

Submission to the Productivity Commission Reducing Barriers to Business Dynamism

Submission from Surveyors Australia
July 2026

About Surveyors Australia

Surveyors Australia is the national peak body for the surveying profession, representing surveying businesses, surveyors and allied professionals across Australia.

Our members work across cadastral, engineering, construction, infrastructure, mining, spatial and emerging technology disciplines. Surveyors are critical first movers in Australia's construction, property, infrastructure, resources, housing and land development systems.

Surveying is a small profession with a large economic footprint. Every home, road, rail corridor, mine, renewable energy project, pipeline, major infrastructure corridor and parcel of land depends on accurate surveying, spatial information and professional judgement.

Surveying businesses are commonly small and medium sized businesses. Many are owner led, many operate in regional markets, and most carry the cost of professional compliance, technology investment, training, project risk and regulatory navigation.

Surveyors Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into reducing barriers to business dynamism.

We do not seek to repeat the broader economy wide arguments made by business peak bodies. Instead, this submission provides a practical account of how regulatory fragmentation, occupational licensing complexity, digital system design, workforce constraints and business succession issues affect one small but essential profession.

Summary

Surveying businesses are enabling businesses. When they can operate efficiently, move skilled people across borders, invest in technology, train staff and grow, the benefits are felt across housing, infrastructure, land development, regional investment and digital transformation.

When surveying businesses are constrained by fragmented regulation, duplicated systems, workforce bottlenecks or unnecessary compliance, those costs do not stay within the profession. They flow through to developers, contractors, governments, councils, utilities, landholders and communities.

Surveyors Australia supports reform that makes business systems simpler, faster, more consistent and more productive. However, in a regulated technical profession such as surveying, reform must be carefully designed.

The issue is not deregulation. The issue is better regulation.

Surveying regulation exists for clear reasons. It protects land ownership, public confidence, infrastructure accuracy, safety, professional accountability and the integrity of Australia's land administration systems. Reform should therefore remove unnecessary friction while preserving the standards and professional safeguards that the public, government and industry rely on.

The key barriers affecting surveying businesses are:

1. Fragmented state and territory licensing, registration and professional obligation systems.
2. Inconsistent and incomplete operation of mutual recognition arrangements.
3. Poorly connected planning, titles, cadastral, spatial and government lodgement systems.
4. Government statutory and approval timeframes in the development chain that are not being met in practice and are lengthening in some jurisdictions.
5. Duplicated digital requirements that add cost without removing existing obligations.
6. Workforce shortages and the high cost to employers of training future surveyors and technicians.
7. Award and employment compliance complexity, particularly where classifications do not reflect modern qualifications, competencies and professional pathways.
8. Barriers to capital investment, technology adoption and business succession, especially for small and regional firms.

Surveying businesses as enabling businesses

Surveying businesses do not only provide services to individual clients. They enable wider economic activity.

Surveyors are engaged at the front end of housing supply, land subdivision, infrastructure delivery, construction verification, transport, mining, renewables, utilities, digital mapping and land administration.

A delay or inefficiency affecting surveying businesses can affect project timing, client cost, land release, infrastructure delivery and regional development.

This is why business dynamism in surveying matters. A more productive surveying sector supports national priorities, including housing supply, infrastructure delivery, regional growth, digital transformation and workforce participation.

1. Occupational licensing and labour mobility

Surveying is regulated under state and territory legislation. This reflects the importance of cadastral surveying to land ownership, property boundaries, land titling and public confidence in the Torrens Title system.

Surveyors Australia strongly supports fit for purpose licensing and registration. Professional standards must not be weakened. However, the current state based system creates avoidable friction for businesses and practitioners operating across jurisdictions.

Surveying businesses can face different registration requirements, licensing pathways, terminology, continuing professional development obligations, insurance settings, board processes and local overlays. These differences increase cost, slow workforce deployment and make national business operations harder than they need to be.

Automatic Mutual Recognition has improved mobility in some areas, but its operation remains uneven. In practice, businesses still face inconsistency, uncertainty and administrative burden when moving skilled surveyors across borders or operating in multiple jurisdictions.

Surveyors Australia does not support a blunt one size fits all national licence. Surveying has a long history of reciprocal recognition and inter jurisdictional cooperation. The better approach is active harmonisation of existing frameworks.

Reform should focus on:

1. Improving the operation of Automatic Mutual Recognition for registered and licensed occupations.
2. Harmonising terminology, licence classes and regulatory scope where appropriate.
3. Reducing unnecessary duplication between jurisdictions.
4. Supporting consistent and trusted CPD recognition.
5. Maintaining industry co-design and professional standards.
6. Preserving credential integrity, practical competence and public confidence.

The right balance matters. Businesses need mobility and reduced duplication, but clients, governments and the community also need confidence that registered and licensed surveyors meet the required Australian standard.

2. Digital reform must remove duplication

Surveying businesses interact with a wide range of government systems, including planning portals, titles offices, cadastral systems, spatial data platforms, infrastructure data systems, council systems and project lodgement processes.

Digitalisation can improve productivity, data quality and validation. Surveyors Australia supports that direction. However, digital reform only delivers real benefit where it simplifies processes and reduces duplication.

Poorly designed digitalisation can simply turn fragmented paper processes into fragmented online processes. Multiple portals, inconsistent fields, duplicated uploads, unclear validation rules and limited interoperability all create avoidable cost.

For surveying businesses, digital system design is not a back office issue. It affects project delivery, client cost, staff productivity, data quality and the speed at which housing, infrastructure and land development projects can progress.

A more productive system would be built around the practical workflow of businesses and projects, not the institutional boundaries of government.

Surveyors Australia recommends that digital reform include land, planning, titles, cadastral and spatial data systems as priority economic infrastructure.

Reform should focus on:

1. Interoperable planning, titles, cadastral and spatial systems.
2. Common data fields and clearer data standards.
3. Reusable information and a practical “tell government once” approach.
4. Clear validation rules, tolerances and guidance.
5. Greater consistency between state, territory and local government systems.

6. User testing with the professional businesses that lodge, certify, interpret and rely on these systems.

Digital government reform should be judged by whether it reduces practical business friction, not by whether a form has simply moved online.

3. Planning and approval delays affect professional service businesses

Regulatory delay does not only affect project proponents. It flows through the supply chain, including to specialist professional services such as surveying.

Surveying firms are often engaged at key points in land development, subdivision, infrastructure design, construction verification and project completion. When planning, titles, cadastral or approval systems are slow or inconsistent, surveying businesses can experience delayed workflows, disrupted cashflow, increased rework, client frustration and inefficient use of skilled staff.

In many parts of the development chain, the statutory timeframes that government itself sets for approvals, registrations, plan examination and title dealings are not being met in practice. In a number of jurisdictions these delays are getting worse rather than better. This is not a private practice productivity problem. It is a direct government responsibility, and it reduces productivity across the entire chain.

Surveyors contribute within a broader productivity chain. When government does not meet its own legislated timeframes, the cost flows to surveying businesses, their clients and the projects that depend on them. Addressing these statutory delays sits squarely with government and is one of the clearest productivity gains available outside the control of private practice.

This matters because the surveying workforce is already constrained. Skilled surveyors should be spending their time on productive technical work, not navigating unnecessary duplication or repeated administrative processes.

Surveyors Australia recommends that regulatory impact analysis take account of the cumulative effect of approval delays on specialist professional services, not only the direct impact on developers or asset owners.

Where governments seek to accelerate housing, infrastructure and regional development, they should also examine the enabling professions and business systems that sit behind delivery.

4. Workforce development and employer training costs

Surveying businesses play a significant role in developing the future workforce. They employ graduates, technicians, trainees and early career professionals, supervise practical experience, support professional development and help people progress towards registration or licensing.

This comes at a real cost to business. Employers carry supervision time, mentoring, reduced early productivity, administration and project risk. For small businesses, these costs are significant.

Surveyors Australia supports stronger employer incentives for work based learning, traineeships, apprenticeships and professional pathways. These incentives should not be limited to traditional trades. Technical and professional occupations also require structured workplace learning, supervision and progression.

Surveying is a clear example of why training policy and business dynamism are connected. A firm cannot grow if it cannot attract, train and retain skilled people. A profession cannot support housing and

infrastructure delivery if the education and training pipeline is too thin, too fragmented or too difficult for businesses to support.

Surveyors Australia recommends that the Productivity Commission recognise employer based training as a productivity issue, not only an education issue.

Reform should support:

1. Meaningful incentives for employers who train future technicians and professionals.
2. Better links between vocational education, higher education and professional registration pathways.
3. Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer that is fair, transparent and trusted.
4. Bridging pathways for internationally qualified professionals who need to meet Australian standards.
5. Practical support for small and medium sized businesses that carry the day to day cost of workforce development.

5. Award and employment compliance complexity

Surveying businesses also face employment compliance complexity. This is particularly acute for small and medium sized firms without dedicated human resources or payroll teams.

One practical issue is that award classifications may not align clearly with contemporary qualifications, competencies, responsibilities, registration requirements or modern surveying roles. This creates uncertainty for employers and employees and increases the risk of payroll error.

Surveyors Australia has separately raised concerns that the Surveying Award does not adequately reflect modern surveying pathways, including vocational qualifications, degree pathways, competency development, professional responsibility and registration.

This submission does not seek detailed workplace relations reform through this inquiry. However, the issue is relevant to business dynamism because complex and unclear compliance obligations reduce business confidence, increase advisory costs and divert management time away from productive activity.

Surveyors Australia recommends that the Commission recognise employment compliance complexity as part of the cumulative regulatory burden facing small professional and technical businesses.

6. Capital investment, technology adoption and innovation

Modern surveying businesses are technology intensive. They invest in specialist equipment, software, vehicles, drones, scanners, spatial systems, data management, cyber security, AI enabled tools and staff capability.

These investments can be expensive and may have long payback periods. For small and medium sized firms, access to appropriate finance can determine whether they can adopt new technology, expand capacity or compete for larger projects.

Productivity in surveying is closely connected to technology adoption. Better equipment, data systems and digital workflows can improve project accuracy, reduce rework, support infrastructure delivery and strengthen confidence in spatial information.

Surveyors Australia recommends that capital access reforms recognise the needs of small technical and professional firms investing in productivity enhancing technology.

Surveyors are also statutorily required to take part in government led digital transformation of the cadastre and land administration system, including digital plan lodgement, digital cadastre and survey data programs. Where government mandates these transformations, it should co-invest. Collaborative funding and targeted incentives are needed to build the digital enablers that make these systems work in practice. Digital strategy must enhance productivity across the land system, not shift cost and effort onto the businesses required to use it.

Reform should support:

1. Access to longer term finance for productivity enhancing business investment.
2. Investment incentives for equipment, software and digital capability.
3. Practical support for AI, cyber security and digital adoption by small and medium sized firms.
4. Innovation programs that are accessible to professional services and technical SMEs, not only large firms or research intensive sectors.
5. Collaborative funding and incentives for surveyors required to participate in government led digital cadastral and land administration transformation, so that digital strategy enhances rather than detracts from productivity.

7. Business transfer and regional continuity

Many surveying businesses are owner led. In regional areas, a single surveying firm may provide essential local capability for land development, infrastructure, councils, agriculture, mining, utilities and private landholders.

If succession, ownership transfer or restructuring is too complex or costly, viable businesses may close rather than transfer. In surveying, that can mean the loss of local capability, reduced service access, delayed projects and weaker regional development capacity.

Business transfer should therefore be seen as a productivity and regional capability issue.

Surveyors Australia recommends that reforms to business transfer and succession frameworks consider the impact on small professional service firms, particularly in regional Australia.

Reform should focus on:

1. Simpler business transfer pathways for small and medium sized firms.
2. Better guidance for owner led businesses planning succession.
3. Reduced duplication across Commonwealth, state and territory systems.
4. Proportionate compliance settings that preserve business continuity.
5. Recognition that the loss of a viable professional service business can affect local economic capacity beyond the business itself.

Recommendations

Surveyors Australia recommends that the Productivity Commission:

1. Recognise surveying businesses as enabling businesses for housing, infrastructure, land development, regional growth and digital transformation.
2. Improve the operation of Automatic Mutual Recognition and occupational mobility frameworks for regulated technical professions, while preserving professional standards and licensing integrity.
3. Support active harmonisation of state and territory surveying registration, licensing, CPD and professional obligation systems, rather than imposing a blunt national licensing model.
4. Include land, planning, titles, cadastral and spatial data systems in digital government reform priorities.
5. Apply a practical “tell government once” principle to business facing systems wherever possible.
6. Ensure digital reform removes duplicated requirements rather than layering new obligations on top of existing processes.
7. Co-invest, with collaborative funding and incentives, where surveyors are statutorily required to deliver government led digital cadastral and land administration transformation, so that mandated digital change drives productivity gains.
8. Assess the cumulative impact of planning, approval and lodgement delays, including unmet statutory timeframes, on specialist professional service businesses.
9. Hold governments accountable for meeting their own statutory and published timeframes for approvals, registrations, plan examination and title dealings, and report publicly on performance, recognising that delay in the development chain is a direct and growing drag on productivity that sits with government rather than private practice.
10. Support employer based training incentives for technical and professional occupations, not only traditional trades.
11. Improve recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and bridging pathways for skilled workers, including internationally qualified professionals.
12. Recognise award and employment compliance complexity as part of the cumulative burden facing small professional and technical businesses.
13. Improve access to finance and investment support for small firms adopting productivity enhancing technology, equipment and digital systems.
14. Simplify business transfer and succession pathways for small and medium sized professional service firms, particularly in regional Australia.
15. Ensure regulatory reform is developed with industry co-design so that changes are practical, proportionate and grounded in how businesses actually operate.

Conclusion

Surveying is a small profession with a large economic footprint. It supports housing, infrastructure, land administration, construction, resources, transport, energy and regional development.

The barriers facing surveying businesses are often cumulative. A licensing difference here, a duplicated portal there, an unclear classification, a delayed approval, a difficult recognition pathway, a succession barrier, or an investment that is too hard to finance.

Together, these barriers reduce business confidence, slow growth and limit the capacity of surveying businesses to support national priorities.

Surveyors Australia supports reform that makes business systems simpler, faster, more consistent and more productive. For regulated technical professions, the goal should not be deregulation for its own sake. The goal should be better regulation: clear, proportionate, interoperable and trusted.

If Australia wants more homes, better infrastructure, stronger regions and higher productivity, it must also support the small professional businesses that make those outcomes possible.

Yours sincerely,

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