



Submission to National Competition Policy Analysis 2025

Submission Details

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Confidentiality: This submission is not confidential.

Executive Summary

This submission from Stronger Ground contributes to the Productivity Commission's National Competition Policy Analysis 2025 by highlighting the benefits of collaborative, skills and capability focussed economic development. Drawing on over 20 years of experience producing industry development events across Australia's major sectors, the submission focuses on the importance of teamwork, shared capability building, and collective industry action in enhancing Australia's economic resilience. We advocate for a shift in policy focus away from competition as the sole metric, towards collaborative approaches that strengthen Australia's industries, regions, technology capability and skilled workforce development.



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Submission

The 2025 National Competitiveness Policy review is well underway and has engaged a broad range of industrial sectors and productivity, competitiveness, and economic development experts around the challenge of how we improve the health and resilience of our economy on an increasingly turbulent global stage.

What I would like to submit to the process is a consideration of whether competitiveness is actually the most useful and appropriate metric to measure, or if there are better indicators of success and thriving economic potential we should be focusing on. I also want to share examples from my 20 years of work supporting large economic development and industry events, highlighting the importance of collaboration, teamwork, and shared capability development.

Since the early 2000s, I have been producing some of the biggest annual gatherings of Australia's largest industrial sectors - including defence, medical technology, manufacturing, mining and oil and gas, the emerging and clean energy sector, the diverse Australian water sector, ICT services and technology development, and others focused on infrastructure and construction - bringing peers together to benchmark, share best practice, address collective challenges, develop action agendas, and lobby policymakers for economic settings that help their sectors grow and reduce barriers to success.

Over the past two decades, one of the things that has stood out most is that sectors with a strong focus on collaboration, shared capability development, teaming, and capability building - at a job function level, at a whole-of-industry level, and at a regional level - are often the ones that thrive the most.

Examples include collaborative approaches to defence capability led by organisations like the Defence Teaming Centre and the Australian Industry Defence Network, which support SMEs to collaborate, share skills, and lobby for more supportive market policies. The Defence Teaming Centre, a member-based not-for-profit, runs programs like Team.eX that build SME capability for defence contracting, foster teaming, and connect SMEs with major primes and government buyers. The Australian Industry Defence Network offers similar programs through its state chapters, providing advocacy, networking, and business development support for SMEs in the defence sector.

Another leader of this collaborative capacity development approach is the Industry Capability Network, which started across Australia in the early 2000s from a Federal Department of Industry initiative and now operates as a not-for-profit focused on building regional and sector-wide capability. Through its ICN Gateway platform and region-based teams, it connects over 100,000 Australian suppliers with major project opportunities across infrastructure, energy, defence, and advanced manufacturing, unlocking billions in contracts and strengthening local supply chains and regional economies.

In the Hunter region, collaborative models like HunterNet and the Hunter Clean Manufacturing Precinct have driven growth in manufacturing, food production, and clean-tech industries. These networks have connected thousands of businesses and workers with opportunities in clean energy and advanced manufacturing, with support from councils, universities, and research institutions helping to modernise and diversify the region's economy.

We are currently seeing the growth of Circular Economy Living Labs across Australia, which bring organisations together to develop circular business models and regional value chains where every part of the system thrives. A good example is the Circular Economy Living Lab in Lake Macquarie, which involves local government, industry, community groups, and the University of Newcastle, creating new enterprise models focused on waste reuse, materials innovation, and sustainable job creation.

In Geelong, seeking solutions to the die off of the local automotive sector, the Chamber of Commerce and local industry development hubs have worked to transform the region into a competitive advanced manufacturing centre. Through partnerships with Deakin University's ManuFutures facility and initiatives like the Advanced Fibre Cluster, manufacturers have been able to co-invest in innovation, develop specialist skills pipelines, and jointly access new markets and supply chains.

In the fintech sector, industry incubators like Stone & Chalk - starting in Sydney and expanding to Melbourne - have been pivotal in growing Australia's fintech ecosystem. They have provided collaborative environments for companies to share skills, resources, networks, and governance support, while also offering structured programs, connections to investors, and access to corporate partnerships. This has created stronger, more globally competitive Australian fintech businesses.

Another emerging trend is the rise of bioregional finance and place-based economic development models aligned with concepts like doughnut economics and regenerative economics. Initiatives like

Regen Melbourne, the Regen Foundation, and Greenprints are helping to design local financing models and collaborative industry ecosystems where value circulates locally, supporting both community resilience and ecological health.

These examples show the benefits of focusing on collaboration rather than pure competitiveness. Collaboration enables shared skill development, collective advocacy to influence market conditions and regulations, and joint investment in technology and workforce capabilities. It allows for capability building not just within individual businesses, but across job functions, whole sectors, and regions. Large industry gatherings - like the ones I have produced over the past two decades - play a central role by giving industry participants a chance to meet, share knowledge, address challenges together, and collectively advance to adapt to changing market and environmental conditions.

I believe we should refocus policy on promoting teaming and collaboration towards capability development. Nationally, we had a highly successful initiative through the Industry Growth Centres, which ran from 2015 to 2024. These Growth Centres - covering Advanced Manufacturing, Food and Agribusiness, Medical Technologies and Pharmaceuticals, Cyber Security, Oil, Gas and Energy Resources, and Mining Equipment, Technology and Services - helped thousands of businesses engage with researchers, develop skills, collaborate on supply chains, co-invest in innovation projects and lobby government around market conditions. They delivered significant benefits to key industries and regional economies. I would like to see reinvestment in similar on-the-ground collaborative initiatives - whether through new programs or by strengthening successful organisations like the Industry Capability Network, which continues to deliver productivity gains in several regions.

We demonstrably benefit from a collaborative approach to economic development - one that builds skills, strengthens industries, connects communities, and creates a more resilient and sovereign Australian economy. An approach focused on growing the skills and capability of Australian people, creating connected and thriving industries, and supporting the long-term resilience of entire sectors, regions, and job functions.

Thank you for considering this submission as part of your research process.

Best regards,

Alicia Boyd

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