

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Housing Supply Regulation Inquiry - Response to the Interim Report

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Executive summary

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's interim report on housing supply regulation.

Australia will not meet its housing ambitions without expanding and diversifying the construction workforce. Women remain significantly underrepresented across the industry, particularly in trade and site-based occupations, despite representing one of the largest opportunities to increase workforce capacity.

BuildSkills Australia estimates that meeting Australia's housing ambitions will require approximately 116,700 additional workers beyond business-as-usual workforce growth by 2029. Its *Housing Workforce Capacity Study* identifies greater participation by women as the largest individual workforce opportunity, estimating that lifting women's participation to a level comparable with manufacturing could add up to 51,000 workers.

Increasing women's participation is therefore not peripheral to the housing supply challenge. It is an important part of building the workforce required to convert regulatory reform into completed homes.

NAWIC supports the Commission's objective of enabling more homes to be built, more quickly, in the places Australians want and need to live. We broadly support its proposed principles for a best-practice housing regulatory system:

- Adopt a build mindset.
- Only regulate when necessary.
- Coordinate with infrastructure.
- Keep the process simple.

Reform should make planning and approvals more efficient, predictable and proportionate; improve coordination between housing and enabling infrastructure; and remove regulatory barriers that do not produce a clear public benefit.

However, the success of reform must be measured by additional completed homes not simply rezoning, development applications or approvals. Governments must also consider whether the construction industry has the capacity to deliver the resulting pipeline.

Recruitment alone will not deliver the sustained workforce growth required. The industry must provide conditions that enable women to enter construction, remain in the industry and progress into skilled, supervisory, technical and leadership roles. These include safe and respectful workplaces, appropriate amenities and equipment, sustainable working arrangements, accessible entry pathways and clear opportunities for career progression.

NAWIC recognises that the inquiry is focused on housing regulation rather than labour supply policy. We are not proposing that the Commission extend its scope. We ask the Commission to recognise workforce capacity and diversity as important implementation considerations and to ensure that reform reinforces, rather than undermines, the conditions required to attract and retain women.

NAWIC's core position is:

Australia will not meet its housing ambitions without expanding and diversifying the construction workforce. Housing supply reform must therefore be implemented alongside workforce settings that enable construction to attract, retain and progress women, while maintaining safe, productive and professionally accountable workplaces.

NAWIC makes five recommendations aligned with the themes of the interim report. Together, they seek to ensure that regulatory reform translates into completed homes and supports a construction industry capable of drawing on the full available workforce.

About NAWIC

The National Association of Women in Construction is a national organisation representing and supporting women across construction and the built environment.

NAWIC works with governments, employers, industry bodies, education and training providers, and construction professionals to improve the attraction, retention and progression of women. Its members work across residential and commercial construction, infrastructure, engineering, architecture, planning, project management, professional services, procurement, trades, education and government.

NAWIC therefore has a direct interest in both the effectiveness of Australia's housing supply system and the capacity of the construction workforce to deliver the homes and infrastructure Australia needs.

1. Best practice for housing regulatory systems

NAWIC supports the Commission's proposed principles for a best-practice housing regulatory system. Regulation should be proportionate, clear, consistently administered and focused on enabling appropriate housing development.

NAWIC supports removing requirements and processes that create unnecessary duplication, delay, uncertainty or cost. However, a build mindset must not become a “build at any cost” approach.

Safety, building quality, professional competency and clear accountability are necessary features of a productive construction industry. Streamlining regulation should not weaken these protections or make responsibility for design, construction, certification and workplace safety less clear.

These protections also matter to women’s participation. Women are more likely to enter and remain in construction when workplaces are safe, respectful and professionally managed, and where standards and avenues for accountability are clear.

Women’s participation should therefore be recognised not only as an equity objective, but as a housing delivery consideration. Australia cannot continue drawing its construction workforce from only part of the available population while seeking to deliver a substantially larger housing pipeline.

The Commission should acknowledge workforce capacity as an important consideration in the implementation and sequencing of regulatory reform. This does not require detailed recommendations on labour supply. It recognises that regulatory reform will not produce additional completed homes unless the construction industry has the people and capability to deliver them.

RECOMMENDATION 1 — RECOGNISE WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN HOUSING DELIVERY

The Productivity Commission should recognise that increasing women’s participation, retention and progression is an important part of expanding the construction workforce needed to deliver additional housing.

The final report should also make clear that removing unnecessary regulation must not weaken the safety, building quality, professional competency and accountability requirements that support women’s participation and a productive construction industry.

2. Unlocking more homes through better land-use regulation

NAWIC supports land use reforms that enable greater housing density and a broader range of housing types in locations with access to employment, transport, services and infrastructure.

Clear and consistent planning controls can reduce uncertainty and provide a more predictable pipeline of work. NAWIC supports appropriate reforms to enable low and mid-

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rise housing, greater density in high-demand locations, mixed-use and infill development, and the removal of land use and built form controls where their costs exceed their public benefits.

Where restrictions are retained for environmental, heritage, hazard or other legitimate reasons, they should be transparent, evidence-based and proportionate.

A clear and stable housing pipeline is also important for workforce planning. Greater certainty gives construction businesses particularly small and medium-sized businesses more confidence to recruit workers, engage apprentices and invest in skills and training.

A broader pipeline can create opportunities across trades, design, engineering, planning, project management, procurement, manufacturing, logistics and site delivery. However, these opportunities will not automatically increase women's participation. Governments and industry should connect planned housing activity with practical entry, training and progression pathways for women.

RECOMMENDATION 2 — USE PIPELINE CERTAINTY TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE GROWTH

The Productivity Commission should support the removal of unnecessary land use and built form controls that restrict appropriate housing supply.

Land use reforms should provide a clear and predictable development pipeline so construction businesses can invest with greater confidence in apprenticeships, training, workforce growth and pathways for women into skilled, supervisory and leadership roles.

3. Reducing the burden of approvals

NAWIC supports approval systems that are timely, transparent and proportionate to the risk and complexity of a development.

Slow or uncertain approvals increase project costs, delay construction and make it more difficult for businesses to plan future workloads. This uncertainty can discourage employers from recruiting workers, engaging apprentices and investing in training.

It can also undermine initiatives intended to increase women's participation. Apprenticeships, traineeships, mid-career entry and return-to-work programs are difficult to sustain when employers cannot confidently anticipate when projects will commence.

NAWIC supports risk-based assessment, clearer pathways for straightforward developments, earlier consideration of infrastructure requirements and development

trade-offs, better coordination between decision-makers and transparent assessment timeframes.

These reforms should be supported by adequate capability and resourcing within approval authorities. Digital systems can help reduce duplication, but they cannot compensate for unclear requirements, fragmented responsibilities or insufficient assessment capacity.

Approval systems should also support modular, prefabricated and other modern construction methods where these can demonstrate appropriate safety and quality outcomes. These methods may create new roles in technical, manufacturing and off-site environments and broaden the pathways available to women.

However, innovation must be accompanied by appropriate training, competency, certification and quality assurance. Faster approvals and new construction methods should not weaken professional judgement or obscure responsibility for safety, design quality and construction compliance.

RECOMMENDATION 3 — MAKE APPROVALS PREDICTABLE AND ACCOUNTABLE

The Productivity Commission should recommend clear, consistent and risk-based approval pathways, supported by defined timeframes, effective coordination between decision-makers and transparent reporting.

Streamlined pathways should provide the certainty needed to support workforce investment while retaining clear responsibility for design quality, safety, construction compliance and professional decision-making.

4. Delivering housing-enabling infrastructure

NAWIC supports stronger coordination between housing development and the infrastructure required to support it. Timely access to transport, water, energy, telecommunications and social infrastructure is essential to convert planned housing growth into completed homes.

Governments should publish coordinated housing and infrastructure plans that clearly identify where growth will occur, the infrastructure required, responsibilities for funding and delivery, key dependencies, and expected timeframes.

A visible and credible pipeline would also support workforce planning. It would enable employers, training providers and industry organisations to anticipate where skills will be needed and connect recruitment, training and employment pathways including pathways for women to actual projects.

Workforce access should be considered when planning major precincts and regional growth areas. Transport, accommodation and local services can affect whether workers, particularly women and people with caring responsibilities, can take up and remain in regional or project based employment.

Major housing programs also provide an opportunity for governments, employers and training providers to coordinate workforce initiatives linked to forecast demand. This would support a more reliable supply of skilled workers while creating clearer entry and progression pathways for women.

RECOMMENDATION 4 — PLAN HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

The Productivity Commission should recommend that governments publish coordinated housing and infrastructure plans with credible sequencing, responsibilities and delivery timeframes.

These plans should also support workforce planning by linking major housing pipelines with training and employment pathways, including pathways that increase women's participation in construction.

5. Toward more homes, faster

Delivering more homes, faster, will require more than changes to planning and approval systems. Regulatory reform may expand the housing pipeline, but it will not increase completions unless the construction industry has the workforce and capability to deliver it.

Women are not a supplementary workforce for construction; they are essential to building the industry capacity needed to deliver Australia's housing ambitions.

Attracting more women into construction is only part of the solution. Sustained workforce growth will depend on whether women can remain in the industry, complete their training and progress into skilled, supervisory, technical and leadership roles.

Publicly funded and supported housing programs provide governments with a direct opportunity to drive these outcomes. Through procurement and contracting, governments can establish clear and proportionate expectations for:

- Women's participation, retention and progression.
- Apprenticeships, mid-career entry and return-to-work pathways.
- Safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces.
- Appropriate amenities and personal protective equipment.
- Progression into skilled, supervisory, technical and leadership roles.

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These requirements should focus on sustained employment and career progression not simply the number of women present on a project at a particular point in time.

RECOMMENDATION 5 — INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION, RETENTION AND PROGRESSION

The Productivity Commission should recommend that governments use major housing reforms and publicly supported housing programs to increase women's participation, retention and progression in construction through measurable workforce targets, safe and inclusive workplaces, appropriate facilities, accessible career pathways, and clear accountability through procurement and contracting.

Conclusion

Regulatory reform is necessary, but it will not deliver more homes unless the construction industry has the workforce capacity to build them. Women remain significantly underrepresented in construction and must be central to expanding that capacity.

Realising this opportunity requires more than recruiting women into the industry. It requires safe and respectful workplaces, appropriate facilities and equipment, sustainable working arrangements, accessible entry pathways and genuine opportunities for women to develop their skills and progress into technical, supervisory and leadership roles.

These are not separate from productivity. They support a safer, more capable and resilient workforce and strengthen the industry's ability to deliver a sustained housing pipeline.

NAWIC calls on the Commission to recognise construction workforce capacity and women's participation within it as essential to the successful implementation of housing reform. Governments should align regulatory reform, infrastructure planning and public procurement with practical measures that enable women to enter, remain and progress in construction.

With the right regulatory and workforce settings, Australia can accelerate housing delivery while building a more diverse, productive and sustainable construction industry.

NAWIC would welcome the opportunity to provide further information or participate in any hearings, roundtables or consultations undertaken as part of the inquiry.

Source

BuildSkills Australia, *Housing Workforce Capacity Study*, 2025