

The CONTEXT: *Growing the defence industry workforce: Attracting and retaining women with critical skills and trades.*

ABSTRACT

There is significant cause for optimism in Australia's defence industry. With the Government committing unprecedented funds to defence capability, the industry seems set to see significant growth in the next decade and beyond. While there is some debate over the specific numbers, it seems certain that this funding boost will create thousands of new jobs. The Naval Shipbuilding Plan, for example, is estimated to create up to 15,000 direct and indirect jobs in construction and sustainment nationally. In an environment where there are already skills shortages, the defence industry will need ensure it can attract and, importantly, *retain* the skilled workers necessary to meet this growth in demand.

We know that many of these new jobs will be in industries and professions that have been traditionally male-dominated. So if defence industry is going to meet growth in demand for skilled workers, there will need to be a renewed focus on attracting and retaining all potential sections of the workforce, including women.

A gender-inclusive workplace culture will be crucial to defence industry organisations' success in achieving Australia's sovereign capability ambitions. Yet despite publicly valuing diversity, many defence industry organisations are not addressing the gender gap in a way that will deliver Australia's future defence industry workforce.

Failure to identify and address the significant challenges inherent in attracting, and critically, retaining a gender balanced workforce poses a risk to defence industry's ability to capitalise on growth opportunities.

Companies will need to ensure they have a workplace culture that is attractive to all sections of the workforce, including addressing any factors likely to push or pull skilled employees out. Companies will need to ensure they have the conditions and culture compatible with the personal factors which are realities of contemporary skilled workers' lives, such as family and caring responsibilities.

This report details the current state for women in defence industry occupations including: workplace issues for women in STEM roles and in trade apprenticeships; women's lived experiences in defence industry roles in Australia; current challenges for achieving greater diversity across the defence industry sector; and the reasons women leave the industry. The report also examines the effectiveness of strategies to date, and makes suggestions for the future. Implementing change brings challenges, but the value to individual companies and across defence industry will be substantial. Failing to do so will have significant implications for the sector's ability to sustain its growth trajectory.

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