishing performance metrics
- Conducting trial periods and gathering feedback
- Maintaining documentation and promoting a supportive culture

Successful job sharing implementation hinges on meticulous planning, communication, and continuous evaluation to ensure uninterrupted coverage while accommodating employees' work-life balance needs. Numerous organisations can attest to the success of job sharing, and it's been one of the initiatives that have helped Viva make such significant progress around gender diversity.

FACILITATING WORKFORCE RETURN

One of the Geelong team's specific focuses has been introducing flexibility to support mothers rejoining the workforce. These efforts have been well received in the local community and include transitional support processes like streamlined onboarding, mentorship, flexible shifts, and family-friendly policies to help parents transition back into the workforce.

There has been a lot of change in Viva over the years, and long-standing refinery employees can attest to how much easier it is for women to return to the workforce now. Viva's policies create a level playing field for women to be supported and transitioned back into the workforce.

Women rejoining the workforce at Viva benefit from working arrangements that support their needs and a culture that helps them to succeed.



“Women know they have the full support and backing of the company and management team. There is a strong camaraderie between women, and both male and female team members contribute to making the workplace more inclusive.”



**ROBYN REIMERS, GEELONG OPERATOR,
GEELONG REFINERY**

SAFETY AND INCLUSION — HAND IN HAND

Efforts to improve safety have always been a priority for Viva. As increasing gender diversity is also a company focus, specific safety considerations have been re-visited to meet individual needs. These changes include smaller PPE options, differently shaped garments and gloves, and inclusion efforts to ensure office spaces and amenities catered to diverse needs.

INITIATIVES TO BUILD CULTURE

The refinery team holds a unique view of the link between safety and culture. As a site that operates on shift work with dangerous materials, the team is quick to emphasise how important trust is between colleagues.

“We have to work closely in sometimes tricky situations, so culture can become a safety hazard if interactions aren’t supportive and don’t create the ability to focus on the job at hand. You have to know that people have your back.”

The team can attest to the strengths of their workplace culture. No one is afraid to ask each other, ‘Are you okay?’ and there is an understanding that they won’t let each other walk out on the plant if they don’t think a colleague is 100% okay. Understanding the link between safety and culture flows into how the refinery team views inclusion; it’s as much about safety as it is about having the correct moral stance.

“Inclusion is everything because someone on the outer will have that on their mind as they step into situations that can be safety sensitive. How someone feels and thinks impacts how focused and ultimately safe they can be on the job.”

Building a strong culture and proactive initiatives to increase gender diversity is clearly working. Since 2017, Viva Energy has witnessed a substantial increase in diversity at the Geelong refinery. Female representation in operator roles has gone from 9% to 25% over the past five years, and the overall refinery female representation has gone from 16% to 27% over the past four years.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLYSHIP

According to CEO Scott Wyatt, allyship plays a crucial role in driving tangible progress. While each company can enact change within its own realm, achieving true gender equality requires collective efforts and Scott sees great benefit in learning from like-minded CEOs and fostering alliances across organisations to effect societal change.

“It’s important to build partnerships with others to make tangible progress - there are always things you can do and actions you can take within your own company, but to move the needle on closing the pay gap and increasing female representation in the workforce, it takes every company to do their bit.”

● SCOTT WYATT, CEO, VIVA ENERGY

Viva was one of the first companies to pay superannuation to parents on unpaid parental leave and collectively they have embraced diversity from the boardroom to the frontline. Viva is now reaping the rewards of efforts and enjoying a workforce that is increasing in diversity year on year.

“When you draw on a diversity of thought and diverse voices at the table, you get better business results. It’s also a better employment experience for people and a better overall result for the business – and moreover the compelling reason to focus on this agenda is that it’s the right thing to do. It’s important from a values perspective and motivates me to want to do more in this space - great people drive great business results.”

● NATASHA CUTHBERT, CHIEF PEOPLE & CULTURE OFFICER, VIVA ENERGY

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