



Women in Construction and Infrastructure Participation Target

South Australia

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MASTER
ELECTRICIANS
AUSTRALIA

Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is a peak industry association representing electrical contractors across Australia, majority of which are small and medium sized businesses. We are recognised by industry, government and the community as a leading business partner, knowledge source and advocate. You can visit our website at www.masterelectricians.com.au

MEA has chosen to respond via a written submission, as opposed to the survey given our position (as outlined below).

Female Participation

MEA has long recognised the value that increased female participation would bring to alleviating the skills shortage and acknowledges the significant contribution women can make to the industry.

Increasing female participation including through enhancing trade career experiences and strengthening pathways into the industry remain core advocacy priorities for MEA.

However, MEA cautions against any mandating of female participation percentages or female participation rates as tender selection criteria, as these approaches do not necessarily 'grow the pool' of women in the sector, but encourage intensifying competition for the existing limited pool of female participants. This can ultimately undermine the intended objective and lead to undesirable outcomes such as:

- women can be removed from one project that they may be happy working on to work on another to satisfy a tender requirement;
- women can be hired with no meaningful work to complete;
- larger businesses may 'poach' female workers from other businesses for a particular project with the offer of higher pay, to the detriment of smaller businesses unable to meet the same pay rates.

In addition to potentially losing staff, smaller businesses (many of which operate as subcontractors on government projects) may also be disadvantaged if they are unable

to contribute towards head contractors meeting procurement targets due to limited personnel and resources. This may reduce their ability to participate in government work, despite otherwise being capable and competitive providers.

While MEA acknowledges the intent behind procurement targets and the importance of government setting goals to increase the proportion of women working in the sector, care must be taken to ensure small businesses are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Recommendations

Key policy reforms advocated by MEA which we believe will lead to genuine increase in female participation include:

- Government-funded financial incentives to support commencement of women in trades
- Policies to improve access to clean, safe, and private amenities on worksites including support for small businesses to implement women's amenities
- Industry-wide cultural change
- Ensuring complaints procedures are confidential, accessible, and effectively actioned where appropriate
- Introduction of high school subjects aligned with a trade career to increase early exposure and help shift entrenched cultural perceptions of trade careers