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Productivity Commission – Submission on *investing in cheaper, cleaner energy and the net zero transition*

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership (www.giwl.anu.edu.au) at the Australian National University is pleased to put forward a submission to the 2025 Productivity Commission's recommendations for investing in cheaper, cleaner energy and the net zero transition.

While the Net Zero Interim Report is comprehensive in its economic and environmental scope, it lacks **explicit gender analysis**, **gender-disaggregated data**, and **targeted measures** to ensure that women and underrepresented groups benefit equitably from the net zero transition.

This needs to be addressed in the final report because:

- Climate change is a threat multiplier for gender inequality.
- Net zero policy must be gender-responsive to be effective and equitable.
- New Policy Proposals[1] (NPPs) in Federal Government require adequate gender analysis and budgeting.

Our recommendations:

- Ensure emissions reduction policies are inclusive and equitable
- Integrate gender responsiveness into energy infrastructure approvals
- Address gendered barriers to climate adaptation and resilience

These recommendations support existing, new, 2025 Australian Government policy Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment (https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/including-gender-guide.pdf). In particular, this guide is designed to "assist Australian Public Service (APS) policy makers developing a Cabinet Submission or New Policy Proposal in fulfilling gender analysis requirements set by Government." As per this guide, **gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting is a core Australian Government commitment** that should flow through to new policy recommended by the Productivity Commission, including in this report.

[1] Definition: "Any proposal that requires a government decision and that:

- have a certain or potential financial impact including on the fiscal balance, underlying cash balance, headline cash balance, net debt or net worth on existing estimates within the forward estimates period or beyond (including drawing down on cash reserves or moving expenditure from outside into the forward estimates) or
- have changes in expenses offset by changes in other expenses or user charges (revenue) or
- create a legal, financial, contingent or other commitment for the Commonwealth or
- changes the intent of a previous new policy decision or position, including proposals that are fully offset, absorbed within existing resources, or involve movements between or within outcomes." (Department of Finance 2025, New Policy Proposals (NPPS), https://www.finance.gov.au/about-us/glossary/pgpa/term-new-policy-proposals-npps

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"All Cabinet Submissions and NPPs must include a Gender Analysis Summary – including when a Gender Impact Assessment is also required . . . A Gender Impact Assessment must be completed if the proposal meets one or more of the following criteria:

- *the proposal has a significant positive or negative impact on gender equality*
- *the proposal targets cohorts of people who can typically be disadvantaged*
- *the proposal relates to a gender segregated industry*
- *the proposal establishes a National Partnership Agreement (or like agreement)*
- *the total value of the proposal is $250 million or more over the forward estimates."*[2]

The **recommendations in the interim report meet more than one criteria requiring gender analysis** (e.g. potential significant positive or negative impact on gender equality; relates to a gender segregated industry; and the total value is likely to be $250 million or more, for instance). Recommendations should pre-empt these Federal Government requirements for gender analysis and engrain gender considerations throughout, for instance, as recommended in the next pages.

As one example of meeting these criteria, **Interim Report recommendations primarily target gender segregated industries**. This includes energy (electricity, gas, water and waste services), transport (transport, postal and warehousing), and construction. All are strongly male dominated. On the other hand, sectors omitted from the strategy are primarily female-dominated (health, care, and education), as shown in the table below[3].

Industry	Female employees, 1998	Female employees, 2018	Female employees, differences (percentage points)	Gender composition, 2018
Health Care and Social Assistance	77.2	79.0	1.9	Female-dominated
Education and Training	65.8	73.2	7.4	Female-dominated
Retail Trade	54.4	55.0	0.6	Mixed
Accommodation and Food Services	54.5	54.9	0.4	Mixed
Administrative and Support Services	51.2	51.5	0.3	Mixed
Public Administration and Safety	41.9	48.6	6.8	Mixed
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	43.1	48.5	5.4	Mixed
Financial and Insurance Services	57.3	48.1	-9.2	Mixed
Arts and Recreation Services	47.6	46.4	-1.2	Mixed
Other Services	38.0	43.6	5.6	Mixed
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	42.5	43.3	0.9	Mixed
Information Media and Telecommunications	44.0	42.0	-2.0	Mixed
Wholesale Trade	30.1	34.7	4.6	Male-dominated
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	30.1	30.1	0.0	Male-dominated
Manufacturing	25.9	29.5	3.6	Male-dominated
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	17.6	23.8	6.2	Male-dominated
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	23.1	20.9	-2.2	Male-dominated
Mining	9.4	16.3	6.8	Male-dominated

[2] Page 14, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2025) Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/including-gender-guide.pdf
[3] Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Construction	13.8	12.0	-1.8	Male-dominated

Recommendation in detail

1. Reducing the cost of meeting emissions targets

The draft recommendations focus on market efficiency and technology-neutral incentives but overlook how these mechanisms may **disproportionately benefit male-dominated sectors and exclude women and underrepresented groups**.

Suggested improvements:

- **Incorporate gender-disaggregated data** in emissions reduction policy impact assessments to understand who benefits and who bears the costs.
- **Expand incentives to include female-dominated sectors** (e.g. health, education, care) which are critical to climate resilience but often excluded from transition funding. Healthcare alone contributes 7% of carbon emissions in Australia[4] – combined with other female-dominated sectors, these represent sectors generating substantial emissions but without the dedicated support transport and heavy industry receive in this report.
- Ensure that carbon pricing and clean energy incentives **do not inadvertently widen gender gaps in economic participation**.
- To achieve net zero in 2050 at lowest cost possible requires a **lowest cost possible approach that is gender responsive.** This includes ensuring female-dominated industries get equitable access to emissions-reduction incentives and that women-owned businesses are also incentivised to be part of green energy solutions. Without this, lowest cost possible models may be biased towards industries that are loudest in demanding support, and innovators and entrepreneurs who have dominated in the past (with only 2% of startup funding in Australia in 2024 going to women-owned enterprises for instance[5]). The lowest cost possible model, if not gender responsive, could therefore entrench social inequalities that are vital to be addressed for Australia to have any chance at net zero transition. **Gender responsive budgeting is strongly advised to feature in this model.**

Why this matters: Without targeted measures, support available to transition to net zero remains siloed, potentially over-relying on changes for only some industries (e.g. male-dominated heavy industries) and under-utilising the impact of measures for others (e.g. female-dominated industries like healthcare and education).

2. Speeding up approvals for new energy infrastructure projects

The report recommends streamlining approvals but does not adequately address community engagement or equity in benefit-sharing, particularly for women and First Nations communities.

Suggested improvements:

- **Mandate gender-responsive community engagement standards** in environmental approvals, ensuring women's voices are heard in planning and decision-making.

[4] Malik, et al (2018) The carbon footprint of Australian health care, *The Lancet*, 2(1): E27-E35.
[5] Cut Through Venture and Folklore Ventures (2024), State of Australian Startup Funding, https://www.australianstartupfunding.com/

- **Include gender equity criteria in benefit-sharing frameworks**, such as:
    - Prioritising local employment and training for women.
    - Supporting women's participation in land-use planning and regional development.
- **Ensure First Nations women are meaningfully included** in clean energy consultations and benefit-sharing agreements, with culturally appropriate engagement.

Why this matters: Infrastructure projects can have significant social impacts. Gender-responsive engagement ensures equitable outcomes and stronger social licence for clean energy development.

3. Addressing barriers to private investment in adaptation

While the report addresses housing resilience and climate risk, it **does not acknowledge that women (especially single mothers, older women, and renters) are disproportionately affected** by housing insecurity and uninsurability.

Suggested improvements:

- In setting up the climate risk information database, a category of **demographic factors should be overlaid on climate risks** to get the most accurate information on climate risks. The Climate Justice Observatory (https://climatejusticeobservatory.com.au/) provides one model for doing this that could be expanded upon. This would help both individuals/households understand their own situation, as well as support policy and planning for builders, developers, insurers, and government planners and policymakers.
- **Invest in renewable energy solutions for renters, social housing and remote communities**.[6] The Federal Government should work with States and Territories to:
    - create new initiatives to rollout renewable energy and household battery storage, especially for renters and social housing tenants
    - respond to dangerously hot homes by supporting household energy efficiency upgrades and delivering a program to plan for future heatwaves
    - increase investment in neighbourhood level disaster resilience measures to safeguard our communities and enable them to be resilient in the face of extreme weather.
- In improving housing resilience over time, initially, **climate-resilient affordable housing should be prioritised for those most at risk** e.g. for women at risk of homelessness, including single mothers, older women, and low-income renters.
- **Recognise and respond to demographic trends** in retrofits of existing stock, climate risk assessments for planning and zoning, and communications and supports to households to understand and use climate risk information.
    - Housing resilience is linked to individual adaptive capacity which is shaped by an individual's socioeconomic status and myriad structural, resource and policy-related capital. Resilience is dependent on access to income, savings, employment, education and training and control over productive resources[7]. Women experience both reduced lifetime income from time out of the workforce as well as escalated rates of domestic violence post natural disasters[8].

[6] For a Queensland example, see the Power Together campaign and 2025 Policy Report https://powertogether.org.au/about-power-together/2025-policy-report/

[7] Shi, H., & Jin, E. (2022, December). Valuing the costs of natural disasters using the life satisfaction approach. Victoria's Economic Bulletin, 6(4).

[8] Molyneaux, R., Gibbs, L., Bryant, R. A., Humphreys, C., Hegarty, K., Kellett, C., Gallagher, H. C., Block, K., Harms, L., Richardson, J. F., Alkemade, N., & Forbes, D. (2019). Interpersonal violence and mental health outcomes following disaster. BJPsych Open, 6(1). https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2019.82

Comparatively, men typically have stronger financial security and decision-making power that solidifies their housing resilience[9]. These differences must be accounted for in policy.

- 26.2% of properties analysed in Australia had female-only ownership, compared to 29.9% of properties owned by men. women head 63.5% of single-adult households, but represent just 42.8% per cent of sole property owners[10].

- **Ensure adaptation funding reaches women-led initiatives**, especially in community resilience, disaster recovery, and local infrastructure.

Why this matters: Women often have fewer economic resources and face greater risks from climate-related displacement, health impacts, and insurance exclusion. Adaptation must be inclusive to be effective.

We thank the Productivity Commission for its consideration of this submission and welcome ongoing dialogue to help shape an inclusive, net zero transition that works for everyone. **For further information, please contact Dr Elise Stephenson [REDACTED] and Prof Susan Harris Rimmer [REDACTED].**

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[9] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2024), The socio-economics of gender and disasters, https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-july-2024-the-socio-economics-of-gender-and-disasters/

[10] CEDA (2021). Property Ownership and the Gender Wealth Gap, https://www.ceda.com.au/newsandresources/opinion/built-environment-urban-planning-cities/property-ownership-and-the-gender-wealth-gap