



# SEE & BE

**Joint Industry Submission:**  
National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

April 2023



# Foreword

On 28 March 2023 at Parliament House in Canberra I hosted a roundtable on gender equality, in partnership with the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA).

The event brought together members of parliament, academics, industry groups and business leaders from across Australia to discuss broadening opportunities, developing pathways, removing barriers and increasing the appeal for women to work in non-traditional trades and STEM vocations.

Focusing on identifying strategies to attract, retain, educate, support, and empower women the group will continue to work towards fostering initiatives to help create a more gender-equitable workforce in male-dominated sectors.

With less than three percent of the tradespeople in non-traditional trades being female, and only a 27% representation of women across STEM, this is an important issue that requires a collaborative effort from industry leaders, policymakers, and other key stakeholders.

The outcomes of the discussions at the roundtable are captured in this submission to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women.

I truly believe that these actions will drive much needed change to create more diverse and inclusive workforces, and ensure that women in these sectors can forge a pathway for future generations of girls so that they can follow in their footsteps.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the following organisations to the roundtable and the development of this submission to government:

- NECA
- Electrical Trades Union
- Keystone
- Contact Group
- Schneider Electric
- NAWIC
- Fredon Group
- Build Like A Girl
- Master Plumbers Association
- Axis Plumbing
- Curtin Institute for Energy Transition.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to my parliamentary colleagues for their attendance and invaluable contribution to the roundtable, including:

- The Honourable Minister Ed Husic, Minister for Industry and Science

- Ms Kylea Tink MP, Member for North Sydney
- Ms Zali Steggall OAM, MP, Member for Warringah
- Dr Monique Ryan MP, Member for Kooyong
- Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP, Member for Sydney
- Ms Allegra Spender MP, Member for Wentworth
- Dr Sophie Scamps MP, Member for Mackellar
- Ms Kate Chaney MP, Member for Curtin.

I support the recommendations made by industry in this submission.

*Zoe Daniel*

**Zoe Daniel MP**  
Member for Goldstein

# Overview

The Australian Government is committed to leading gender equality internationally, however according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report<sup>1</sup>, Australia is ranked 43rd out of 146 countries on the Index.

The Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet released the Status of Women Report Card<sup>2</sup> noting the following trends for careers and working lives of Australian Women:

- Women and men largely work the same jobs they did 35 years ago: caring and clerical professions remain dominated by women while construction trades and labouring professions are dominated by men.
- Women are less likely to participate in the workforce and more likely to work part time.
- A gender pay gap exists in hourly wages and full-time wages, reflecting the impact of gender discrimination, and that lower-paid occupations tend to be female-dominated.
- Women are underrepresented in leadership.

The industry welcomes and acknowledges the range of initiatives recently announced

by the Federal Government, including consultation on the *National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality* led by the Office for Women, as well as the establishment of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to provide independent advice to Government on a wide range of women's economic equality issues.

The industry also commends the Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy, for pledging gender equality in the clean energy sector by introducing initiatives such as the Australian Women in Energy Roundtable to drive practical actions towards equality based policies.

**Through this submission the industry offers its advice to the government to inform the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality.**

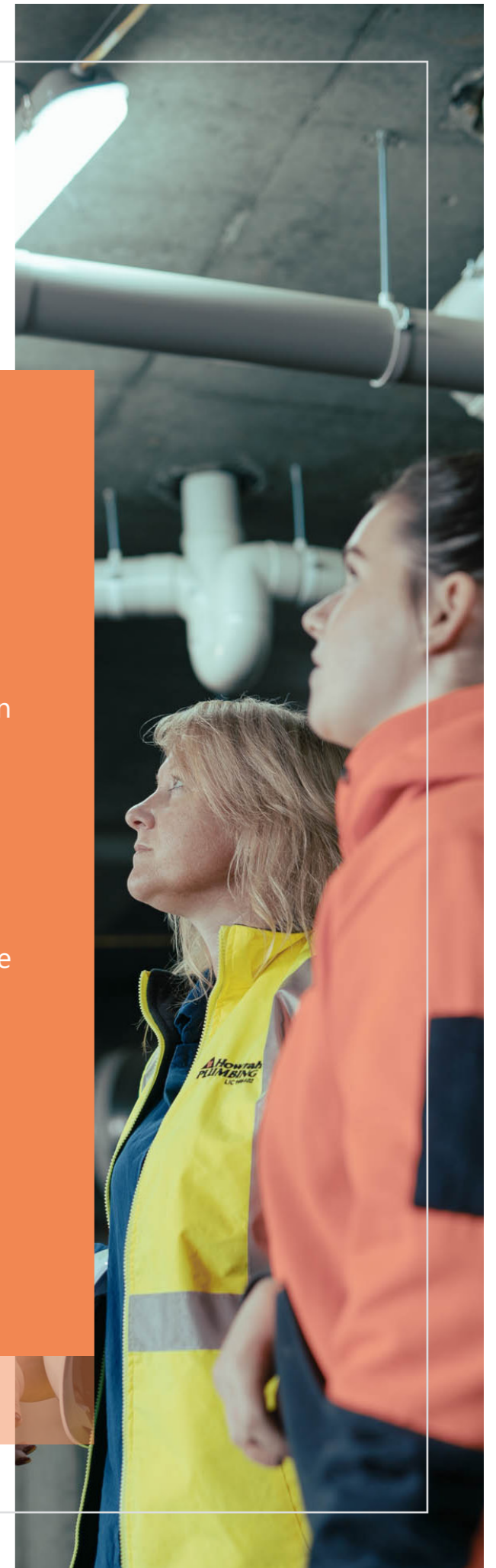
**We are asking the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to consult with us in the design, implementation and delivery of our recommendations.**

**The industry has undertaken early modelling including a range of cost assumptions for proposals within this submission, such as for the mature age apprentices subsidy scheme, female role models and public relations campaign.**

## Industry Recommendations

Industry participants have agreed on the following joint recommendations to the federal government:

- 1** Enable **exemplar projects with a critical mass** of women on sites, of at least 30%.
- 2** Ensure policies and funding are directed towards **priority initiatives** such as subsidies for mature-aged apprentices and more effective government procurement mandates.
- 3** Co-fund with industry a **national public relations campaign** to attract and retain more women to male-dominated sectors.



1. Global Economic Forum (2023), Global Gender Gap Report 2022 (weforum.org)  
 2. Australian Government (2023), Status of Women Report Card (pmc.gov.au)

# Ecosystem

Despite efforts to increase female participation in trades, frustration remains that progress toward gender equality has been marginal at best.

Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but having a more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.

Traditional views on careers for women and social influences on women's perceptions of jobs start from an early age.

Cultural issues cannot be overstated, and the sooner perceptions are shifted, the better the opportunity to influence role models of tomorrow and encourage future generations of female tradies.

The industry supports workplace initiatives that remove cultural barriers, break down discriminatory practices, and make the electrotechnology sector a better place to work for everyone.

We are committed to working with the government and industry to establish the construction sector as an employment sector of choice for women.

Both government and industry need to demonstrate through actions that women are welcome participants in all trades and significant contributors to economic recovery and future prosperity.

It makes sense that women who are half of the available workforce should see non-traditional trades and STEM as an attractive and rewarding sector to have a satisfying, well-paying and long term career.

By joining industry forces we are committed to actively driving evidence based and genuine change, changing laws, making people accountable for their behaviour, improving workplace culture and ensuring that government leads by example in making women feel valued, safe and welcome in all sectors of the nation's economy.

Only through a holistic approach will industry and government be able to collectively influence the complete ecosystem of women entering the workforce from early education to longer-term career planning in the sector.

The components of this critical ecosystem are demonstrated in the chart on the opposite page.

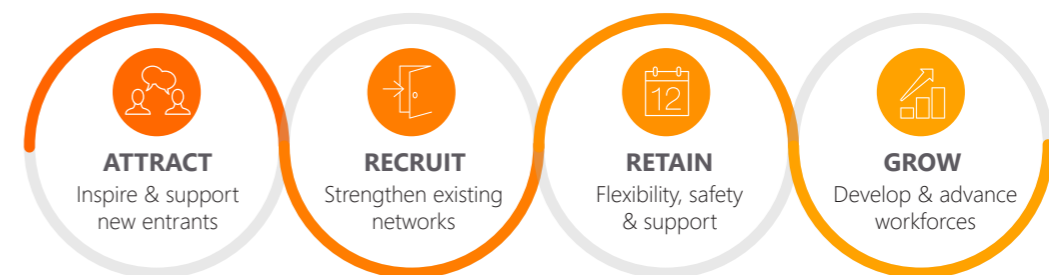
# Gender Equality

## Boosting female participation

### OBJECTIVES



### STRATEGIES



### KEY ENABLERS



### INFLUENCERS



### KEY CHALLENGES



Ongoing engagement, monitoring & improvement

*A more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.*



# 1. Exemplar Sites

## Pilot programs

We have seen significant culture change in corporate environments and boardrooms where female voices are heard, and it is time to break down barriers preventing women from having careers in building.

A target of no less than 30% is required to achieve cultural change and effective work environments conducive to encouraging female participation.

Various studies have proven that with a critical mass of female trades and supervisors on exemplar sites we are likely to see immediate, effective and genuine behavioural influence and culture shift.

If we are to make a meaningful impact on the number of women joining our industry, we need a change to how we approach the issue, a step change is required.

The industry is proposing a pilot program led by the federal government with major construction companies in each jurisdiction to include testing of:

- collaborative methods of setting shifts to balance personal needs and preferences with business output demands.
- staggered start and finish times, on a rostered basis.
- home-based work for desk-based roles.
- empowering and encouraging site managers to make decisions about

flexible working arrangements, within a broader company framework.

- supported data collection to identify barriers to workforce participation within companies.
- support for HR departments and site managers to respond effectively to that information.

The industry can support the federal government's investments in exemplar sites, schemes and trials by utilising its large cohort of apprentices to direct female apprentices to specific sites and work collaboratively with other RTOs and GTOs to deliver the same on such sites.

In collaboration with larger head contractors and subcontractors apprentices can be supported by female supervisors, project engineers and project managers to create greater support and visibility of the female cohort on the site.

## Culture training

Lack of training results in poor behaviour, and lack of support results in silence.

There will remain a need for targeted cultural training, to ensure that males that struggle with the transition are educated to understand what behaviours are expected.

The federal government needs to allocate funds to develop appropriate cultural training for all apprentices and workers

inducted onsite, and support workers in developing respectful relationships through culture change.

The training is required to be targeted, informed and address all errant behaviours including coercive control, sexual harassment, discrimination and workplace behaviour.

This training assists not only in the context of the work site but can continue into the domestic relationships of industry participants.

Culture of abuse and culture of silence should not be tolerated on work sites.

The industry is asking the government to support male-dominated sectors by enabling independent and confidential mechanisms for women to raise complaints in relation to inappropriate behaviour made by male colleagues on sites.

The government and industry need to make sure female workers are aware of this service and related policies, and that making a complaint will not result in ramifications for them.

Further support networks need to be provided in the form of dedicated apprentice mentoring programs, support services for mental health, domestic violence support network and culture training for males and females.

## Female facilities and childcare

Facility upgrades are required on construction sites, to enable basic amenities for female workers, including changing facilities, designated lunch areas, toilets and showers, and maintain those to appropriate standards and expectations.

Another reason why women leave the building and construction industry is the long hours that are required by workers onsite.

The necessity of safety discussions, particularly toolbox talks commence early in the morning and engage all trades and site participants, outside the hours of childcare providers and out of school programs.

Childcare facilities and subsidy programmes that were designed for these sectors would encourage greater and more diverse participation for all cohorts.

Having onsite childcare and afterschool care will ensure that parents are close to their children in the event of unforeseen issues and will reduce the amount of travel time required to attend to their children's needs.

This alone would act as a significant incentive for women to not only join their designated projects, but also remain in the industry during the early years of their children's lives.

## Recommendation 1 - Summary

To successfully enable exemplar projects with a critical mass of women on sites, industry is asking the federal government to:

- Set an example by publicly declaring its zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour, bullying, intimidation or discrimination towards women in male dominated sectors.
- In consultation with state and territory governments develop an ongoing program of pilot sites from publicly funded infrastructure investments as exemplar sites, which characterise the following:
  - at least 30% females on sites (this criteria will need to be developed in close consultation with industry and audited continuously to ensure absolute efficacy)
  - provide culture training and mechanisms that support safe and effective complaint processes
  - provide appropriate female facilities at a minimum
  - provide childcare support services.
  - offer an incentive scheme to encourage women to migrate to these sites, eg \$1,000 as sign on bonus, or similar.



*Chronic skills shortages can be met by quality female and mature age candidates who are eager to work and complete an apprenticeship.*



## 2. Policies and Funding

### Better procurement

The aspiration for businesses to employ more women in non-traditional roles has been strong for many years, but the incentive for women to join the sector remains unchanged.

Work practices and cultural norms that characterise the building and construction industry need to be addressed.

Industry and government can drive change through contracts, however such policy changes need to be developed in close consultation with the industry to ensure such policies are indeed successful and effective in driving change in the sector.

Procurement credit should be awarded for contracts of sites that roster flexibility, are committed to building female facilities, conduct regular auditing and achieve gender pay equity.

Employee amenities (such as on site or nearby childcare) will need to be subsidised and should be considered in all government procurement contracts as part of their evaluation criteria.

The federal government is a significant purchaser of goods and services, and needs to ensure its purchasing power supports value for money while growing economies and job opportunities.

Through the Buy Australian Plan the government needs to introduce procurement best practice principles to

maximise opportunities for engagement of female workforces particularly in male-dominated sectors, and in industries such as construction.

### Mature age apprentices

The federal government has an immediate opportunity to design a scheme to support mature aged apprenticeships and address skills shortages in the broader sector.

The cost to hire a mature age apprentice is a challenge for all businesses, on average it is 44% greater in the first year than that of a junior apprentice, 33% in the second year, 24% in year three before gradually decreasing to only 6% difference in the fourth year.

However, mature aged apprentices including young people over 21 offer great benefits as potential tradespeople due to their life and work experience, commitment to work and training, qualifications, appreciation of safety protocols and many more.

The current disincentive to hire mature age candidates particularly disadvantages women, who are more likely to apply for an apprenticeship when over 21.

The industry recommends the federal government enter bilateral agreements with state governments to institute a capped and temporary subsidy scheme to remove wage barriers for Australian businesses wishing to engage mature age female apprentices on sites.

Under the subsidy scheme it is proposed that employers of mature age apprentices claim the difference (or portion of the difference depending on employer eligibility), as a government rebate, between wage costs of a junior apprentice and those of a mature age apprentice.

The scheme is proposed to act as a temporary measure only to help attract more mature aged women to trades and address skills shortages in the building and construction sector.

As obligations to engage female workers increase across the sector and businesses begin to recognise the benefits of female and mature age apprentices, the need for government subsidies will subsequently decrease and diminish over time.

It is recommended for the government to work with industry to remedy sector wide skills shortages through the development of a Subsidy Scheme for adult apprenticeships in the sector and encourage businesses to employ more female mature age apprentices.

### Industry role models

The industry proposes the government provides ongoing funding for industry representatives to assist in raising awareness of female role models in all aspects of male-dominated sectors.

Industry representatives visit schools, TAFEs,

universities and career events to promote the sector, government's commitments and incentives to potential future female employees of non-traditional trades.

The industry will work together to raise awareness of the state government's commitment to female participation in building and construction.

The industry proposes to work together across sectors and engage suitably skilled and experienced female representatives to implement a suite of initiatives focused on increasing female participation and retention in trade-based occupations.

Key responsibilities of these role models could include, but are not limited to:

- visiting and/or conducting webinars with secondary schools, facilitating female only pre-apprenticeship programs in the summer and winter school holidays
- providing 'respectful relationships' toolbox talks within industry
- providing advice and support to existing female tradespeople and apprentices and their employers and supervisors.

The activities will be targeted at three cohorts: school aged girls, women seeking a career change, and employers and supervisors of apprentices.

**The industry is asking to work together with the government on a national co-funded rolling program across male-dominated sectors.**

## Recommendation 2 - Summary

To ensure policies and funding allocations are effective and maximise outcomes for Australian women, the industry proposes:

- Better procurement
  - Government's purchasing power has the ability to drive direction of investment including a greater commitment to female participation.
- Mature age apprentices
  - To address immediate skills shortages across the sector, the government has the opportunity to provide subsidy schemes to encourage greater uptake of mature age apprentices.
- Industry role models
  - Introduce a rolling program for female role models and industry representatives to raise awareness of their respective sectors and grow the number of females entering and remaining in the industry.





*You can't be what  
you can't see.*



## 3. PR Campaign

### Overview

The industry will work together on a joint national public relations, awareness and education campaign.

The industry is seeking co-contribution from the federal government to support the initiatives outlined in the following phases of the campaign.

We are inviting the government to form part of our ongoing consultation efforts in the development of the campaign, with due consideration of co-funding of activities affecting primarily the public sector (eg awareness in public schools).

The following phases outline the proposed approach by industry:

### Phase 1: Deep Dive

#### Deep Dive: July 2023, Melbourne CBD

- Industry and government engagement to define scope of work, barriers and opportunities.
- Stakeholder landscape mapping to inform engagement activities: this is a joint exercise to define the general position of stakeholder groups based on their likely support of female participation - by geographic location and segment.
- Review of the elements of Keystone's "A Woman's Place" campaign in the context of a potential national rollout.

See: <https://buildsomethingbig.com.au/women/>

- Consider existing initiatives at both state and national levels, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Broadly identify messaging, themes and potential branding.
- Consider funding options, including in-kind media support and various forms of industry sponsorships (to be discussed at the deep dive)

### Phase 2: Campaign rollout

- Ensure ongoing stakeholder consultation informs all activities.
- Invest in research: schedule sentiment testing with focus groups, or online surveys to inform work where required.
- Develop a communications and engagement strategy, identifying audiences, channels for engagement and timing.
- Consider public relations activities in the form of disruptive marketing (eg temporary "Mansplaining Hotline", see: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/sweden-launches-national-mansplaining-hotline-men-call-complain-n685966>)
- Consider the development of a documentary or TV report based on specific priorities under the campaign, with talent to be sourced from within participating industry groups.

- Key channels for consideration: website, social media campaign, television advertisements, print, radio, stakeholder events, existing networks across industry and government.
  - For noting, all participants in the Keystone campaign are real women working in real businesses, which was crucial to industry and community engagement.
  - The website won a creative award for content and user experience this week – it sits under the umbrella of our Be Part of Building Something Big campaign which aims to articulate a coherent and inspiring identity for the industry.
- role models from the industry
  - incentivise university groups or outreach organisations (including STEM) to host events with female students in upper primary school as the target audience
  - introduce diversity discussions into subjects in primary school classrooms/curriculum.
  - while gifted and talented programs vary in primary schools and secondary schools, universities can start to engage with gifted and talented programs from primary school so students can start to think about future careers.

### Phase 3: Education

- Continue raising awareness of the PR campaign, across all levels of education sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary).
- Develop a sub-campaign “See & Be” targeted at education cohorts at all levels, including:
  - development of materials such as posters and fliers for primary and secondary schools
  - develop booklets or materials for primary school students
  - contribute regularly to newsletters and events organised by schools and targeted at parents also
  - organise regular visits by female

### Phase 4: Don't stop

The campaign will aim to raise public awareness, allow women to engage directly with industry, build general community awareness and confidence, while promoting open and genuine engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

Ongoing review, monitoring and improvement will be critical to the ongoing success of the public relations efforts.

**We are asking the federal government to partner with the industry through engagement and co-funding of national public awareness and education activities.**

## Recommendation 3 - Summary

To attract, recruit, retain and grow female participation in male-dominated sectors, the industry recommends influencing the influencers in lives of young girls and women through a public awareness, education and engagement campaign:

- ongoing engagement and education on opportunities and needs while addressing the barriers
- undertake a full-day deep dive to develop the public relations campaign, including:
  - developing the stakeholder landscape
  - locational priorities
  - need for research and consultation
  - agree on messaging and branding
  - identify key aspects of the communication strategy.
- develop materials and education packs to underpin awareness campaign at all levels of education.



