

## Submission by the WA Chapter of NAWIC

### Statutory Review of the *Building and Construction Industry Training Fund and Levy Collection Act 1990 (WA)*

1. This submission is made on behalf of the [WA Chapter](#) of the National Association of Women In Construction ([NAWIC](#)).

NAWIC is an Australian, not-for-profit organisation formed in 1995 whose aim is to champion and empower women in the construction and related industries. Specifically, its mission is to drive changes that will aid in the increased recruitment, retention and further vocational development of women within all facets of the construction industry. A [core policy](#) of NAWIC is achieve 25% minimum female participation across all of the construction industry by 2025.

2. NAWIC works towards achieving its mission and core policy through programs and coordinate events that women can be involved in at a number of different levels, from social interaction, [networking events](#), professional development and education programs, [mentoring](#), leadership opportunities, a [scholarship](#) and [awards](#) programs.
3. The WA Chapter of NAWIC is comprised of a [committee](#) of 13 women from various sections of the construction industry. The WA Chapter [President](#) of NAWIC, Abby Chittick, is a Design Manager at [Lendlease](#) with more than 12 years in the construction industry. Ms Chittick has a degree in architecture from the University of Western Australia. Ms Chittick spoke by way of consultation with the Chair and the Executive Officer of the Statutory Review of the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund and Levy Collection Act 1990 (WA) (**Review**) on 15 April 2024.
4. This submission addresses the gender diversity aspect of the Review [Term of Reference](#) (f), which provides:

*Consider the benefits of a more diverse construction workforce and assess whether First Nations people participation and gender imbalances in training are being adequately addressed under the Act.*

5. There are not enough women engaged in the construction industry in WA. Women make up only around [13%](#) of the workers in Australian construction generally and only 2% of this is women in trades.

*Why there are not enough women in the construction industry*

6. NAWIC submits that there are a number of reasons for the lack of female participation in the construction industry, however, the [main factors](#) include:
  - (a) **Bias and discrimination** - Women face bias and [discrimination](#) in the hiring process, as well as in the workplace, which can make it difficult for them to succeed and advance in their careers. That includes a male-dominated culture that can manifest in various ways including:

- (i) **In the Work Environment** -The male-dominated culture may not be inclusive or welcoming to women. This can create an unwelcoming and uncomfortable environment for women, leading to high turnover rates and low retention.
  - (ii) **Gender pay gap** - Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) shows women working in the construction industry experience an average gender pay gap of around 28%.
  - (iii) **The motherhood penalty** - Long working hours and lack of flexibility makes it also difficult for women to balance their work with domestic and parental duties (in Australia women spend 64.4% of their average weekly working time on unpaid care work compared to 36.1% for men, source: [WGEA](#)).
  - (iv) **Recruitment bias** - women who have taken a career break to look after children often struggle to re-enter employment due to (unconscious) recruitment bias.
- (b) **Educational pathways** - Women are not being encouraged to pursue training and upskilling in the construction industry or education in STEM fields from an early age leading to fewer women participating. This can create a pipeline problem where there are fewer women with the necessary skills and qualifications to enter these fields.
7. Ms Chittick has directly observed classes of second year construction management students at Curtin University wherein only 10 of 150 people in that course were women. The challenges around discrimination and stereotypical views of the suitability of women to perform construction jobs is only heightened in the case of trades and in lower-tier firms.
  8. The NAWIC [Vice President](#), CJ Devereux, is the founder and owner of an excavation business, [Civilspec Resources](#). Ms Devereux's experience is that she misses out on winning work because of the view that excavating is man's work. does not get work because man should be doing excavation work.
  9. The NAWIC Committee have direct experience of being on construction sites where there were no female toilets because, it was said, there was no contemplation of women ever being engaged on the site.

*Some solutions to address the issue of not enough women in construction*

10. NAWIC submit that the following factors will help address the issues of preventable gender imbalances in the construction industry:
  - (a) **Targeting schools** – there is a need to encourage young women to consider secure careers in construction by informing them directly of the benefits and of the changes in the barriers that were once perceived as limiting career opportunities for women. For example, the positive messages include that:

- (i) There are currently many opportunities given the huge work pipeline for high paid roles for skilled women;
  - (ii) The major organisations in the construction field are actively addressing discrimination and diversity including with flexibility policies designed to attract and retain women and people with family commitments.
- (b) **More diverse teams** – the culture will be less discriminatory if there is exposure to more diverse workplaces. For example, Lendlease has a [40:40:20](#) aspirational gender target.
  - (c) **Female role models** - The underrepresentation of women means that there are fewer role models for young women to look up to and aspire to be like. This can make it difficult for women to envision themselves in these careers.
  - (d) **Improved Support and Promotion for Trades** - Recognizing the pivotal role trades play in construction, especially in promoting gender diversity, NAWIC advocates for targeted programs to support women pursuing trade careers. This includes initiatives such as hands-on trade skills workshops and industry immersion days, providing women with practical experience and exposure to trade environments.

*What the CTF can do to assist in achieving these solutions*

11. The CTF's Try a Trade program directly addresses the need to target schools.
12. NAWIC would like to know if CTF can get directly involved in helping to recruit trainees and apprentices at major projects in WA, including by way of helping industry to source and match up graduates from the CTF scholarship programs and other (eg) TAFE courses with contractors who are seeking apprentices and trainees. An example of the problem is the large amount of Defence Industry work in the pipeline at places such as Garden Island. Lendlease, for example, has developed a program in an attempt to strike up interest from female sporting groups by addressing those groups about careers, and the flexibility that is now possible to allow women to pursue both their professional and sporting careers simultaneously.
13. NAWIC recently [called](#) for the WA State Government to impose an aspirational target of 25% female participation on all its projects. NAWIC understands that some other States, such as Victoria, have achieved far higher female participation rates on government-owned projects than is the case in WA. Victoria has a number of government-run [programs](#) that are designed to address diversity problems in the construction industry. NAWIC submits that the CTF should explore whether it would be an appropriate vehicle to run similar programs in WA.
14. Promotion of Flexible Work Arrangements - The CTF can advocate for the adoption of flexible work arrangements within the construction industry, emphasizing the benefits of work-life balance and accommodating diverse needs. This can include promoting part-time apprenticeships, job-sharing opportunities, flexible work hours to attract and retain women in construction careers while balancing family and other commitments.

15. Establishment of Trade-Specific Scholarships for Women - CTF to introduce targeted scholarship programs focused on supporting women pursuing education and training in specific trades. These scholarships can cover tuition costs, training materials, and certification fees, helping to remove financial barriers, especially to those re-entering work life after raising children, and encourage more women to enter and excel in traditionally male-dominated trades.

*Conclusion*

16. NAWIC consider that the CTF provides valuable input into the construction industry. It is, however, of the view that there is little understanding in the construction industry generally of the positive work that the CTF undertakes, or the availability of some its grants and scholarships programs.

**Abby Chittick**

**Chapter President**

**On behalf of the WA Chapter Council of NAWIC**

**Date:** 19 April 2024