



Draft for consultation

Workforce Plan

2026-2027



Skills Insight acknowledges that First Nations peoples have been living on and caring for Country for thousands of years. This is respected in our values and the way we work.



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DRAFT

Executive summary

The industries supported by Skills Insight, including agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care, are foundational to Australia's economy and resilience. Operating throughout regional, rural and remote areas, these sectors underpin critical supply chains, ensure national food security, and support sovereign manufacturing capability. As the global environment becomes increasingly volatile, a skilled, safe and adaptable workforce is essential to manage climate impacts, integrate new technologies and maintain productivity.

Despite their critical importance, these sectors face severe and persistent workforce shortages. An ageing workforce, combined with the seasonal nature of agricultural and processing work, has driven a heavy industry reliance on temporary migrant labour. While this is necessary for many immediate operations, it limits the development of a secure, long term domestic skills pipeline. Furthermore, extensive consultations with employers and unions consistently highlight that attracting and retaining workers requires urgent, coordinated action to improve workplace safety, wellbeing and inclusivity, particularly for women and First Nations peoples.

Formal vocational education and training is the primary mechanism for building this required workforce capability. Graduates from national training packages report strong employment outcomes and high satisfaction. However, significant structural barriers remain in regional Australia. Thin training markets, a lack of local trainers and inadequate funding models severely constrain access to education in the locations where workforce shortages are most acute.

To address these complex challenges, the Workforce Plan 2026-2027 establishes a practical roadmap for action, focused on four core strategic priorities.

- **Evidence-based decision making:** Launching a comprehensive strategy to correct significant gaps in national administrative data, ensuring policy and funding decisions accurately reflect the real-world experiences of regional employers and workers.
- **Regional access and inclusion:** Advocating for sustainable funding models that reflect the true cost of regional training delivery, while developing accessible learning pathways that broaden workforce participation and support local economic development.
- **Productivity and capability:** Reforming training packages to ensure qualifications keep pace with digital transformation, automation, complex biosecurity risks and the Net Zero transition.
- **Quality skills system:** Partnering across the jobs and skills network to reduce regulatory fragmentation, improve the formal recognition of existing workplace skills, and build robust apprenticeship and traineeship pipelines.

By bringing together industry, unions, government and training providers, this Workforce Plan provides a shared, evidence-based foundation to secure the skills and capabilities required for Australia's future.

Workforce planning priorities

<p>Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) access and inclusion</p> <p>Strengthening workforce participation by improving access to training and pathways in RRR Australia, supporting priority cohorts, reducing barriers and building cultural capability.</p>	<p>Productivity (social and economic)</p> <p>Supporting productivity by improving recognition of the return on investment in VET to inform industry and policy decision-making, which will also enable safe, resilient workforces aligned with Commonwealth priorities.</p>
<p>Quality skills system</p> <p>Improving skills system quality by driving sector reform, ensuring training meets industry needs, and addressing inter-jurisdictional barriers to delivery and uptake.</p>	<p>Evidence-based decision making</p> <p>Enabling better workforce decisions by building robust industry evidence, understanding future skills needs, and strengthening industry capability to use data effectively.</p>

* Please see discussion around [Data and evidence credibility issues](#) below

Workforce planning priorities and government policy alignment

Skills Insight's workforce planning priorities are interconnected with Australian Government policy settings that focus on productivity, equity and long-term capability.

Core policy anchors

Working Future: The White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities

Sets the overarching ambition for a more productive, inclusive and secure labour market, with a focus on:



Delivering sustained and inclusive full employment

Ensuring everyone who wants to work can find a job without a prolonged job search



Promoting job security and strong, sustainable wage growth

Supporting secure work and real wage growth that lifts living standards over time



Reigniting productivity growth

Lifting productivity through skills, technology and better-functioning labour markets



Filling skills needs and build our future workforce

Aligning education, training and migration systems with current and emerging skills demand



Overcoming barriers to employment and broadening opportunities

Removing structural barriers so more people can participate fully in the labour market, especially cohorts facing persistent disadvantage and exclusion

National Skills Agreement

Establishes shared Commonwealth, state and territory priorities to:

- rebuild and strengthen the VET system
- support lifelong skills development
- deliver high quality, industry relevant training
- place TAFE at the centre of public provision.

The industries supported by Skills Insight contribute to National Skills Agreement priorities in two complementary ways, both through *enabling* contributions - as economic anchors in regional, rural and remote (RRR) Australia that underpin supply chains for housing, construction, essential care and community services - but also *directly*:

- **Developing Australia's sovereign capability and food security:** supporting the *National Biosecurity Strategy* and the *National Food Security Strategy* through primary production, processing and manufacturing
- **Supporting the Net Zero transformation:** workforce development through programs such as the Indigenous Rangers Program for skills in land use, water, ecosystem management, environmental services, and primary production emissions reductions
- **Ensuring Australia's digital and technology capability:** growing capabilities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) use and broader digital transformation within production, processing and supply chains

- **Delivering reforms to improve the regulation of VET qualifications and quality:** through training product design, training delivery implementation, promotion and monitoring, and future-ready workforce pathways
- **Gender equity:** embedding analysis of gender-segregated workforces and participation barriers into workforce planning and training design
- **Closing the Gap:** through participation, co-design, pathways and regional employment

Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) focus

Regional policy initiatives are driven by goals of economic resilience, productivity, equal access to education and jobs, and sustainable, inclusive workforce solutions, including:

- Regional Investment Framework
- Regional Recovery partnerships
- Regional Development Australia
- Northern Australia Action Plan.

Industries overview

In 2025, Skills Insight-supported industries contributed

\$79.5 billion

to the national economy

Employing

791,000

(as at November 2025)

The workforce has grown by 5.5% since 2015 and is projected to grow by

6.2% by 2035

compared with 13% nationally

59% of workers live outside capital cities

Geographic concentration varies among sectors



>90%

of sugarcane farming occurs in QLD



Victoria has the highest share of cut and sewn textile manufacturing (26%) but activity remains widely distributed

There were

240,303

businesses operating at the end of June 2025

60%

of which were **businesses without employees**

vs. 64% nationwide



First Nations people account for 2.2% of the workforce, with the highest representation in Forest Management and Harvesting (6.8%)

Total national employment: 2.2%

37%

Women

below the national workforce participation rate of 48%

28%

of workers are owner-managers *vs. 21% nationwide*

Median age

39

Up one year over the past five years

vs. 38 nationwide

31%

of the workforce is nearing retirement (55+ years)

35%



28%

work in roles formally classified as 'high-skill' (ANZSCO/OSCA Skill Level 1)

work in roles formally classified as 'lower-skill' (ANZSCO/OSCA Skill Level 5)

Yet only around one in five workers hold a bachelor's degree or higher

Yet over half hold qualifications above certificate II-level

High-skill work ≠ high-qualification attainment

Workers at Skill Level 5 encompass a broad range of capabilities and career progression potential

Competency and experience often substitute for formal tertiary qualifications in a substantial share of high-skill roles. A similar pattern is evident in lower-skill roles, where diverse qualification attainment points to scope for progression and upward mobility.



Formal qualification attainment alone does not fully capture workforce capability.

Stakeholders highlight the need to review OSCA occupation skill levels to ensure alignment with real-world industry requirements.

Data and evidence credibility issues

Skills Insight acknowledges feedback from industry regarding data limitations. We understand that robust, accurate data is essential for effective workforce planning and training package development. Our team is working to strengthen the evidence base through practical solutions, including by supporting industry-led approaches to data collection and analysis to address data gaps. As we build better data capabilities, we invite stakeholders to continue sharing their experiences and insights with us. Your ongoing engagement and willingness to share local data sources are vital to ensuring our planning accurately reflects the realities of your industry.

Data gaps

National administrative datasets (primarily from the ABS and JSA) describe workforce size, trends, and characteristics, but have significant limitations, especially in agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal, and environment care industries.

Key issues include:

- statistical volatility from small samples, particularly in RRR areas
- under-estimation of seasonal and temporary workers and distortion of employment patterns

- misalignments in times-series data due to:
 - misclassified industry assignments
 - changes to geographical and industry classifications
- poor coverage of business owners and unpaid family workers
- under-estimation of job vacancies
- trade-offs between timeliness, granularity and accuracy.

When headline data obscures real workforce pressures

The above data limitations are particularly evident in RRR areas with complex labour markets. Stakeholders in aquaculture and wild catch industries, for example, have consistently reported that official workforce data understates real employment levels and labour demand. Industry feedback indicates that Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates significantly under-count employment in sectors characterised by self-employment, owner-operators and informal labour arrangements, such as in the South Australian tuna industry, where stakeholders advised actual workforce numbers were more than double those reported in the LFS.

Such data issues are starting to gain greater recognition nationally, notably with demand indicators. Jobs and Skills Australia¹ highlight that:

‘In December 2025, there were around 13,000 vacancies advertised online in Northern Australia (a decrease by around 7% over the year previous). Using data from JSA’s new series Total New Vacancies, which combines data from both JSA’s Internet Vacancy Index and employer surveys to offer insights into hiring activity beyond online job ads, there were 89,300 estimated vacancies in Northern Australia.’

This substantial gap highlights how reliance on online vacancy data as a proxy for ‘total demand’ can significantly understate labour demand, particularly in regions where employers rely far more on informal and community-based networks to advertise and fill roles. These new findings both validate and reinforce industry concerns that headline indicators do not reflect actual workforce pressures. JSA’s acknowledgement of this challenge strengthens the case for broader data improvements to support more accurate and informed workforce planning.

Poor-quality data can lead to workforce and skills demand being under-estimated or misclassified, particularly for regional, niche or emerging roles, resulting in their exclusion from funding, incentives or priority programs. Such exclusions can cause employers to delay workforce investment, scale back training, or abandon recruitment altogether, negatively affecting productivity, business viability and training markets. For industry

bodies, unreliable data increases the cost of engagement, requiring repeated advocacy and evidence-gathering simply to correct the record, rather than progressing solutions.

What we're doing

Timely, reliable and sector-relevant industry data, used alongside Commonwealth and state and territory datasets, is essential for skills analysis, workforce planning and industry response. Stronger data sharing and integration will support a more accurate understanding of current and emerging workforce needs, enabling more responsive and evidence-based decisions across industry and government.

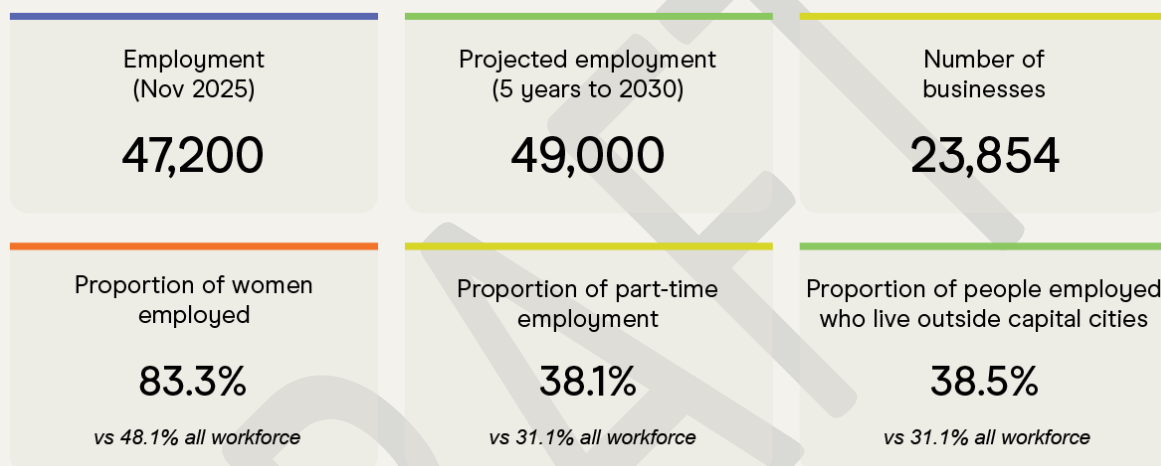
Skills Insight is developing a strategy to support our collaboration with industry on data improvements and support better workforce planning. Objectives of the strategy are to:

- **Strengthen confidence in workforce data** by improving transparency, consistency and fitness-for-purpose, enabling industry stakeholders to use data with greater confidence in workforce planning and decision-making.
- **Build industry data capability through strategic partnerships**, supporting an uplift in the collection, sharing and analysis of industry-relevant workforce data across regions, sectors and priority cohorts.
- **Influence government decision-making** by advocating for the integration and effective use of industry-led data collections alongside administrative and labour market data, ensuring policy settings better reflect real-world workforce conditions.

Animal care and management

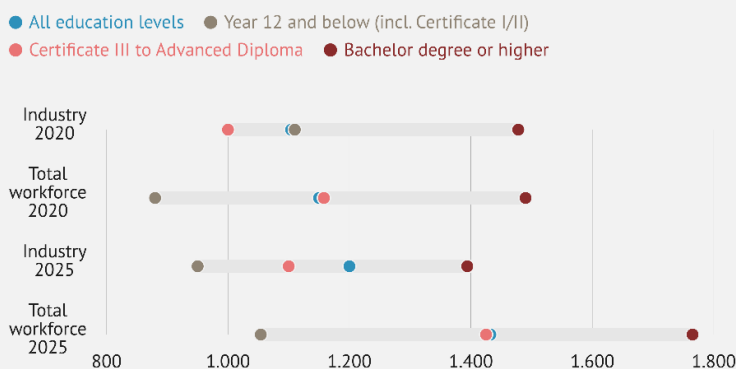
The animal care and management industry spans a diverse range of sub-sectors, from pet and companion animal services, wildlife management, exhibited animals and veterinary and allied animal health services. The workforce underpins critical national priorities, including animal health and welfare, biosecurity surveillance, and emergency response. The sector operates across diverse settings, from sole-trader pet businesses to large veterinary practices and wildlife organisations, and must navigate increasingly complex licensing, regulatory and quality assurance requirements.

Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



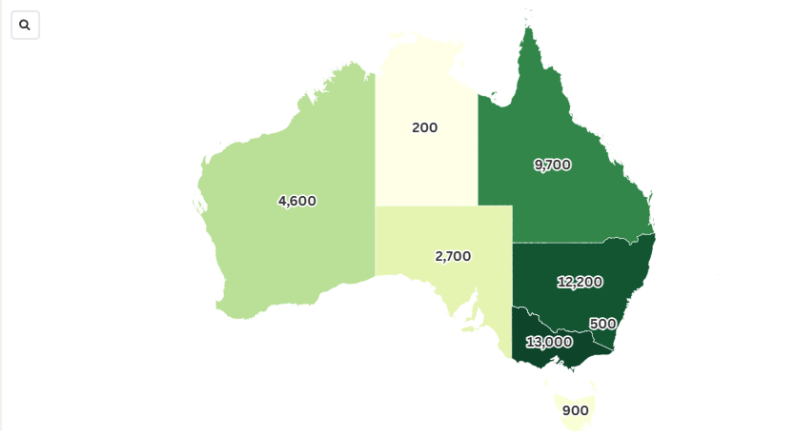
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Animal care and management

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

200  13,000



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Strengthening veterinary workforce capacity

The veterinary services sector is facing significant workforce pressures, with veterinarians and veterinary nurses in national shortage since 2021. Vacancy fill times for veterinarians averaged 25 weeks in 2023, particularly affecting service delivery in regional and rural areas. This shortage is exacerbated by the industry's high proportion of part-time employment (38.1%) and the fact that only 38.5% of workers live outside capital cities, constraining regional access to care.

Strengthening workforce capacity will require a more integrated approach, including improved training pipelines, targeted regional attraction and retention measures, and better utilisation of the existing workforce. The Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA) highlights the opportunity to alleviate pressure on veterinarians by enabling veterinary nurses and veterinary technologists to work to the full scope of their training and capability, supporting more efficient service models, improved access to care, and greater system resilience across companion animal, livestock, wildlife and biosecurity settings.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)
- [Biological resource management](#)

Supporting workforce mobility through clearer, future-ready licensing and regulatory training

Animal care sectors operate under a diverse mix of licensing, legislative, regulatory and certification requirements. With multiple jurisdictions progressing animal welfare reforms simultaneously (including SA Animal Welfare Act 2025; NSW independent oversight office; WA Horse Standards and Guidelines 2025), regulatory complexity is increasing for employers, workers and training providers. RTOs must account for these requirements when developing and delivering training, creating compliance challenges and limiting workforce portability. To address this, [Skills Insight is undertaking a pilot initiative](#) to map licensing and related regulatory requirements across selected *ACM Training Package* qualifications and units. By systematically sourcing and documenting this information, the project aims to improve clarity and consistency for RTOs and learners, reduce compliance burden, and support the development of transferable compliance, safety and quality-assurance capabilities across animal care occupations.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Data gaps limiting visibility of workforce demand

Across several industry sectors, workforce demand and lived industry experience are not consistently reflected in national occupation classifications and data sources, limiting visibility of shortages and constraining workforce development responses. In the pet grooming sector, stakeholders report persistent attraction and retention challenges, despite pet groomers not being classified by Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) as an occupation in national shortage. The [PIAA Pet Grooming Survey 2025](#) found that 79% of respondents experience extreme difficulty recruiting skilled groomers, with 46% taking more than 12 months to fill vacancies and 20% ceasing recruitment altogether. In addition, 92% identified a need for improved access to workforce data. Stakeholders are concerned that current shortage assessments do not reflect real-world demand, weakening the evidence base for training and workforce planning.

Similar visibility issues exist in the equine and related sectors, which represent a significant national workforce. While farriers are recognised as being in national shortage, occupations such as equine dental technicians and equine massage therapists are not recognised within the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), limiting workforce visibility and access to development opportunities. Compounding such issues, Veterinary Services is the only animal care industry recognised in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC). Improved classifications and data on workforce demand, shortages and retention would support more accurate assessments of whether training supply is aligned with industry need.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

- [Biological resource management](#)
- See also: [Data and evidence credibility issues](#)

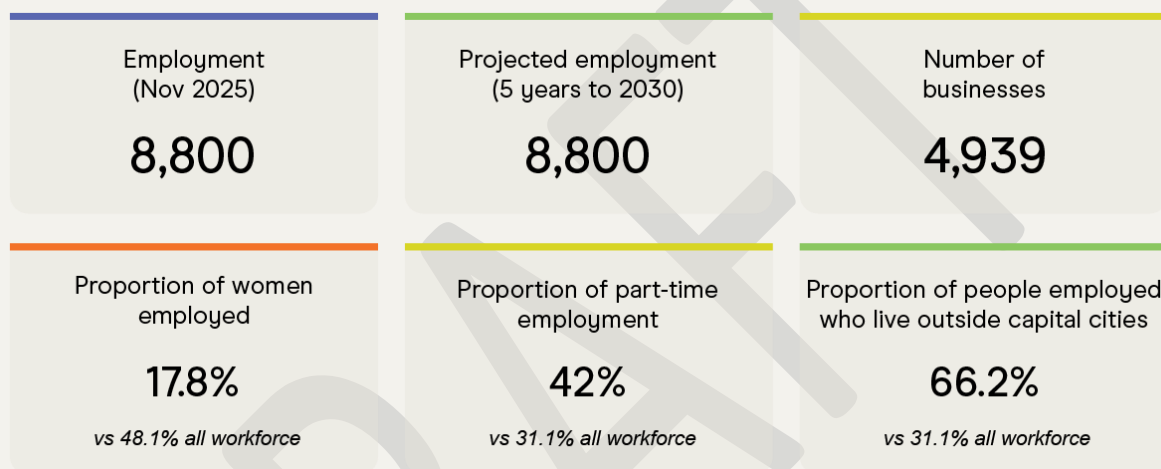
Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction and retention tools for employers • From Training Package to Training Delivery
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterinary Nursing Review • Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations Project • VET Workforce Project • Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review • Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation Shortage List • OSCA Maintenance Strategy • A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Aquaculture and wild catch

The aquaculture and wild catch industry is a foundational supply chain sector that underpins Australia’s sovereign capability and food security. The industry encompasses two distinct operating environments. Aquaculture, including fast-growing operations in remote and northern Australia, involves the managed cultivation of aquatic species, while wild catch focuses on the commercial harvesting of marine resources. The industry’s operations are heavily concentrated in regional, rural and remote areas, making it a critical economic anchor for coastal and island communities.

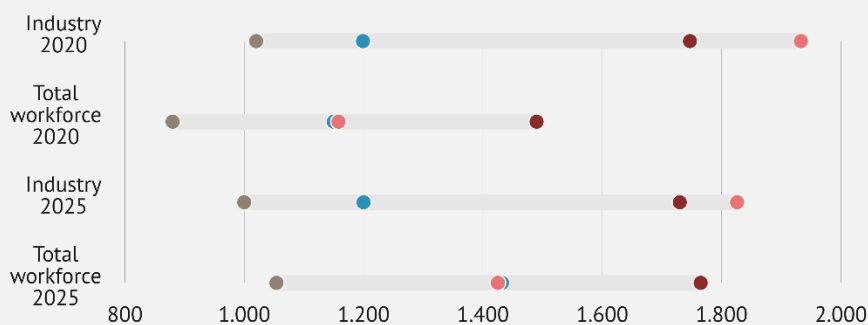
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.

- All education levels
- Year 12 and below (incl. Certificate I/II)
- Certificate III to Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor degree or higher



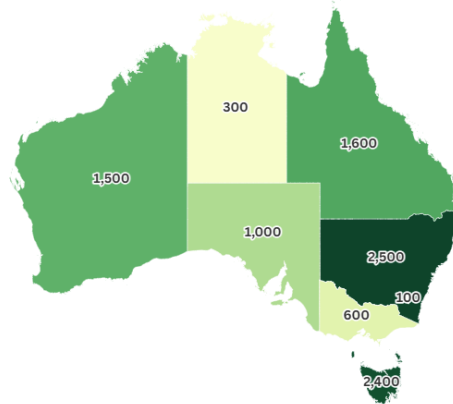
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Aquaculture and wild catch

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

100  2500



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Data improvements required for effective workforce development

Aquaculture and wild catch employment spans owner-operators, seasonal crew, and remote community workers whose labour is inconsistently captured across the Labour Force Survey, Census, and payroll data. This creates a persistent *invisible demand* problem, where genuine skills needs are not reflected in workforce evidence or training activity. Decision-makers may interpret limited enrolments or provision as low training demand, when in practice demand is suppressed by low supply viability, reinforcing funding, incentives and delivery decisions that further reduce training access and leave skills gaps unaddressed.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- See also: [Data and evidence credibility issues](#)

Shortage occupations and declining training enrolments

The industry is experiencing acute skills shortages, with Jobs and Skills Australia classifying Master Fisher and Deck Hand as occupations in national shortage in 2025. These shortages are occurring alongside declining VET activity, with enrolments in the *SFI Training Package* dropping by 14% between 2020 and 2024, and completions falling by 32% over the same period. The combination of high part-time employment (42%), low female participation (18%), and declining training pipelines poses significant risks to the sector's capacity to maintain safe, productive operations.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#) (including discussion of shortages facing occupations at lower OSCA Skill Levels, such as *Aquaculture Worker*)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Supporting skills development in First Nations aquaculture enterprises

Aquaculture operations in remote and northern Australia, including significant First Nations community enterprises, are among the fastest growing parts of the industry, yet there is a lack of training materials supporting culturally-appropriate VET delivery. By working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Aboriginal Sea Company, in partnership with Skills Insight, is developing [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#) that are culturally grounded and tailored to the needs of First Nations learners. These resources will enable RTOs to deliver existing units of competency with improved cultural integrity and regional relevance.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)
- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)

Supporting industry to implement the National Biosecurity Strategy

Aquaculture and wild catch industries operate as frontline biosecurity environments exposed to exotic aquatic disease pathways. The seafood industry is committed to implementing priorities in the *National Biosecurity Strategy*, including developing and sustaining a highly skilled workforce to ensure the right capability and capacity, in the right place, at the right time, and is collaborating with Skills Insight on [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#).

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Biosecurity](#)
- [Biological resource management](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Industry priority actions



Complete

- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)
- [From Training Package to Training Delivery](#)
- [Exploring Training Demand & Supply Challenges](#)



Current

- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)



Consultation

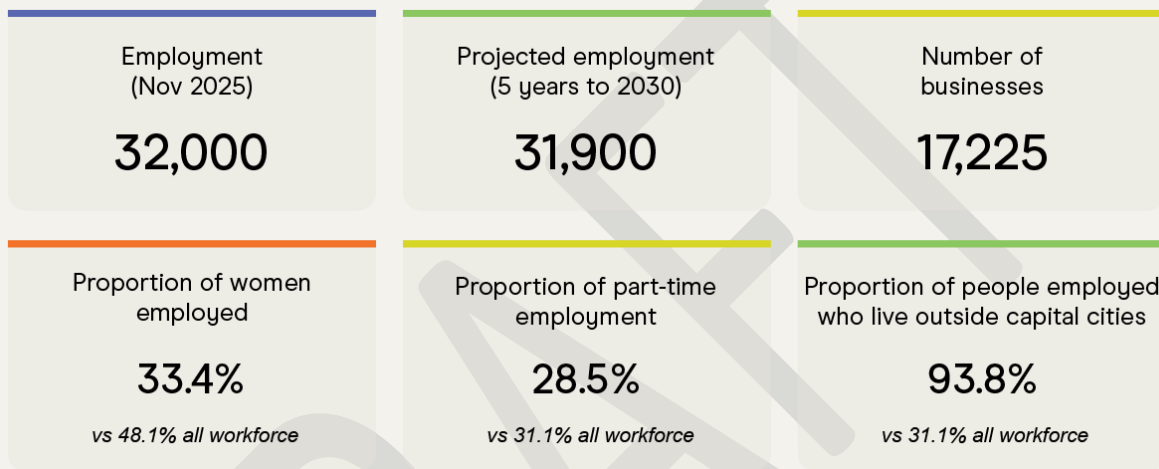
- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

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Broadacre cropping

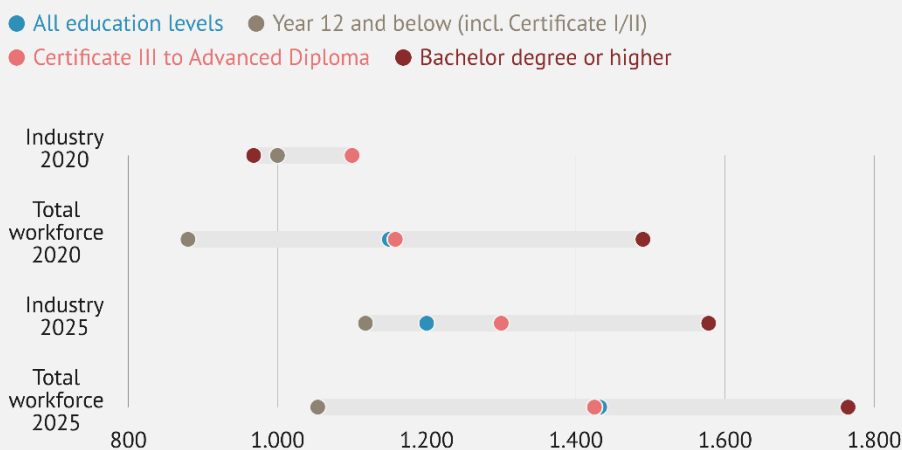
Broadacre cropping is a cornerstone of Australia’s food and fibre supply chains, encompassing grain, oilseed, pasture, cotton and sugar cane production. The sector is critical to both domestic food security and the national export economy. Its operations are heavily concentrated in regional, rural and remote Australia, with distinct seasonal production cycles and an increasing reliance on large-scale machinery, precision technology, and varied workforce arrangements.

Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



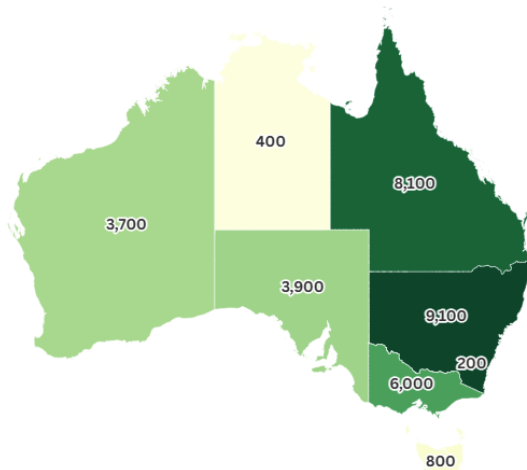
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Broadacre cropping

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

200  9100



Industry workforce and skilling insights

An Ag Trade Apprenticeship offers pathways potential

Broadacre cropping is one of Australia's most economically significant agricultural sectors, yet it has no formal trade-level apprenticeship. The creation of an [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#) is seen by stakeholders as an opportunity to offer a clear, credible career pathway to prospective entrants, with the potential for supporting workforce renewal in the context of an ageing workforce. This is particularly critical given the sector is experiencing ongoing national shortages in highly skilled roles, with both Agricultural Consultants and Agricultural Research Scientists classed as being in shortage in 2025. Skills Insight is exploring the creation of an agriculturalist occupation as an Ag Trade Apprenticeship outcome, noting that such an occupation does not yet exist in the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA).

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)

Accessible skilling options required

With 93.8% of workers living outside capital cities, broadacre cropping has one of the most regionally concentrated workforces in Australia. However, the inland and remote regions where industry operates are not well-served by RTOs, and employers face constraints in absorbing the time and cost of off-farm training. As a result, formal VET qualifications are effectively inaccessible for many broadacre workers. Thin training markets and geographic isolation make delivery unviable without targeted intervention.

Limited access to skilling pathways also complicates workforce planning, as gaps in current data mean it is unclear the extent to which JSA's flat employment projections to 2030 reflect labour constraints or increased reliance on technology.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Safety, wellbeing and climate risks in complex workforces

Safety and wellbeing challenges in broadacre sectors reflect the broader structural complexities of regional agricultural workforces. The cotton sector, for example, relies on large-scale machinery, seasonal production cycles and a workforce that includes temporary workers, working holiday makers, PALM scheme participants and family operators. Resourcing constraints, climate-related stressors, extended working hours during planting and harvest, and considerable distances to health services and emergency response infrastructure all contribute to elevated physical and psychosocial risks. These characteristics underscore the need for safety approaches, such as the [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#), that are tailored to industry contexts.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Safety and wellbeing](#)

Digital skills becoming core competencies

Grain and cotton operations are integrating autonomous machinery, remote sensing, and digital farm management platforms at an accelerating rate, driven by labour scarcity and the economic case for precision inputs. [The Career pathways in Australia's agricultural production industry project](#) identified that digital literacy, precision agriculture, compliance, automation, and traceability are no longer optional but becoming core competencies for career progression.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Technology and innovation](#)

Biosecurity readiness in supply chains

As a foundational supply chain industry, broadacre cropping faces significant biosecurity exposure, particularly concerning pest and disease incursions that could disrupt domestic supply and international market access. Ensuring the workforce is equipped with the skills to monitor, report and respond to these risks is a priority, and the sector is currently engaged with the [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#) to strengthen this capability.

Industry priority actions



Complete

- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)
- [From Training Package to Training Delivery](#)
- [AHC Improvements Project](#)



Current

- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)



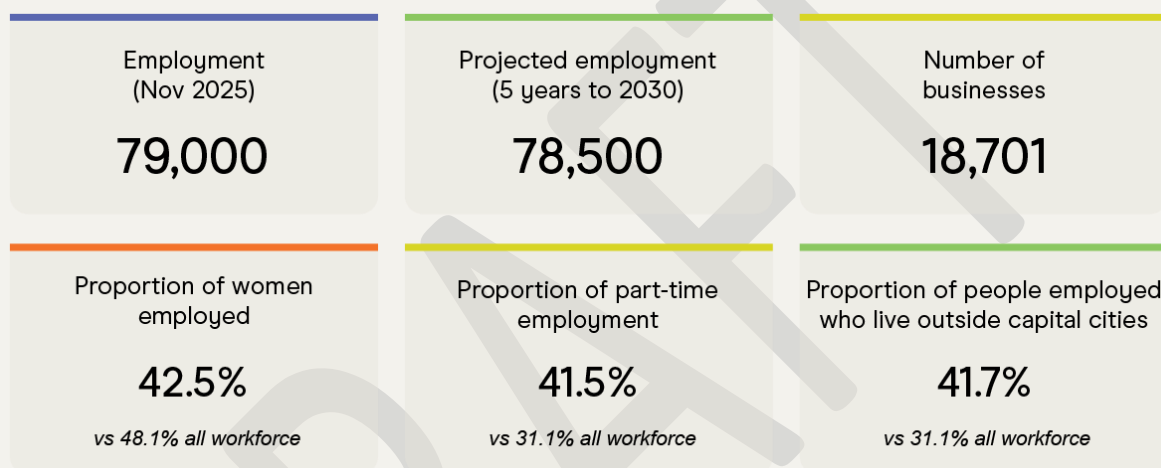
Consultation

- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

Ecosystem management, conservation, landscaping and gardening

This large and occupationally diverse sector encompasses arboriculture, conservation, landscaping, gardening, parks management, pest management, and sports turf management. The sector’s workforce underpins national environmental stewardship and biosecurity priorities, while also supporting regional economies and the broader net zero transition through the Indigenous Rangers Program and the emerging nature economy.

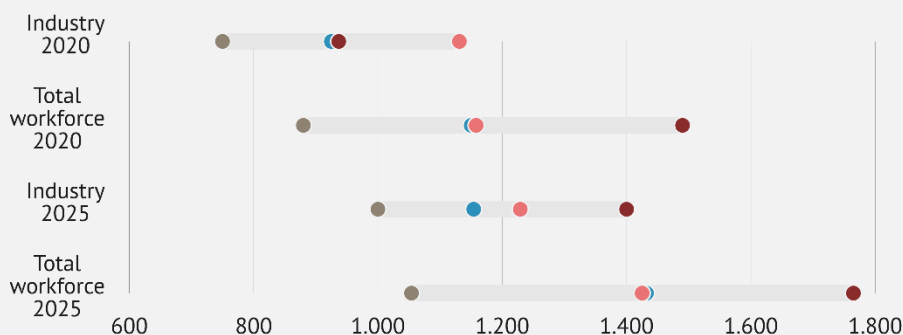
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

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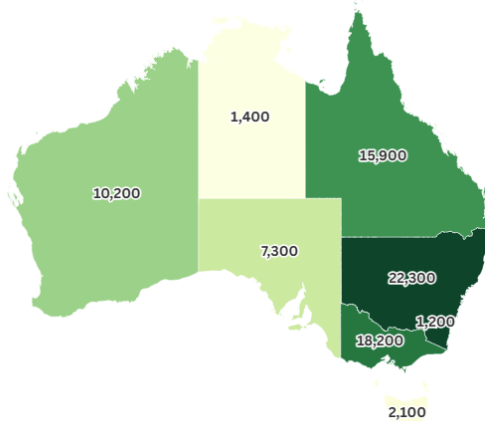
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Ecosystem management, conservation, landscaping and gardening

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

1200  22,300



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Growing and diversifying the First Nations workforce through Ranger programs

Round two of the [Indigenous Rangers Program](#) will invest over \$190 million by 2028, to create over 900 new employment opportunities for Indigenous Rangers across Australia. Crucially, half of these positions will be allocated to First Nations women, supporting greater gender equality within the sector.² Following feedback to the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), this round of the program will focus on better integration with other Ranger programs at the Commonwealth, state and territory level.³ Skills Insight supports strengthening of the Rangers sector and is consulting with First Nations stakeholders to scope initiatives that will help build a skilled and diverse workforce capable of supporting environmental repair, community resilience, and disaster response.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)

Supporting industry to implement national strategies

[Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030](#) is an Australian Government roadmap for harmonising federal, state and territory regulation, funding and work towards conservation and ecosystem management objectives. These include targets to 'protect and conserve at least 30% of Australia's terrestrial and inland water areas, and marine and coastal areas by 2030, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services'. Meeting this target requires enabling policies and efforts to deliver current and future workforce needs. It is also supported by

implementation of the *National Biosecurity Strategy*, with [Skills Insight partnering with Public Skills Australia, with contributions from ForestWorks and MINTRAC](#), to undertake a cross-industry analysis of skills requirements.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Sustainability](#)
- [Biosecurity](#)

New occupations emerging with nature economy growth

Australia's Nature Repair Market and 2024 Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme reforms have led to new and augmented occupations emerging, including biodiversity assessors, credit verifiers and monitoring specialists requiring ecological and regulatory competencies. These emerging roles in conservation and carbon farming are not yet described in the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), while further industry consultation is required to understand if current AHC qualifications sufficiently cover skills needs. Understanding these new roles will also be critical to interpreting the sector's flat employment projections by Jobs and Skills Australia (79,000 to 78,500 by 2030), as it is unclear if these figures account for anticipated growth in the nature economy.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Sustainability](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Unlocking regional training opportunities in the green sector

The sector relies heavily on part-time and seasonal labour (41.5% part-time employment), making accessible training pathways critical. Skills Insight's [Exploring Training Demands And Supply Challenges](#) research shows that low enrolments in some arboriculture, landscaping and pest management qualifications are not a reliable indicator of low industry demand for skills. Instead, they often reflect supply-side constraints, including limited RTO capacity, trainer availability and delivery viability, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas. Stakeholder report that such issues directly contribute to skills shortages, with Jobs and Skills Australia classifying Arborist and Landscape Gardener as national shortage occupations with long training gaps. With work mostly undertaken in outdoor settings, arboriculture, landscaping and pest management are well suited to practical, community-anchored training models, including flexible delivery and workplace-based approaches. More targeted and sustained investment in training delivery presents a significant opportunity to strengthen regional workforce capability and better align skills supply with local demand.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Industry priority actions



Complete

- [Exploring Training Demand & Supply Challenges](#)
- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)
- [From Training Package to Training Delivery](#)
- [AHC Improvements Project](#)



Current

- [Landscaping Skills Review](#)
- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)



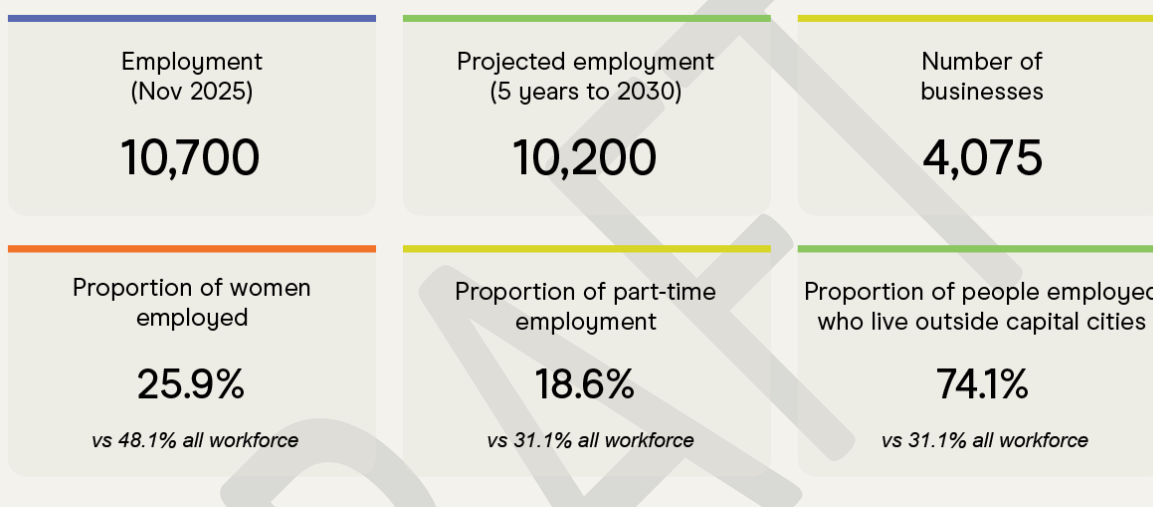
Consultation

- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

Forest management and harvesting

The forest management and harvesting workforce is responsible for the management and operations of Australia's forests. This encompasses operations designated for timber and fibre production across both public and private land, as well as roles critical to conservation, biosecurity, and land management. The sector is foundational to Australia's housing supply chain, and its workforce is navigating complex transitions, including the restructuring of native forestry operations in several jurisdictions.

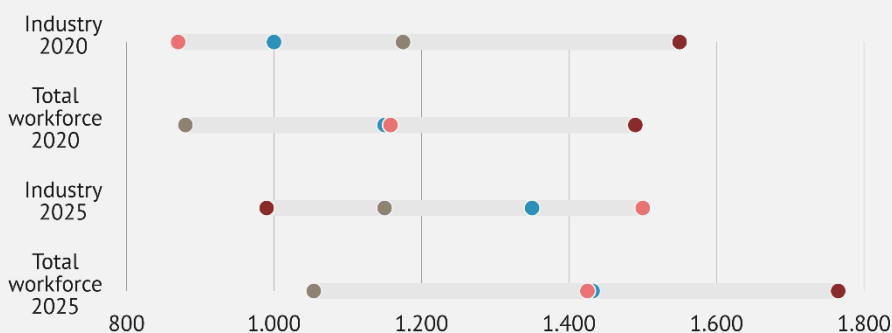
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.

- All education levels
- Year 12 and below (incl. Certificate I/II)
- Certificate III to Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor degree or higher



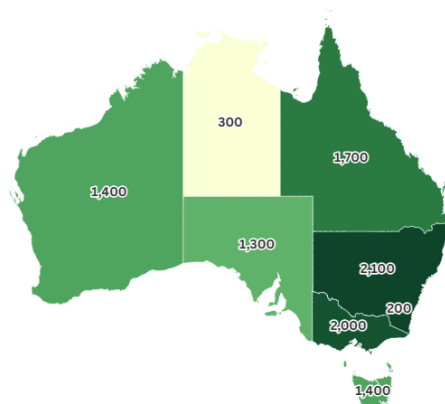
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Forest management and harvesting

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

200 2100



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Forest Operations excluded from the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List

All Forest Operations qualifications (Certificate III, IV and Diploma) were removed from the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List in its January 2026 update. This decision occurred despite occupations like forester, tree worker and arborist remaining in national shortage, a concerning 13% decline in *FWP Training Package* enrolments, and a 51% drop in completions over the past four years. By removing training incentives (a key structural lever for attracting new entrants) long-term workforce development to support the *National Forest Industries Plan* and the supply chain for housing construction may be undermined. Industry, supported by ForestWorks, is identifying appropriate measures to strengthen workforce development and mitigate these risks.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)

Tree felling requiring a national professional development program

Manual tree felling is among the highest-risk activities in the industry; however, RTOs have faced difficulties sourcing trees for learners to practice felling and develop skills to be safe, productive workers. To address this, the [Tree Allocation Partnerships](#) project was undertaken to facilitate partnerships between RTOs, landowners and employers to allocate trees for training and assessment purposes. Industry were also consulted on the [Pathway to Tree Felling Skills Project](#), leading to recommendations for a national professional development program for trainers, assessors, compliance staff and careers

advisers to support consistent application of tree felling operations, with supplementary training product review and support materials to support implementation.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Safety and wellbeing](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Supporting workforce transition through skills recognition and culturally appropriate delivery

The industry is undergoing significant structural change, with Jobs and Skills Australia projecting employment reductions of 4.7% by 2030. In jurisdictions where native forestry is being discontinued or restructured, there is growing demand for recognition of prior learning (RPL) provision from workers who do not hold formally recognised qualifications to recognise and redeploy their portable capabilities across related roles and industries.

At the same time, the industry has a high proportion of First Nations workers (6.8%), many of whom live in regional areas, where 74.1% of the total workforce is based. Ensuring training and skills recognition models are culturally appropriate, accessible and locally delivered is critical for supporting these workers and building workforce resilience during periods of transition.

Plantation expansion is building future workforce demand

Federal investment through the [Forestry Growth Fund](#) (\$300 million) and the [Support Plantation Establishment Program](#) is accelerating Australia's plantation estate, increasing demand for silviculture, nursery, planting and plantation management workers in regional areas where training markets are viable and RTO presence is limited. However, training delivery capacity has not scaled at the same pace, constraining the system's ability to translate this investment into a reliable skilled workforce pipeline.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Industry priority actions



Complete

- [Pathway to Tree Felling Skills](#)
- [Tree Felling](#)
- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)



Current

- [Tree Allocation Partnerships](#)
- [Rural Operations](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)



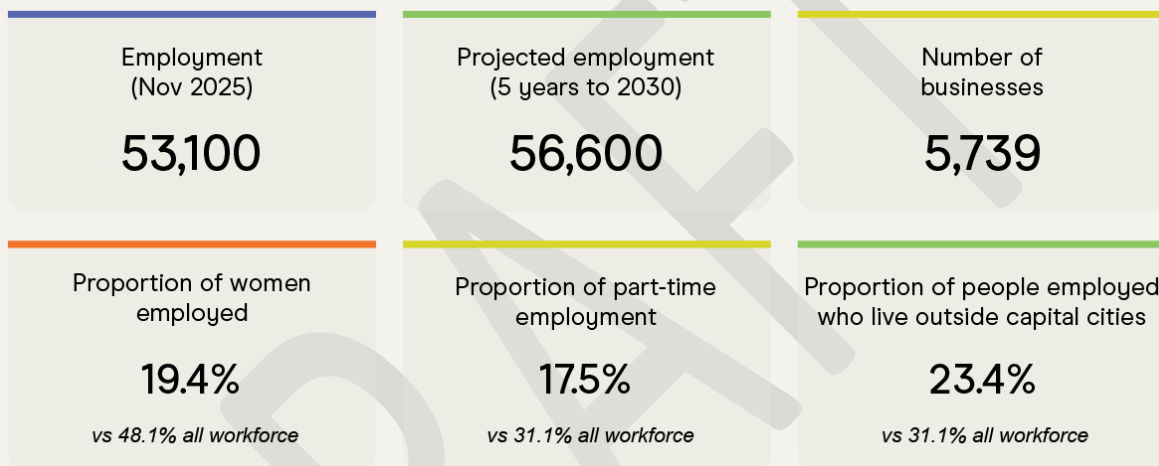
Consultation

- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

Furnishing and other manufacturing

The furnishing and other manufacturing industry covers a broad range of sectors relating to furniture and fittings for residential and commercial buildings. This includes furniture manufacturing and finishing, interior design and decorating, design, flooring, manufacturing and installation of cabinets, fittings and décor, glass and window manufacturing, upholstery, security screens, grilles, awnings and blinds. It also includes niche sectors, such as coopering, mattress manufacturing and piano tuning. The sector is a foundational part of the housing construction supply chain and plays a critical role in advancing Australia's sovereign manufacturing capability.

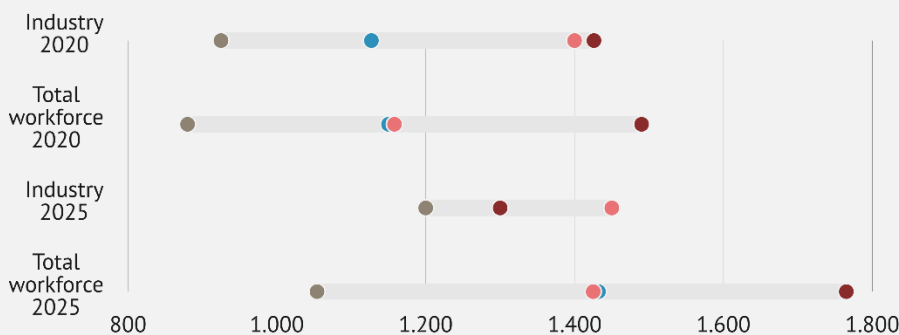
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.

- All education levels
- Year 12 and below (incl. Certificate I/II)
- Certificate III to Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor degree or higher



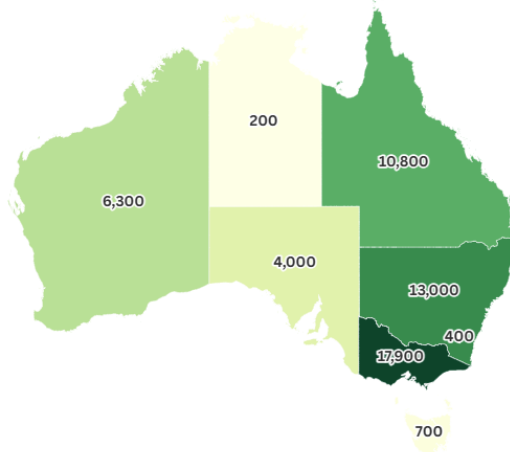
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Furnishing and other manufacturing

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

200 17,900



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Interior designer licensing elevating training delivery demand

The *Diploma of Interior Design* recorded 6,100 enrolments in 2024, yet the *Advanced Diploma of Interior Design*, now required for registered practice in Victoria and recommended for licensing in NSW, recorded only 140. This gap reflects cost barriers, RTO withdrawals and limited practitioner awareness. As licensing requirements become widespread, many of the 18,800 practitioners nationally face a structural qualification access barrier. Skills Insight are proposing to undertake an *Interior Design: Develop Integrated Career Pathways* project to retain construction industry knowledge in the furnishing industry, increase access to the *Advanced Diploma of Interior Design* and support regional training.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Supporting apprenticeships and traineeships for a sustainable workforce

Jobs and Skills Australia project 6.6% employment growth by 2030, yet the industry is facing severe skills pipelines constraints. Core occupations including Cabinet Maker, Glazier, Upholsterer and Wood Machinist are in national shortage, driven by long training gaps and retention issues. While overall enrolments in the *MSF Training Package* have grown by 20% since 2020, apprenticeship and traineeship commencements dropped from 3,445 in 2021 to 2,435 in 2024, a 29% decrease. The sector is dominated by small and medium manufacturers, and with only 19.4% female participation and heavy

metropolitan concentration (76.6%), there is an urgent need to broaden labour market supply. To promote a skilled and sustainable workforce, supporting apprentice completion rates is a priority for industry, who are consulting with Skills Insight on the [Furnishing Apprenticeship Guidance Project](#).

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)





Building workforce capability for sustainable and digitally enabled furnishing manufacturing

Australia's furnishing manufacturing sector is well positioned to lead in sustainable, circular and digitally traceable production, with domestic manufacturers increasingly supplying government and commercial clients that require environmentally compliant, locally made products. The expansion of digital product data and traceability systems, alongside environmentally sustainable procurement requirements, are creating clearly defined, trainable skills needs across cabinetry, furniture, upholstery and window manufacturing. Skills Insight's [Window Furnishings and Shade Sails Project](#) is already responding by developing new training products to flexibly cover emerging technology, compliance and sustainability requirements. As onshore production is prioritised through national policy, manufacturers with strong circular economy, digital and regulatory capability are gaining a competitive advantage in domestic supply chains, highlighting the role of targeted training investment in supporting workforce readiness and industry growth.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Sustainability](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)

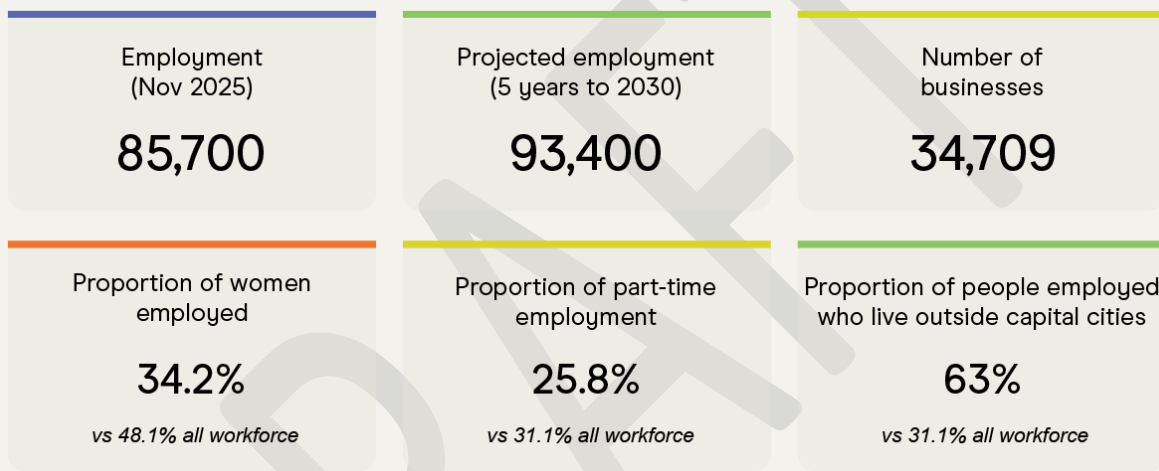
Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Window Furnishings and Shade Sails• Attraction and retention tools for employers• Wood Machining Research
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Furnishing Apprenticeship Guidance Project• VET Workforce Project
 Proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interior Design: Develop Integrated Career Pathways
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occupation Shortage List• OSCA Maintenance Strategy• A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Horticulture

The horticulture industry encompasses the large-scale planting, growing and harvesting of fruit, nuts, vegetables and nursery products across both under-cover (hydroponic/greenhouse) and outdoor systems. As one of Australia's most economically significant primary industries, it is a foundational supply chain sector that underpins national food security. With operations heavily concentrated in regional, rural and remote areas, the sector is navigating complex workforce challenges, including an ageing demographic, reliance on temporary migrant labour, and the adoption of precision agriculture technologies.

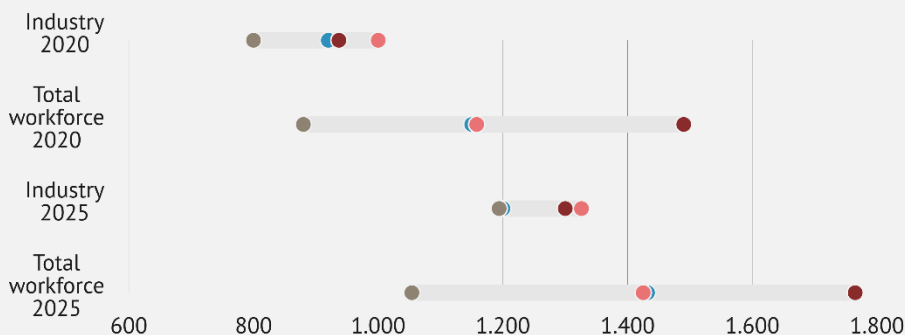
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.

- All education levels
- Year 12 and below (incl. Certificate I/II)
- Certificate III to Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor degree or higher

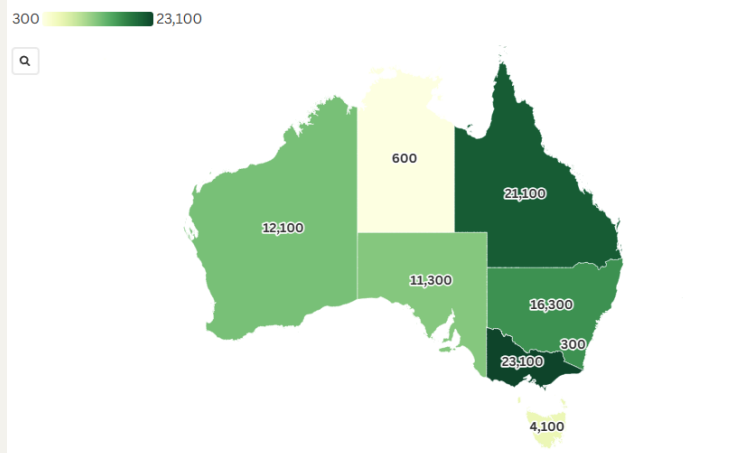


Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Horticulture

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Apprenticeships offers pathway potential

Despite Jobs and Skills Australia projecting 9% employment growth by 2030, horticulture lacks a formal trade-level apprenticeship. This gap exists alongside a 3% four-year decline in enrolments in the *AHC Training Package*, indicating that formal training pathways are currently struggling to attract new entrants. Industry currently have access to production horticulture apprenticeships; however, uptake is low: the *Certificate III in Production Horticulture* recorded 15 commencements in 2024. Greater utilisation of this targeted apprenticeship may help create a clear, credible career pathway to the [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#).

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)

Automation and robotics creating new opportunities

A \$52 million Hort Innovation Frontiers program is accelerating robotics adoption in protected cropping, and the National Robotics Strategy identifies autonomous farming technologies as a way to increase crop yields, reduce pesticide use, and fill labour gaps. While horticulture has been a relatively slow adopter of new technologies, new employment opportunities and skills demand are emerging in agtech and precision agriculture.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Technology and innovation](#)
- [Sustainability](#)

Structural reliance on seasonal migrant labour heightens the importance of local training and labour supply

Horticulture relies heavily on seasonal migrant labour through the PALM scheme, with ABARES data indicating that overseas workers remain the primary response to persistent recruitment difficulties. Because PALM worker availability is tightly governed by visa conditions, minimum-hours settings and employer compliance requirements, adjustments to scheme requirements can translate rapidly into labour shortfalls during peak harvest periods. Jobs and Skills Australia identify this reliance on migrant labour as a systemic vulnerability for the food supply chain.⁴

While domestic training pipelines operate over multi-year timeframes and are not designed to provide short-term surge capacity, strengthening place-based training and employment pathways could increase the pool of locally available workers over time, reducing exposure to scheme volatility and supporting a more resilient and diversified labour supply.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)
- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)

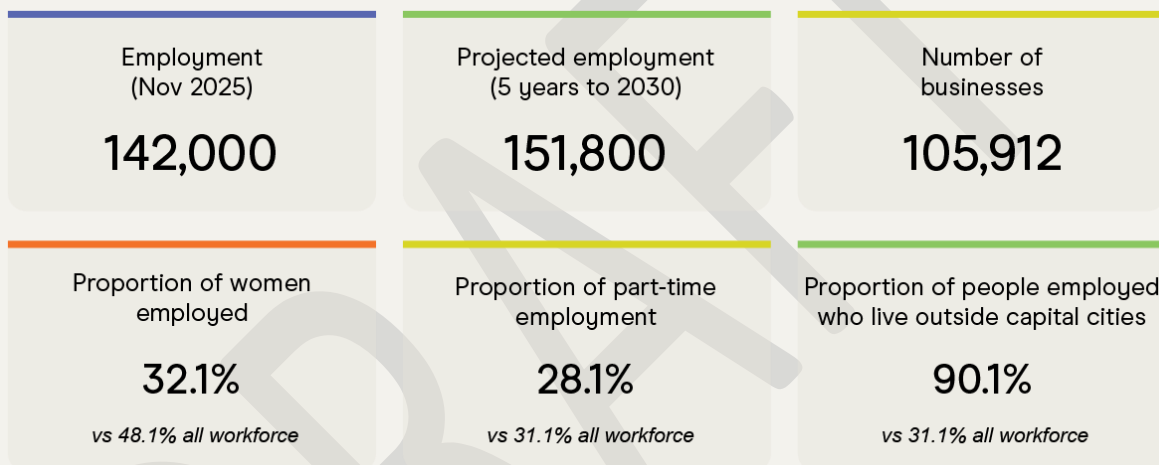
Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attraction and retention tools for employers• Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades• Worker Safety Induction Pilot• From Training Package to Training Delivery• AHC Improvements Project• Exploring Training Demand & Supply Challenges
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rural Operations• Ag Trade Apprenticeship• VET Workforce Project• Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review• Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occupation Shortage List• OSCA Maintenance Strategy• A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Livestock farming

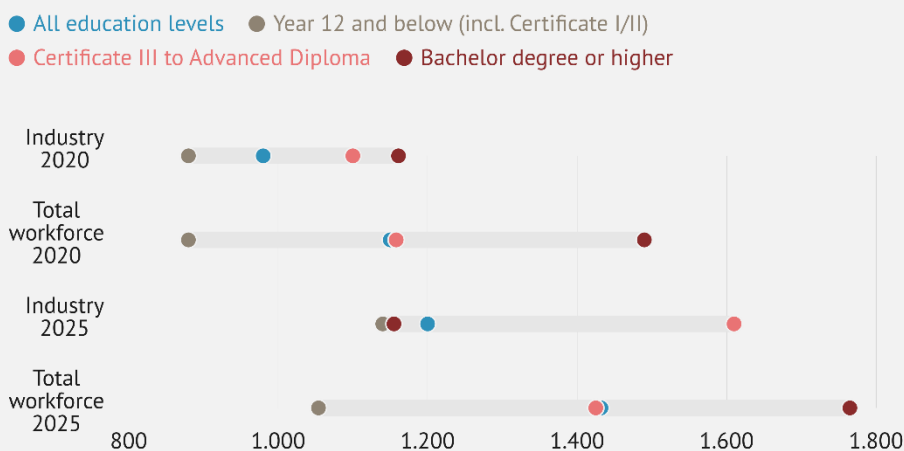
The livestock industry plans, organises, controls, coordinates and performs farming operations to breed and raise livestock. This encompasses the production of breeding stock, meat and other products, covering the value chain associated with milk, eggs, wool and honey. It includes specialised farms, mixed livestock farms, and mixed crop and livestock operations. As the largest sector supported by Skills Insight, livestock farming is a cornerstone of Australia’s food security, export economy and regional communities, with operations inherently tied to the climate and land management practices affecting the environment. An emerging trend, particularly in beef production, is the intensive feeding of animals through feedlot systems.

Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



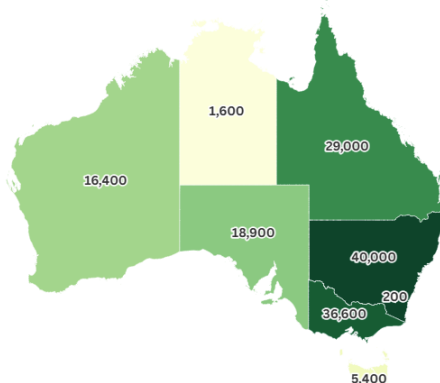
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Livestock farming

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

200 40,000



Industry workforce and skilling insights

An Ag Trade Apprenticeship offers pathways potential

Jobs and Skills Australia projects 7% employment growth by 2030, yet there has been a 3% four-year decline in *AHC Training Package* enrolments, indicating that current formal training pathways are struggling to attract new entrants. The creation of an [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#) encompassing livestock farming is seen by stakeholders as an opportunity to offer a clear, credible career pathway. This is vital for supporting workforce renewal in a sector dominated by older owner-operators, and for addressing ongoing national shortages in highly skilled roles such as Agricultural Consultants and Agricultural Research Scientists. Skills Insight is exploring the creation of an agriculturalist occupation as an Ag Trade Apprenticeship outcome, noting that such an occupation does not yet exist in the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA).

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)

Supporting industry to implement and monitor the National Biosecurity Strategy

The threat of foot-and-mouth disease and highly pathogenic avian influenza requires every livestock worker to be skilled in recognising disease signs and maintaining biosecurity practices. The livestock farming industry is committed to implementing priorities in the *National Biosecurity Strategy*, including developing and sustaining a highly skilled workforce to ensure the right capability and capacity, in the right place, at the right time. To support this, industry is collaborating with Skills Insight on [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#) to ensure training products meet these critical national needs.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Biosecurity](#)
- [Biological resource management](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Technology driving productivity and skills needs

The adoption of advanced technologies in livestock farming is creating new opportunities for productivity gains and workforce development. As digital tools become integral to operations, workers increasingly require skills in technology adoption, data collection, analysis and interpretation to support efficient decision-making. Rather than displacing jobs, sectors such as chicken meat and egg production are embedding digital capabilities within existing roles. In the dairy industry, robotic milking systems reduce time spent on manual tasks and improve labour efficiency, enabling a shift toward higher-skilled work in animal health, data management and system maintenance. As reliance on digital platforms grows, cybersecurity skills are also critical to protect data and ensure operational resilience across geographically dispersed regional operations.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Technology and innovation](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

Industry priority actions



Complete

- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)
- [From Training Package to Training Delivery](#)
- [AHC Improvements Project](#)
- [Livestock Operations](#)
- [Shearing and Wool Classing](#)



Current

- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)



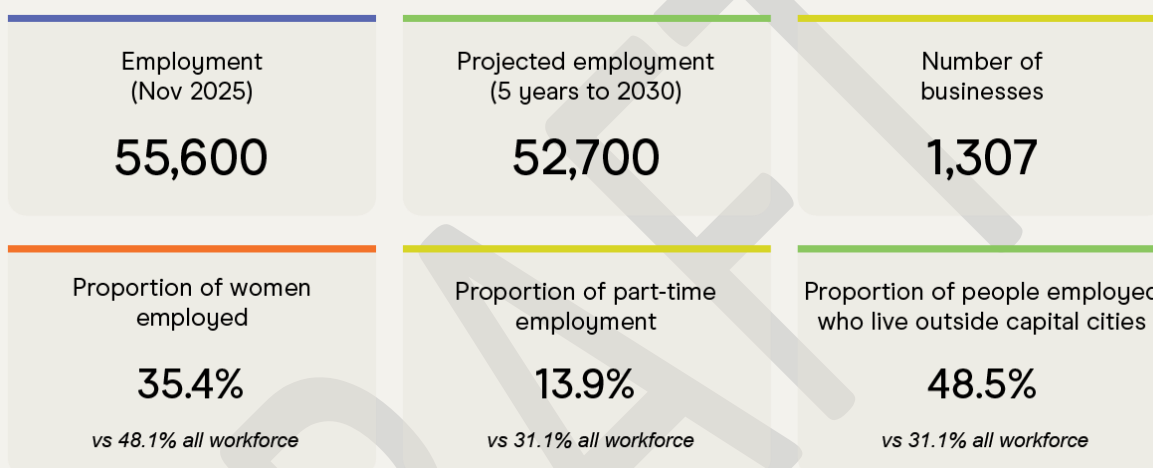
Consultation

- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

Meat, poultry and seafood processing

The Australian meat, poultry and seafood processing and manufacturing industries comprise processors, wholesalers, retailers and exporters. These businesses are a critical link in the nation's food supply chain, underpinning food security, sovereign capability, and domestic and international market access. Operating across both metropolitan and regional areas, the sector is navigating significant workforce transitions driven by technological integration, stringent regulatory and biosecurity compliance, and shifting labour demographics.

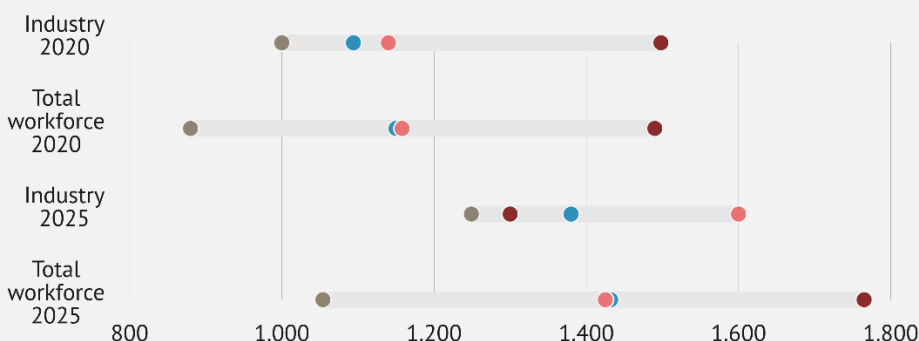
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.

- All education levels
- Year 12 and below (incl. Certificate I/II)
- Certificate III to Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor degree or higher



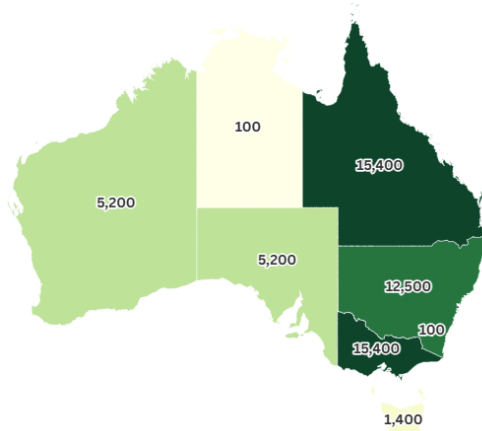
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Meat, poultry and seafood processing

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

100  15,400



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Industry collaboration advancing consistent safety induction for meat processing entrant

Meat and poultry processing plants are recognised as higher-risk food manufacturing environments and employ large numbers of new entrants, casual workers and PALM scheme participants in physically demanding roles. This workforce profile exists alongside a strongly full-time employment structure, with only 13.9% of workers employed part-time, increasing the importance of effective onboarding and safety capability from the point of entry.

Industry-led collaboration is progressing more consistent approaches to safety induction across the sector. The [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#), delivered by Skills Insight in partnership with MINTRAC, was established to address the absence of a nationally consistent, pre-employment baseline for safety capability. Early findings highlight the potential for scalable induction models to support safer onboarding, strengthen regulatory compliance, and contribute to long-term workforce sustainability across meat and poultry processing.

Cross-sector connections

- [Safety and wellbeing](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Aligning meat processing skills delivery with automation and technological change

Jobs and Skills Australia's projected employment reduction of 5% by 2030 highlights how automation in meat processing is reshaping skill requirements, substituting some manual

labour while increasing emphasis on machine operation, monitoring, troubleshooting and maintenance. *The AMP Training Package* is undergoing staged review to ensure qualifications, units and skill sets remain aligned with contemporary processing technologies and workforce needs. Projects led by Skills Insight in partnership with MINTRAC are supporting training product updates to keep pace with technological change, recognising that timely alignment is essential to sustaining productivity, workforce capability and the long-term viability of regional processing operations.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Technology and innovation](#)

Strengthening regional retail butchery apprenticeship pathways

Retail butchery is a recognised trade occupation, with the *Certificate III in Meat Processing (Retail Butcher)* forming the primary apprenticeship pathway. However, Jobs and Skills Australia currently classes core roles including Butcher or Smallgoods Maker and Meat Inspector as being in national shortage, driven heavily by retention gaps. Evidence from *AMP Training Package* reviews and MINTRAC initiatives highlights persistent challenges – especially for small, single-site regional employers – in hosting apprentices through the full training term, due to supervision, scale and delivery constraints. In response, the [Retail Butchery and Smallgoods Project](#), commencing in 2026, is focused on strengthening trade pathways by improving training product alignment and supporting delivery models that enable employers to provide high-quality workplace learning and build a sustainable pipeline of skilled retail butchers.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)

Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction and retention tools for employers • Worker Safety Induction Pilot • Essential Meat Processing Skills
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flock Safe Project • Retail Butchery and Smallgoods • Meat Processing Training Resources • Training Support Materials for Meat Safety • Australia’s Biosecurity Skills Review • Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making

-
- [VET Workforce Project](#)



Consultation

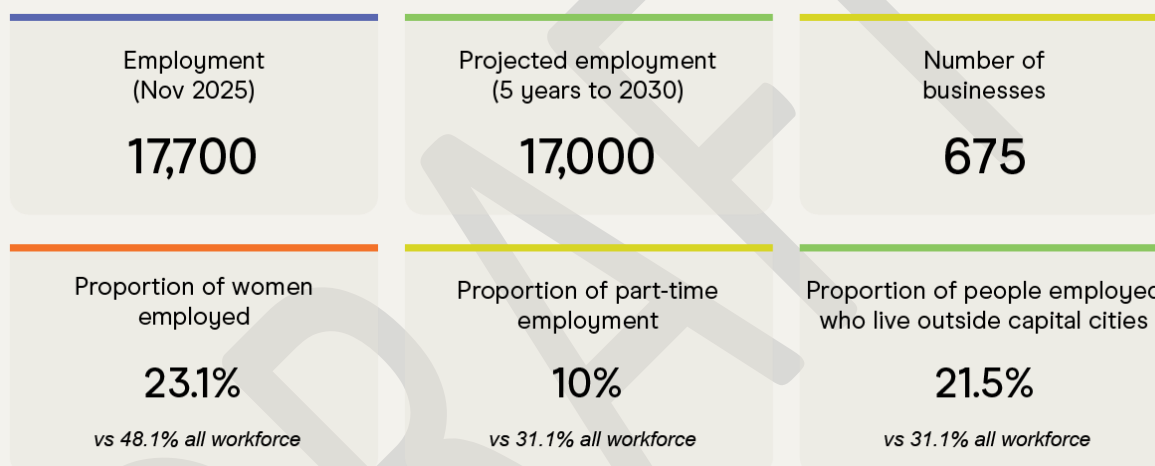
- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

DRAFT

Pulp, paper, packaging and hygiene products

The pulp, paper, packaging and hygiene industry encompasses pulping and papermaking operations, including stock preparation, chemical recovery, electrical power generation, paper finishing and converting, and water services. The sector also includes significant printing and packaging operations. As a foundational manufacturing industry, it is increasingly central to Australia’s circular economy and sovereign capability priorities, while simultaneously navigating complex transitions as legacy production systems are modernised or retired.

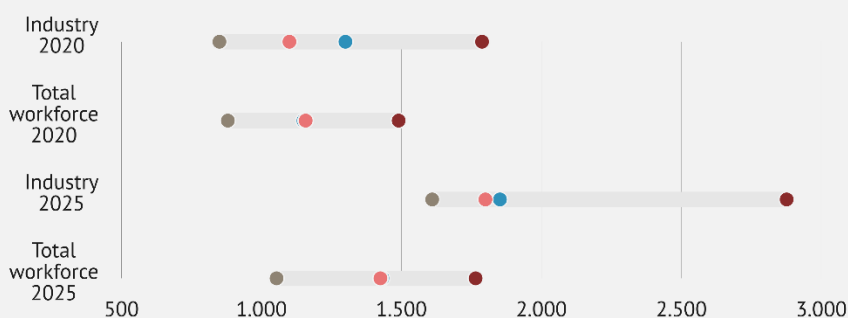
Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

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- All education levels
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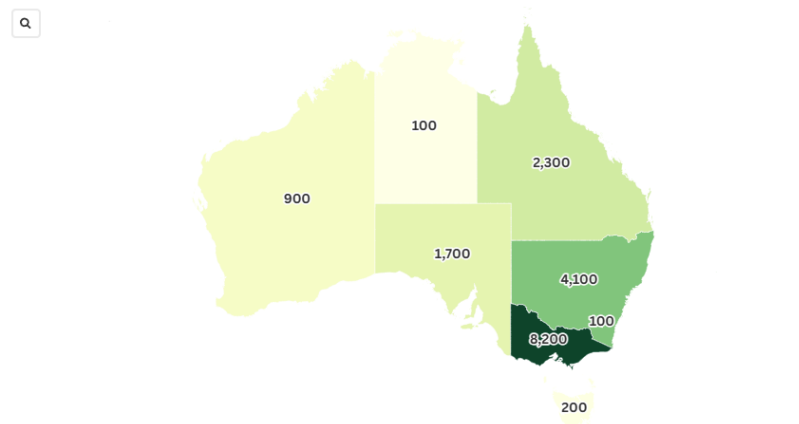
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Pulp, paper, packaging and hygiene products

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

100  8200



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Sustainability and sovereign manufacturing priorities

Packaging and hygiene-related manufacturing activities are adapting to regulatory transitions under the APCO National Packaging Targets and the National Plastics Plan, which are driving new requirements in materials selection, recyclability and compliance capability. At the same time, the National Reconstruction Fund's \$15 billion investment mandate is targeting value-adding and advanced manufacturing across food, materials and enabling technologies. Industry surveys indicate emerging technical skills gaps and a reliance on non-formal training pathways, highlighting the need for training products to keep pace with these regulatory and manufacturing shifts.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Sustainability](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)

Legacy pulp and paper manufacturing sites face heightened transition risk in regional centres

While the broader pulp, paper, packaging and hygiene manufacturing workforce is predominantly metropolitan, large-scale pulp and paper mill operations remain concentrated in a small number of regional centres, including parts of Victoria and regional New South Wales. These sites employ highly specialised, long-serving workforces with skills closely aligned to legacy production systems, reflected in the sector's strongly full-time employment structure (around 90%). As structural pressures

drive capacity reductions – with Jobs and Skills Australia projecting a 4% employment reduction by 2030 – many affected workers do not hold industry-specific or transferable manufacturing qualifications. This limits their ability to safely transition to adjacent employers or industries, increasing the importance of skills recognition and targeted retraining to support workforce redeployment in regional communities.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)
- [Safety and wellbeing](#)
- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)




Strengthening skills recognition and portability

The sector is undergoing significant structural change at a time when an ageing, male-dominated workforce is increasing the urgency of attracting and skilling new entrants. Despite these pressures, the PPM Training Package has recorded zero enrolments in most years since 2017, with a notable exception in 2023 when around 65 Certificate III in Pulp and Paper Operations qualifications were awarded through recognition of prior learning (RPL). This lack of accessible, formal training pathways constrains workforce renewal and limits career progression. In response, Skills Insight is consulting with industry through the [Mapping Workplace Training to PPM Qualifications](#) project to better align in-house training with nationally recognised qualifications, ensuring skills are formalised, portable and valued across the sector.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)

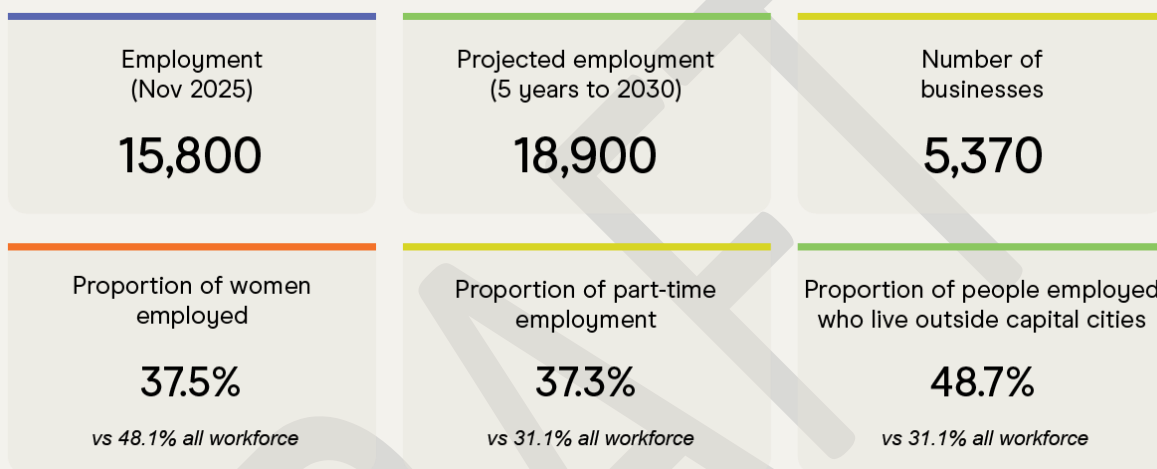
Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction and retention tools for employers
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping Workplace Training to PPM Qualifications • VET Workforce Project
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation Shortage List • OSCA Maintenance Strategy • A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Racing and breeding

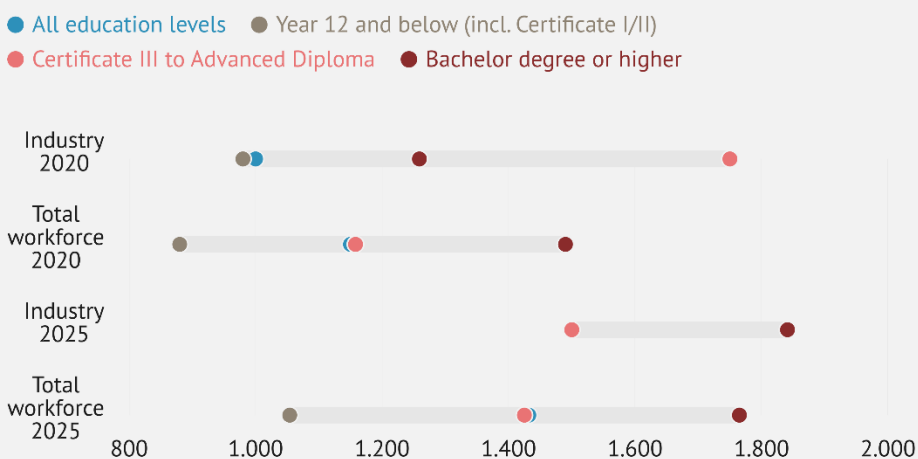
The racing and breeding industry covers racing authority operations, racehorse and greyhound breeding, ownership and training, and racetrack and race club operations. As a major economic contributor deeply embedded in both metropolitan and regional communities, the sector operates in a highly scrutinised, safety-critical environment. The workforce must balance high-performance animal management with stringent regulatory, integrity and welfare standards.

Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



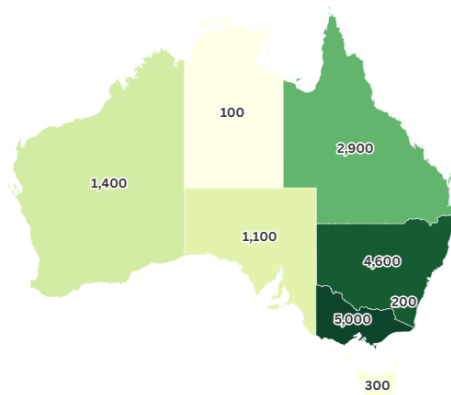
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Racing and breeding

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

100 5000



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Safety-critical roles face rising expectations for training currency

Racing occupations such as jockeys, trackwork riders and breeding staff operate in safety-critical environments subject to increasing regulatory and integrity oversight. Industry is working with Skills Insight on the [Improving Training Pathways and Safety in Racing](#) project to address known safety issues in the racing and breeding industry. At the same time, 2025 revisions to the Training Package Organising Framework (TPOF) and state-based racing regulations, including Tasmania's Racing Regulation and Integrity Act 2024, strengthen requirements for training products to remain current, clearly articulated and aligned with contemporary safety, welfare and workforce-renewal requirements. Stakeholder feedback suggests the best way to ensure safety on the job is through workplace-based training as 'one learns how to handle and ride the horses better by actually doing the roles' [Australian Jockey Association, TAS].

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Safety and wellbeing](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Breeding workforce resilience

With Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) projecting employment growth of nearly 20% by 2030, the thoroughbred breeding sector is under sustained workforce development pressure. Core occupations, including Farrier and Horse Trainer, are classified as being in national shortage, reflecting long training lead times and limited supply. However, despite strong industry intelligence indicating persistent shortages, Horse Breeder is not classified as being in shortage, undermining confidence in official data and constraining effective workforce planning.

Career pathways across thoroughbred breeding roles remain fragmented. Skills Insight’s [Connecting RTOs & Employers Research](#) highlights how thin training markets and limited formal delivery have contributed to the emergence of employer-led pathways such as Thoroughbred Breeders Australia’s Fast Track Program. In response, AgriFutures Australia is leading the development of an evidence-based [Thoroughbred Breeding Industry Workforce Strategy](#) to address labour shortages, strengthen attraction and retention, and establish clearer education and career pathways. Through data analysis, industry consultation and stakeholder co-design, the strategy is to deliver a comprehensive workforce profile, role classification framework and implementation roadmap aligned with national workforce priorities, supporting long-term workforce resilience, growth and global competitiveness.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)
- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)

Multi-jurisdictional racing integrity reforms shaping workforce expectations

Independent and parliamentary reviews of racing governance have concluded or are underway in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania, each strengthening integrity, welfare, governance and workforce-related obligations for racing bodies. Government responses to the Queensland Racing Review (The Next Lap), the NSW Drake Inquiry, and the South Australian Ashton Inquiry, alongside Tasmania’s Racing Regulation and Integrity Act 2024, collectively raise expectations for HR, conduct, procurement and compliance systems. In parallel, the Skills Insight project [Improving Training Pathways and Safety in Racing](#) reflects growing industry attention to whether existing training arrangements remain aligned with this evolving regulatory environment.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)
- [Safety and wellbeing](#)

Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction and retention tools for employers • Connecting RTOs & Employers
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Training Pathways and Safety in Racing • Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making



Consultation

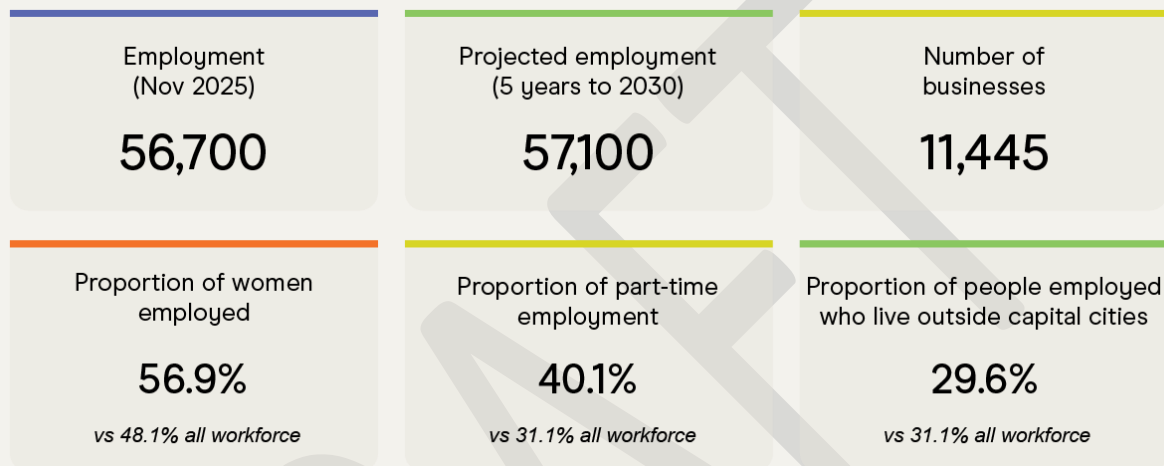
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

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Textiles, clothing and footwear

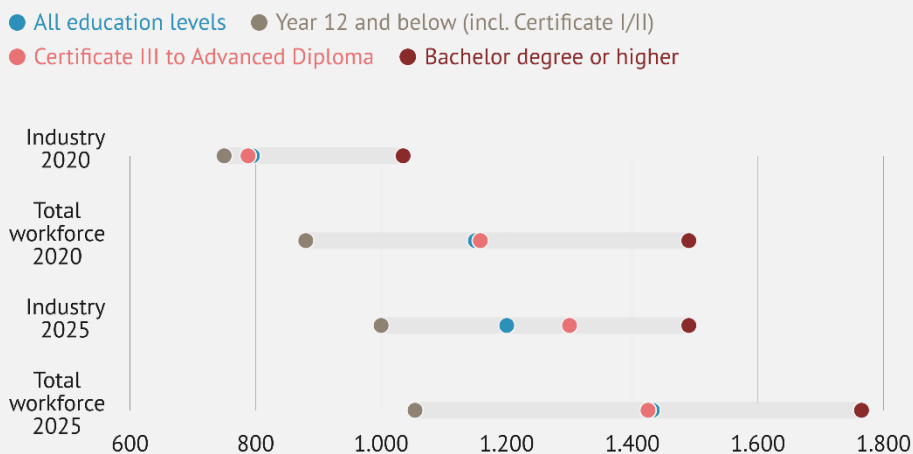
This industry consists of businesses that process and manufacture natural and synthetic materials for textiles, leather, clothing and footwear production, alongside associated services such as design, dry cleaning and repairs. The sector is increasingly recognised as a critical component of Australia's sovereign manufacturing capability, encompassing advanced technical, combat and medical textiles.

Industry snapshot

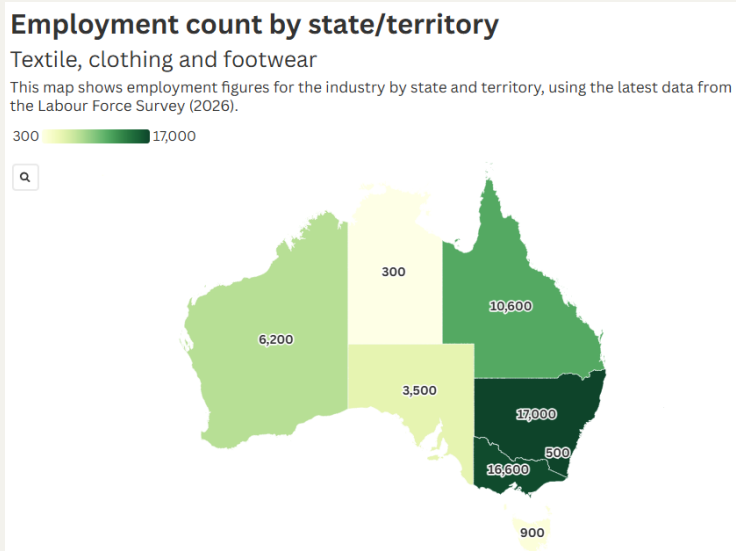


Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Strengthening the sewing machinist pipeline

The Australian Fashion Council has warned that long-term unfilled machinist roles pose growing risks to the sustainability of local manufacturing capability. Sewing machinists are a core technical role in textiles, clothing and footwear manufacturing, yet the workforce is ageing, with a median age of 59 (20 years older than the total workforce median). While the broader *MST Training Package* has seen a 9% increase in enrolments and a 40% increase in completions over the past four years, specific critical pathways like the *Certificate IV in Apparel and Fashion* have seen a 46% decrease. Stakeholder consultation during Skills Insight's [Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights study](#) identified opportunities for coordinated action to better recognise and formalise existing skills, expand apprenticeship and traineeship delivery, and expand accessible pathways into the workforce. A project, [New Entrants as Sewing Machinists](#), is commencing in 2026 to address these challenges.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)
- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)
- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)

Maximising the effectiveness of the MST Training Package in a changing textiles workforce

The *MST Training Package* spans roles as distinct as medical textile production, textile flooring, and commercial laundry. However, stakeholder feedback reported in Skills Insight's [Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights](#) suggests the training package has not been updated to fully reflect sector requirements. Occupational maps

defining roles and progression pathways can support targeted training investment decisions and workers to navigate training and career pathways.^{5,6}

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Critical occupations face ongoing shortages](#)




Sovereign textile capability ambitions are exposing workforce and training constraints

Defence policy identifies combat clothing and related textile technologies as a sovereign industrial capability priority, while broader manufacturing and Senate inquiries highlight Australia's reliance on offshore supply for critical technical and medical textiles.⁷ Industry consultation for Skills Insight's [MST Skills and Occupation Mapping project](#) indicates that specialist skills required for advanced textile manufacturing are not consistently reflected in current training products. Defence and manufacturing strategies emphasise workforce capability as central to sovereign production, suggesting that clearer training alignment, qualification reform and greater workforce supply are needed to build resilience and scale up operations across the sector's highly dispersed base of 11,445 businesses.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

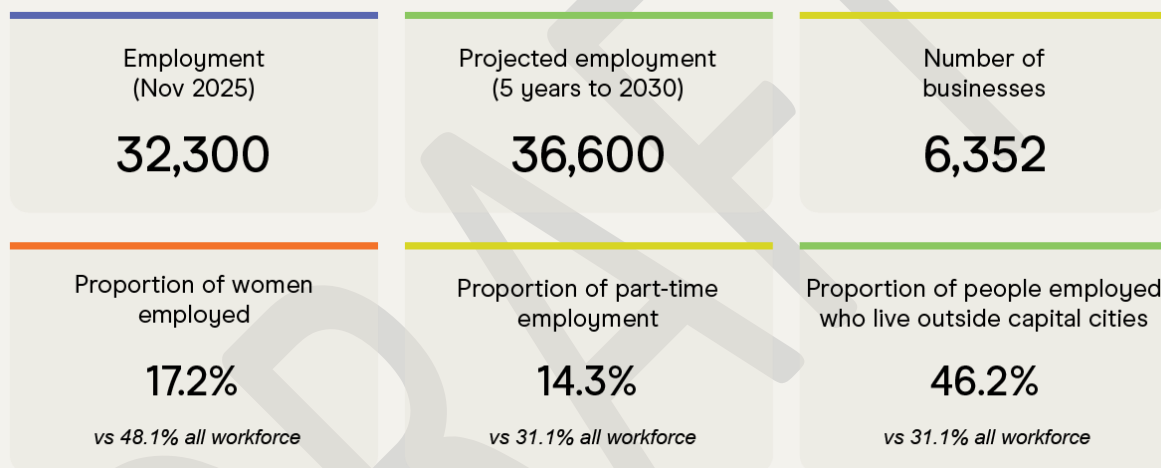
Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attraction and retention tools for employers• Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Skills Mapping• Textile Flooring Manufacturing Pathway• New Entrants as Sewing Machinists• VET Workforce Project
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occupation Shortage List• OSCA Maintenance Strategy• A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Timber, wood processing and building solutions

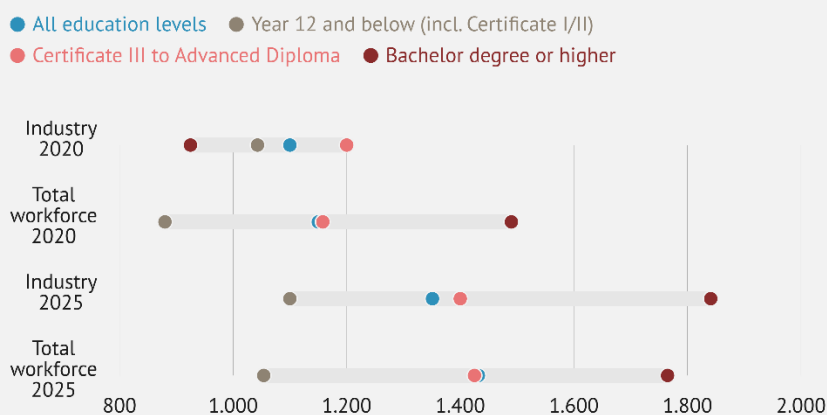
This manufacturing industry is a vital part of the timber value chain, turning harvested trees into materials used to construct buildings, furniture, flooring and other products. Crucially, Australian-grown, timber-framed structural systems are the dominant construction material for detached housing. The supply chain for housing construction is inseparable from forestry, wood processing and regional logistics capacity, meaning a sustainable, skilled workforce in this sector is foundational to delivering Australia's national housing priorities and securing sovereign capability.

Industry snapshot



Median Weekly Earnings

This chart shows the change in average median weekly earnings for the industry relative to the national workforce, during 2020 and 2025.



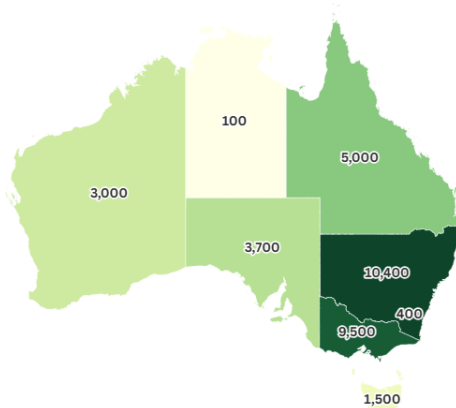
Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment Survey, JSA Custom Report.

Employment count by state/territory

Timber, wood processing and building solutions

This map shows employment figures for the industry by state and territory, using the latest data from the Labour Force Survey (2026).

100  10,400



Industry workforce and skilling insights

Building training capacity for timber systems design

The National Housing Accord's target of 1.2 million new homes by 2029 places growing reliance on prefabricated construction to address labour shortages and accelerate delivery. Timber framing and truss systems are central to this approach, yet nationally recognised training in timber systems design remains limited. While Skills Insight and ForestWorks have developed two entry-level skill sets for timber systems design (to provide credit towards qualifications such as *FWP31220 Certificate III in Timber Systems Design*), delivery is currently constrained, with only a small number of RTOs offering them. Training is further complicated by industry reliance on proprietary, licensed design software integrated with manufacturing systems. Expanding training delivery, strengthening partnerships with industry, and improving access to nationally recognised skill sets would help build a scalable pipeline of timber systems designers to support the delivery of Australia's housing construction priorities.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)
- [Regulatory compliance and quality assurance](#)

Aligning workforce skills with wood processing innovation

With employment projected by Jobs and Skills Australia to grow by 13.3% by 2030, the sector is under pressure to develop a new pipeline of workers and modernise operations. The [Accelerate Adoption of Wood Processing Innovation Program](#) funded by DAFF has

supported 30 grantees with \$88 million in funding to adopt new and upgraded wood processing facilities through innovative approaches that will support the productivity and environmental sustainability of the industry.⁸ Successful adoption of these projects will require skilled workers to operate new technologies, equipment and efficient production processes. However, formal training pipelines are struggling to support this, with *FWP Training Package* enrolments declining 13% and completions falling 51% over the past four years. This highlights an urgent need for continuing *FWP Training Package* alignment with industry evolution to support efforts to address national shortages in core roles like Sawmilling Operators and Wood Machinists.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)
- [Sustainability](#)

Strengthening tech-literate entry pathways into timber and wood processing

Timber and wood processing is undergoing significant technological transformation, with automated harvesters, digital manufacturing systems and AI tools now standard across sawmilling and manufactured products operations, creating attractive career pathways for tech-literate new entrants. ForestWorks’ [Tech-Literate Traineeships for School Students in Forestry and Wood Processing](#) project is actively piloting school-to-work traineeship models that build digital and work-readiness skills for the sector. With women representing only 13% of the industry workforce and the Timber Fibre Strategy identifying workforce diversity as a national priority, these new entry pathways carry particular significance for broadening the appeal of timber processing as an accessible and future-facing career.

Cross-sectoral connections:

- [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#)
- [Technology and innovation](#)

Industry priority actions

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction and retention tools for employers • Wood Machining Research
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Workforce Project



- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)

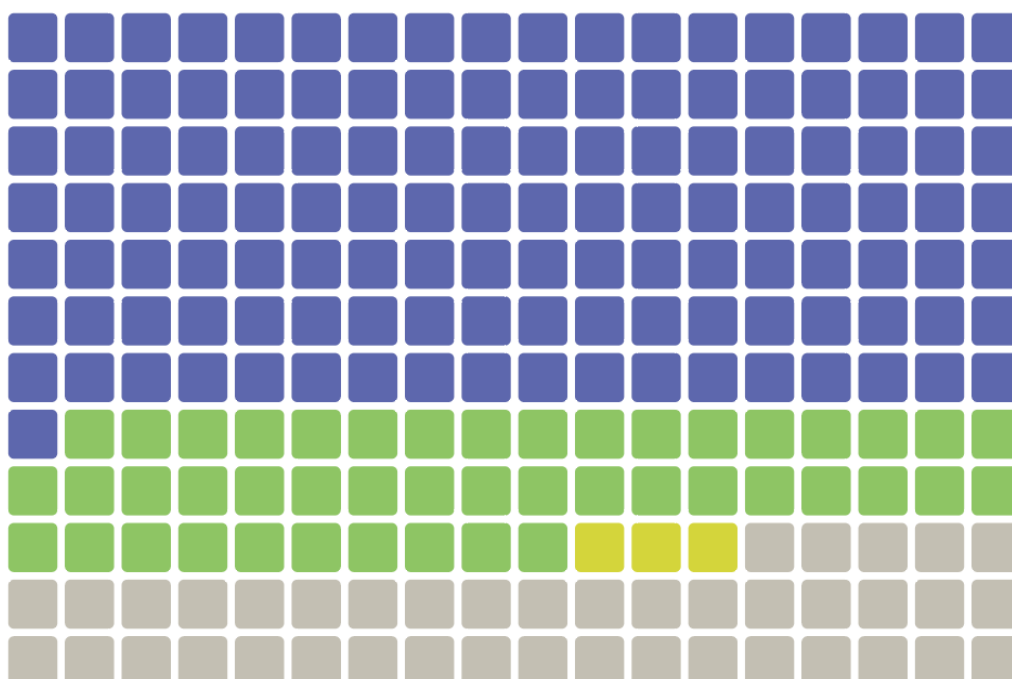
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Education and training update

Formal education and training, delivered through schools, VET (including apprenticeships and traineeships) and higher education (HE), are the **main pathways for building workforce capability across the industries Skills Insight supports.**

VET is the primary formal training pathway across Skills Insight-supported occupations

Each square represents one occupation (n=216), coloured by the dominant training pathway



■ 59% VET only
127 occupations

■ 21% VET and higher education
45 occupations

■ 1% Higher education only
3 occupations

■ 19% No mapped formal training pathway
41 occupations

This reinforces the importance of nationally recognised VET training packages as the main mechanism for workforce entry and upskilling. It also points to the need for better alignment and credit recognition where dual pathways exist, with implications for [tertiary harmonisation](#), the [National Skills Taxonomy](#), and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes.

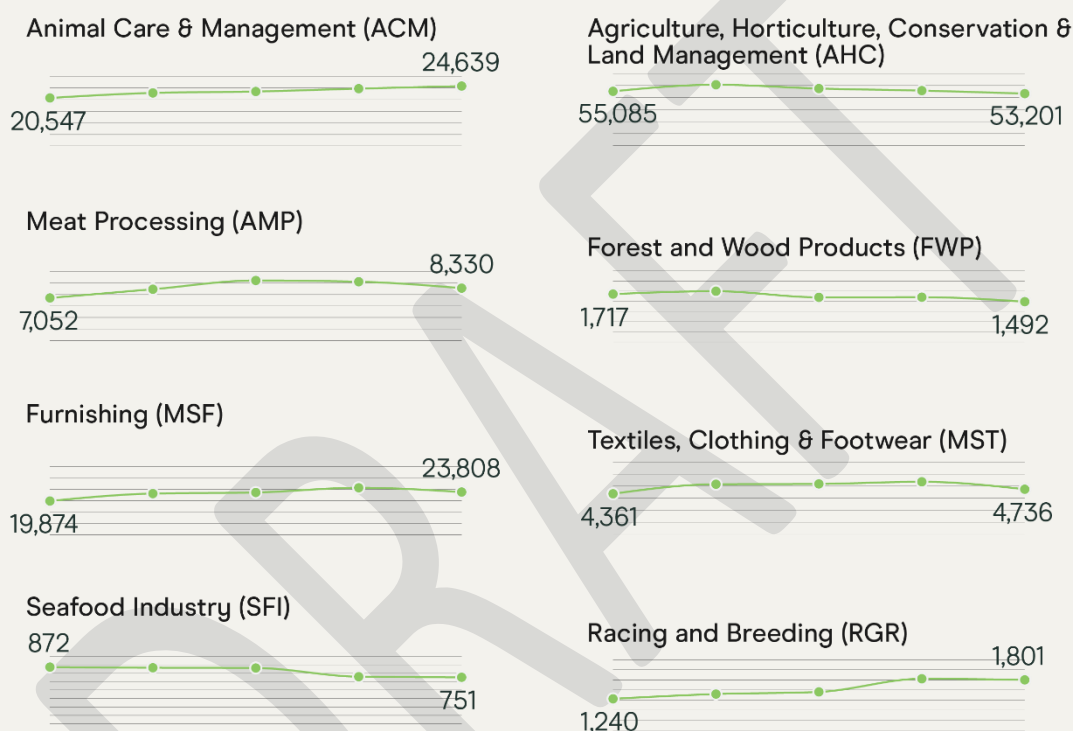
The absence of an explicit or clear formal training pathway for some occupations may also make it harder to expand training supply in response to workforce shortages, particularly in RRR areas. Numerous qualifications are designed flexibly to allow local contextualisation for different occupational outcomes, including agriculture and rural

operations qualifications, though there is a lack of data and evidence on how RTOs are working with industry to contextualise flexible qualifications for specific occupational outcomes. Skills Insight will continue to explore these issues through project such as [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#).

Participation insights

VET training package enrolment trends

Yearly enrolment trends from 2020 to 2024



Source: NCVET Total VET Activity, DataBuilder (2026)

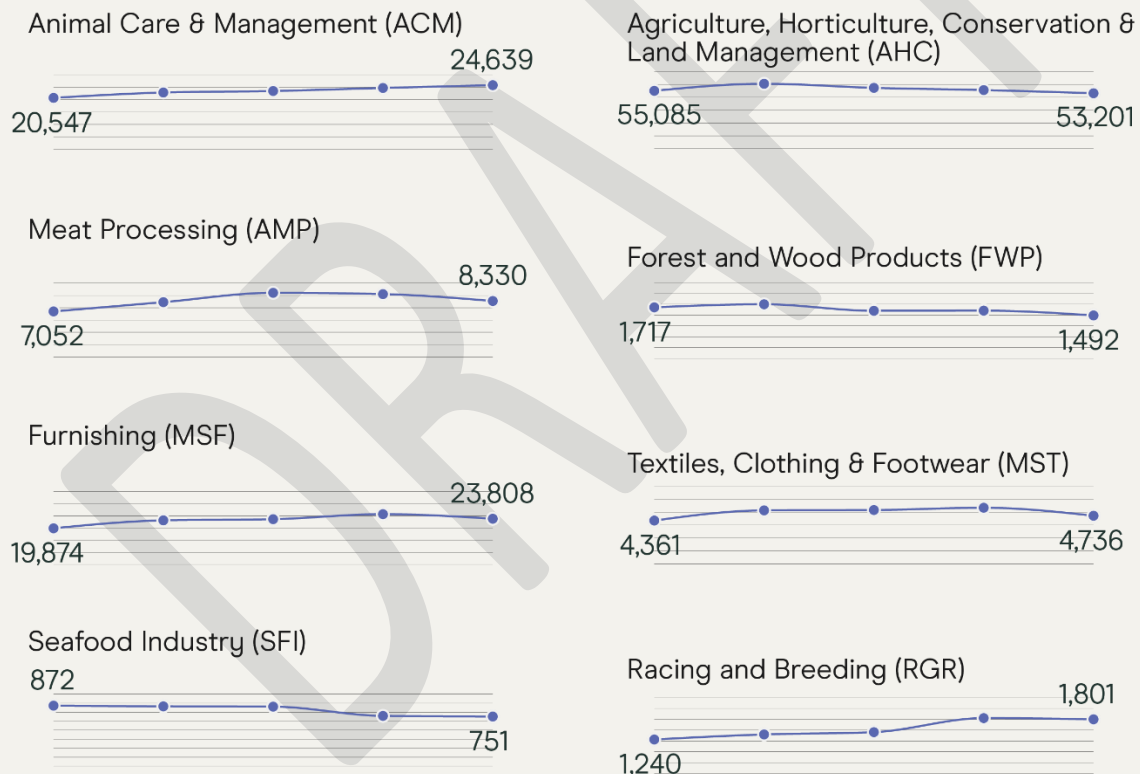
NCVER enrolments data for 2024 shows:

- A positive trend in most of the training packages supported by Skills Insight over the five years since 2020. This includes **ACM** (+20%), **AMP** (+18%), **RGR** (+45%), **MST** (+9%) and **MSF** (+20%).
- The **AHC** and **FWP** Training Packages displayed growth around 2021 but, overall, show five-year change of -3% and -13% respectively. There has been a consistent decline in **SFI** enrolments since 2020, with a -14% five-year change. For more information on training delivery barriers contributing to these trends, see:

- [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#)
- [Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia](#)
- There have been zero enrolments in the **PPM Paper and Pulp Manufacturing Training Package** every year since 2017; however, in 2023 there were around 65 *Certificate III in Pulp and Paper Operations* qualifications awarded through recognition of prior learning (RPL). This was arranged through ForestWorks' Worker Support Program, which supports workers who have been made redundant, with a view to boosting their employability for future roles. For more information see: [Pulp, paper, packaging and hygiene products](#).

VET training package completion trends

Yearly completion trends from 2020 to 2024



Source: NCVER Total VET Activity, DataBuilder (2026)

Combining enrolments insights with completions data:

- All training packages showing positive enrolment trends also show growth in completions over the last five years, including **ACM** (+14%), **AMP** (+44%), **RGR** (+135%), **MST** (+40%) and **MSF** (+21%).

- **AHC** saw a 21% increase in completions despite enrolments falling over the five years.
- **FWP** completions fell by 51%, outpacing the decline in enrolments over the same five-year period. A similar pattern was observed in **SFI**, where completions declined by 32%, also exceeding the fall in enrolments.

For more detailed data breakdowns, please see our [Data Dashboard](#).

35% of all enrolments in 2024 were by commencing apprentices and trainees

Apprenticeships and traineeships are the primary mechanism for formalising on-the-job learning across several of Skills Insight’s training packages, particularly for entry-level roles. By combining paid workplace experience with structured off-the-job training delivered by RTOs, they provide employers and learners with a consistent pathway for building skills in sectors where learning has often been informal. See below for [Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines](#).

Strengthening priority cohort participation

For under-represented genders, people with disability and First Nations people, participating in education and training can improve employment outcomes, while helping to address skills shortages.⁹ Across the training packages under the custodianship of Skills Insight, enrolments for these priority cohorts increased in both number and share (see Table 1), suggesting modest structural change in the pipeline of skilled workers and the potential for increased workforce representation.

Table 1: Priority cohort participation

Cohort	2024 enrolments	2024 share of enrolments	Percentage points change in share of enrolments, 2020 vs 2024	Change in enrolment count, 2020 vs 2024	% change in enrolment count, 2020 vs 2024
Women	55,362	46.8%	+4.1 pp	+8,435	+18.0%
People with disability	11,325	9.6%	+0.6 pp	+1,449	+14.7%
First Nations people	9,603	8.1%	+0.7 pp	+1,453	+17.8%

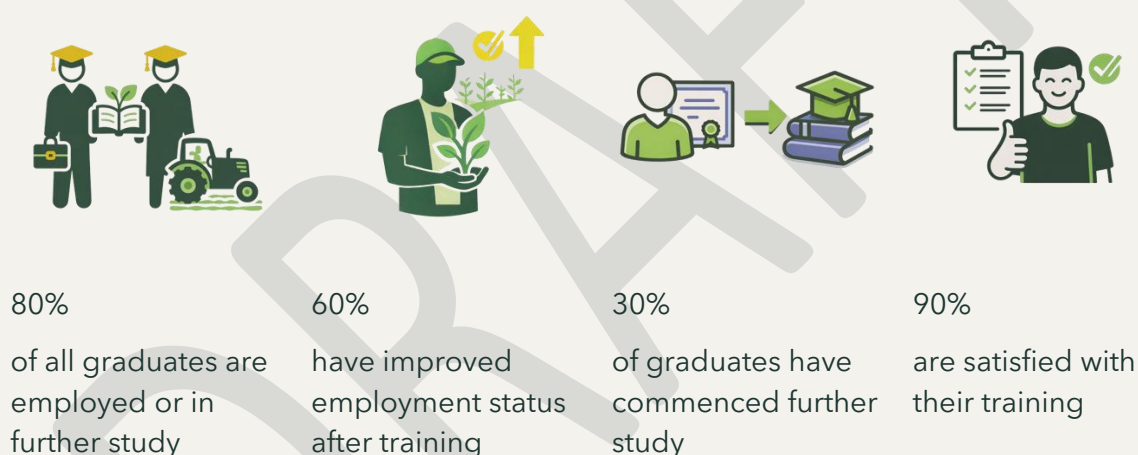
Source: NCVET (2025), VOCSTATS TVA program enrolments

Comparing 2020 and 2024, completions improved across these priority cohorts, with the strongest growth among women (+3.1%), followed by First Nations learners (+1.9%) and learners with disability (+0.7%). While gaps in employment outcomes persist for priority cohorts, existing research indicates that employer-led inclusion initiatives, including workplace adjustments and supportive employment practices, can play an important role in supporting successful transitions into work. See [Broadening participation to build stronger industry](#).

Learner outcomes

Learner outcomes across Skills Insight-supported training packages points to a strong overall return from training. The evidence shows a high rate of satisfaction with training, with training supporting graduates to move into work, improve their employment status (e.g. through promotions), and continue into further study.

Learner outcomes from training packages supported by Skills Insight



The case study below tells the story of Imogen Coe. It illustrates how individuals build capability and progress through vocational learning over time, while also revealing the practical barriers they can face in accessing training and career information. Imogen’s learning journey highlights how motivation, on-the-job experience and VET pathways can combine to support progression and promotion, even for those without prior industry exposure. Her experience also reflects broader, system-level issues explored throughout this workforce plan, including career awareness, access to hands-on training, regional delivery constraints and the importance of sustained learning pathways.

Case study: Imogen Coe's learning journey

Low exposure to industry and career awareness

Imogen Coe currently works on a dairy farm in NSW where they milk 260-280 cows a year. She had no family background in farming and minimal exposure at school yet has been active in pursuing a career in agriculture.

I'm a bit of an animal lover, but I didn't grow up on a farm, so to get into it was a bit random. I wanted to [study agriculture] at school, because we used to go camping and stuff growing up. I'm such an outdoorsy person. I'm not a write down pen and paper kind of learner. I'm definitely a learn on the job kind of person.

Navigating VET access at school

Imogen had to advocate to study for a *Certificate II in Agriculture* during Year 11, requiring her mum to engage with the school career councillor, who then pursued options for Imogen. Ultimately, Imogen was allowed to study by distance. Her passion for the subject matter meant she excelled.

It was my favourite class. I was second in my year just because I was so interested in it. It was just limiting there wasn't the hands-on experience I wanted. So, it was like 'go out to a paddock and figure out how much clover is in the paddock', but I didn't have a paddock to go to, so I'd be walking around the park at the back of my house. That's why TAFE's really good because you get the hands-on experience. Working in it, you learn more than anything else.

Transition from school to workplace-based training

After finishing year 11 and her Certificate II, Dairy Australia helped Imogen source different farms to do trials with. This experience improved Imogen's confidence and capability and motivated her to sign up for a traineeship.

I was so excited to be doing what I wanted to do. Going to TAFE, I was learning the same kind of stuff I learnt as part of the distance course, but this time I was actually understanding it because I was doing it at work. It also made it feel like what I was learning was important.

Training supply and regional availability

The educator who delivered Imogen's traineeship recently retired, with no replacement hired, meaning the region lost access to face-to-face delivery of agriculture qualifications. While online training offered an important pathway for Imogen, she says access to hands-on experience was crucial for her to take the leap and pursue a career in the dairy industry.

It'd be harder now because there's no TAFE running, so if you want to do it, you're on your own a little bit. That would scare me off if I was going to leave school and had to do it all online.

Ongoing learning, capability building and progression

Imogen is currently employed as an Assistant Farm Manager while studying for her *Diploma of Agriculture* online. Her training has supported progression into a more senior role, broadening potential future pathways.

My boss is bringing me into a manager role which is pretty cool. I'm not there yet, but I'm training to be. He gives me a go at everything, even the big boss kind of jobs. I don't know if I'll get to own my own farm, but that would be the goal. I'm doing the Diploma to give me the skills so if there is the opportunity to be a farm manager on my own, I can do it.

System gaps and what needs to change

Imogen says the dairy industry is doing a good job of building community and connections to support new entrants, but more could be done to raise young people's awareness about career opportunities in agriculture.

You think of a farm: you're thinking of someone sitting on a tractor ploughing a field and it's not what it's like at all. There are good jobs, especially if you're an animal lover and that's what you want to do. Just knowing it's an option makes a big difference – knowing that you don't have to be born on a farm to work on a farm and that there are jobs nearby. I didn't really know I could get work on a farm like 20 minutes from home if I wanted.

Imogen's story emphasises:

- There are structural gaps in early exposure to industry careers, with a reliance on individual motivation rather than system design.
- Formal work-integrated learning is a key enabler of skill development, safe work practices, workforce retention and career progression.

- Regional training ecosystems are highly vulnerable, including due to VET workforce attrition, with significant flow-on effects for industry capability.
- There is a need for locally sourced trainers and blended delivery models that support regional career progression, safety and productivity.
- There remain visibility, cultural norm, and informational barriers to participation in industry careers and training.

These issues are elaborated in the following section on key jobs and skills system challenges and drivers.

Challenges and opportunities: how system settings shape workforce and industry outcomes

Critical occupations face ongoing shortages

Skills Insight-supported industries continue to face significant workforce shortages in roles that underpin food security, animal welfare, biosecurity, sustainability, manufacturing operations, regulatory compliance, environmental stewardship, sovereign capability and housing construction.

Core industry occupations classed by JSA as being in shortage in 2025 include:

Industry	Occupation title	Year, shortage location and driver (if published)		
		2023	2024	2025
Horticulture; Broadacre Cropping; Livestock Farming	Agricultural Consultant	AUS: Suitability gap	AUS	AUS

Broadacre Cropping; Horticulture; Livestock Farming	Agricultural Research Scientist	AUS: Suitability gap	AUS	AUS
Ecosystem Management, Conservation, Landscaping, and Gardening; Forest Management and Harvesting	Arborist	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Retention gap
Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Processing/Manufacturing	Butcher or Smallgoods Maker	AUS: Retention gap	AUS: Retention gap	AUS
Furnishing and Other Manufacturing; Timber, Wood Processing, and Building Solutions	Cabinet Maker	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Long training gap
Aquaculture and Wild Catch	Deck Hand	NSW,QLD,NT	QLD,SA,NT	AUS
Racing and Breeding	Farrier	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Retention gap	AUS: Retention gap
Forest Management and Harvesting	Forester		NSW, QLD (R)	AUS
Ecosystem Management, Conservation, Landscaping, and Gardening	Landscape Gardener	AUS: Short training gap	AUS: Short training gap	AUS: Retention gap
Furnishing and Other Manufacturing	Glazier	AUS: Retention gap	AUS: Long training gap	AUS: Long training gap
Racing and Breeding	Horse Trainer	AUS	AUS	AUS
Aquaculture and Wild Catch	Master Fisher			AUS

Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Processing/Manufacturing	Meat Inspector	AUS	AUS	AUS
Timber, Wood Processing, and Building Solutions	Saw Technician	VIC		AUS: Long training gap
Timber, Wood Processing, and Building Solutions	Sawmilling Operator			AUS: Retention gap
Furnishing and Other Manufacturing	Upholsterer	AUS	AUS	AUS
Animal Care and Management	Veterinary Nurse	AUS	AUS	AUS: Long training gap
Furnishing and Other Manufacturing; Timber, Wood Processing, and Building Solutions	Wood Machinist	AUS	AUS	AUS

Source: JSA (2025) [Occupation Shortage List](#)

AUS: National shortage; (R): Regional shortage

See JSA's [2025 Occupation Shortage Drivers Report](#) for definitions of shortage drivers

Across Skills Insight-supported industries, employers continue to report persistent shortages in occupations that underpin safe operations, productivity and regulatory compliance - with many reporting shortages far beyond what JSA findings suggest. Many of these roles are highly specialised, and located in RRR areas, making them difficult to fill even during periods of broader labour market easing. From an industry perspective, shortages are not episodic but structural, reflecting long training lead times, an ageing workforce, limited training delivery, and competition from other sectors for transferable skills. Employers consistently emphasise that vacancies in these roles cannot be easily substituted or deferred without consequence, as they are integral to business continuity and value-chain performance.

The impacts of ongoing shortages are felt directly at the enterprise level. Businesses report increased workload pressures on existing staff, heightened safety and compliance risks, reduced capacity to expand or adopt new technologies, and growing reliance on short-term or less-experienced labour to maintain operations. For smaller and RRR employers in particular, sustained vacancies can constrain productivity, increase

operating costs, and undermine confidence to invest in training, innovation or succession planning. Over time, these pressures compound across supply chains, affecting service delivery, regional economies and compromising Australia's broader sovereign capability and food security.





The invisibility or misclassification of critical roles exacerbates shortages

Across Skills Insight-supported industries, workforce shortages are most pronounced in occupations aligned to OSCA Skill Levels 2 and 3. Stakeholder feedback, including through the [OSCA Update](#) consultation, indicates that gaps in the classification at these levels mean some existing roles, particularly at supervisor and senior practitioner levels, are not separately recognised or clearly distinguished. This reduces their visibility in workforce planning, training analysis and policy settings, concentrating demand pressure on a smaller set of recognised occupations.

Stakeholders have also raised concerns about recognised occupations where OSCA Skill Levels do not adequately reflect the complexity, responsibility and regulatory requirements of the role. A clear example highlighted by the seafood industry is the classification of *Aquaculture Worker* at Skill Level 5, which industry considers misaligned with the technical demands and risk profile of the occupation. Under-skilling in this role increases the risk of biosecurity breaches, environmental harm, animal welfare failures and serious work health and safety incidents, with consequences that can escalate rapidly into stock losses, regulatory non-compliance, market disruption and long-term damage to industry productivity and reputation.

Industry has indicated that this misclassification reduces the visibility of aquaculture workforce pressures in formal workforce planning processes, including by placing the occupation outside the scope of the Occupation Shortage List. As a result, persistent shortages may be overlooked in policy settings linked to training, incentives and migration. The seafood industry is therefore advocating for framework changes to ensure that aquaculture roles are appropriately recognised and that workforce responses are better aligned to the sector's operational, regulatory and biosecurity realities. Skills Insight will continue to work with impacted stakeholders to support their representations to the JSA.

Actions and consultation

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attraction and retention tools for employers• Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades• Essential Meat Processing Skills
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ag Trade Apprenticeship• Veterinary Nursing Review• Landscaping Skills Review• Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Skills Mapping• Rural Operations
 Proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growth Skills Review
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occupation Shortage List• OSCA Maintenance Strategy• A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

Broadening participation to build stronger industry

Increasing diversity and inclusion is critical to addressing workforce shortages, ensuring the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries draw from the widest possible pool of potential entrants and untapped talent. Greater diversity brings a broader range of perspectives, skills and lived experience into the workforce, strengthening innovation, adaptability and problem-solving. This is particularly important in industries where safety, biosecurity, animal welfare, environmental stewardship and regulatory compliance are central, and where diverse workforces can improve decision-making and sustainable operational outcomes, especially in regional, rural and remote contexts.

Evidence from the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency indicates that exclusion of under-represented groups can constrain industry growth, workforce resilience and safety outcomes. Diverse workforces bring different experiences and knowledge systems that shape how risks are understood, how work is organised, and how innovations are identified and adopted. When workplaces include people with varied technical backgrounds, cultural perspectives and career stages, they

tend to operate in more adaptive and informed ways. In this context, diversity is best understood as a workforce capability rather than simply a demographic characteristic, with clear implications for strategic efforts to broaden and sustain participation across the workforce.

Diversity across the workforce

ABS Labour Force Survey and Census data shows that the industry workforces under Skills Insight's coverage are often older, male-dominated and have low representation of First Nations peoples and people with disability.^{10,11} These patterns reflect accumulated structural barriers that have been documented across multiple national inquiries and strategy documents, including *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* and the *Closing the Gap* employment targets. This Workforce Plan examines diversity across five areas: gender, First Nations peoples, CALD and migrant workers, people with disabilities and age. Each area reflects both persistent barriers to workforce participation and opportunities to strengthen workforce capability, access and industry growth.

Gender

JSA evidence suggests occupations with strong gender imbalances are more susceptible to skills shortages.¹² Women represent an average of 37% of workers across Skills Insight's 13 industry groups, ranging from 17% of the workforce in aquaculture and wild catch to 83% in animal care and management.¹³ However, these figures can often understate the gender imbalance within occupations: men hold the large majority of management, technician, trade and machinery operator positions across agriculture and related industries, while women are often concentrated in clerical, administrative and part-time roles.¹⁴

JSA's *Gender Economic Equality Study*¹⁵ attributes the gap between women's educational attainment and their workforce representation primarily to workplace conditions such as inflexible working arrangements and inadequate responses to harassment and discrimination, rather than to skills or aspiration. The JSA Gender Segregation Intensity Scale¹⁶ further shows that occupational gender gaps have remained largely unchanged for around 15 years, indicating that structural change has been slow. Where industry has committed to structured change, outcomes have shifted: *Forest and Wood Products Australia's Gender and Diversity Survey*¹⁷ recorded women executive roles rising from 20% to 29% between 2021 and 2023, demonstrating that targeted initiatives can reshape leadership profiles over relatively short timeframes.

First Nations Peoples

First Nations peoples are custodians of Australia's land and waterways and hold knowledge systems developed over millennia that are directly relevant to environmental stewardship, biosecurity and climate resilience in agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries. Yet First Nations workers average only around 2.2% of the workforce across the industries under Skills Insight's coverage.¹¹ According to

the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation and JSA analysis, less than 1% of growers, farm managers and exporters in the food supply chain are First Nations people, and First Nations-owned enterprises are concentrated in specific segments such as harvesting and cultural land management. The exclusion of First Nations peoples from formal roles in land and environment management is therefore not only an equity issue, but a missed opportunity to harness existing capability, innovation and productivity essential to sustainable workforce development.⁴

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap includes specific employment and education targets for First Nations peoples yet three out of four of these targets remain off track despite improvement.¹⁸ Research suggests that experiences of racism, cultural disconnection and limited career pathways continue to drive high turnover, while programs like Indigenous rangers demonstrate that culturally safe, place-based roles can achieve strong retention.¹⁹

Culturally and linguistically diverse workers and migrants

CALD workers and migrants are essential to the capacity and capability of several industries under Skills Insight's coverage. In meat, poultry and seafood processing, an estimated 32% of the workforce are migrant workers; while in horticulture around 24% are migrant workers.¹¹ These industries rely heavily on working holiday makers, PALM scheme participants and other temporary visa holders, with employment often mediated through labour hire arrangements that can limit access to training, progression and workplace safety networks.

Research on CALD agricultural workers finds that many bring technical qualifications and transferable skills well beyond the roles to which they are assigned, but limited recognition of prior learning, language barriers and insecure visa status often prevent those capabilities from being formally recognised. This means that industries may experience shortages in technical and supervisory roles even where capability already exists within their workforce. This indicates that the constraint is not solely labour supply, but the structural conditions that limit skill recognition, progression and effective workforce utilisation.⁴

Disability

Formal disability identification within agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries averages as 1.3% of the workforce;¹¹ however, these figures are likely higher due to under-reporting. Whether a person chooses to disclose a disability is often shaped by perceptions of workplace culture. While some roles require disclosure for safety reasons, many workers choose not to disclose due to fear of discrimination or career disadvantage. Nearly half of people with disability report experiencing discrimination or harassment at work, compared with 23% of people without disability.²⁰ Australia is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which underpins domestic disability rights and antidiscrimination obligations, and *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* and programs such as JobAccess provide a framework and funding mechanisms for workplace adjustment.

However, uptake of these mechanisms appears limited, constrained by low employer awareness, fragmented advisory services and difficulties accessing specialist support. Accessible design, flexible task allocation, assistive technology and peer support mechanisms have demonstrated effectiveness in improving employment outcomes and represent underexplored opportunities for industries seeking to broaden their talent pool while maintaining high safety standards.

Age

An ageing workforce and a lack of young entrants create simultaneous pressures for industry growth. Across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries, the proportion of workers aged over 55 years increased from around 26% in 2006 to 31% in 2021,¹¹ indicating growing exposure to retirement-related turnover. As many businesses under Skills Insight's coverage are small or non-employing, limited succession planning risks widespread closures when owner-managers retire, threatening overall productivity, inter-generational knowledge transfer and the long-term sustainability of many industries.

The challenge of attracting young workers to industry is multifaceted. Recent ABS labour force data show that youth unemployment remained elevated at around 10% through 2025, more than double the overall unemployment rate, confirming that young people continue to face disproportionately high barriers to secure work compared with the broader labour force. JSA's *Food Supply Chain Workforce*⁴ study identifies apprenticeships and traineeships for critical roles, alongside other structured work-based learning models, as primary mechanisms for addressing attraction and progression challenges, particularly in regional areas.

Actions and consultation

 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools• Attraction and retention tools for employers• VET Workforce Project• Rural Operations Project
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender Economic Equity study

Improving apprenticeship and traineeship pathways to build workforce pipelines

Apprenticeship and traineeship pathways are essential for Skills Insight-supported industries as they provide a structured approach to developing practical, job-ready skills that align with industry needs. These pathways support workforce renewal and address skill shortages, especially in regional, rural and remote communities, by offering accessible training options and clear career progression pathways. They also contribute to the long-term sustainability of supply chains and enable businesses to respond flexibly to changing economic demands. The effectiveness of these pathways is critical to maintaining high-quality standards across the sector and ensuring the continued growth and competitiveness of Australia's industries.

Apprenticeships and traineeships benefit learners and industry

Apprenticeships are a highly effective pathway to employment. In 2024, 95.4% of trade completers and 89.4% of non-trade completers were employed after training, underscoring the enduring labour market value of vocational pathways. For trade apprentices, outcomes are particularly strong, with 74.4% employed in the same occupation as their training and a further 14.6% working in other roles where their skills remained relevant. While non-trade completers were less likely to be employed in their trained occupation (32.7%), a substantial share (41.5%) reported that their training was still relevant in different roles, highlighting the portability of vocational skills. While outcomes are generally positive for non-completers (with 83.3% of trade and 76.1% of non-trade non-completers were employed after training), dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions or the workplace point to the importance of job quality and workplace settings in strengthening apprenticeship retention and long-term workforce outcomes.²¹

Inadequate support limiting apprentice and trainee demand for Skills Insight industries

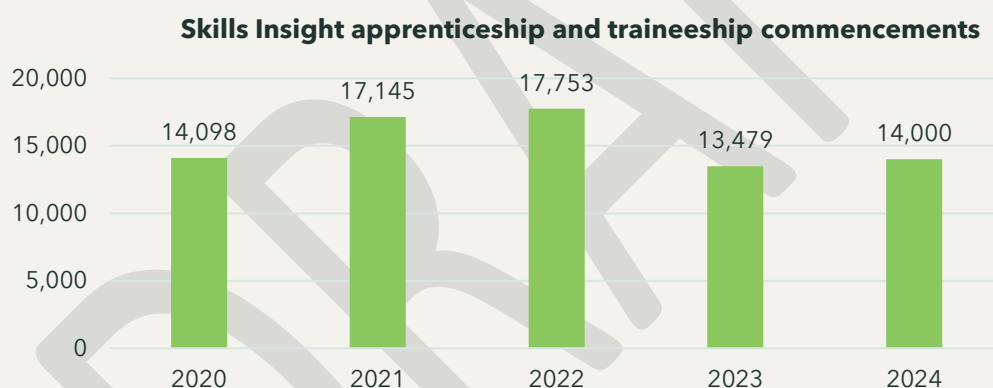
The Australian Government has reshaped its apprenticeship incentive system by increasing financial support for housing construction and clean energy occupations under the [Key Apprenticeship Program](#) (KAP), while reducing payments for many other priority occupations. It has also proposed revising the [methodology behind the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List](#) (AAPL) based on a view of what occupations represent 'value for money or a demonstrable public benefit'. Under this approach, numerous occupations across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries would become ineligible for incentives, despite their critical role in priority industry supply chains and their economic significance for many regional communities.

Insights from a Skills Insight industry stakeholder survey reveal significant concerns regarding the reduction or removal of apprenticeship incentives. Respondents indicated that such changes would impact their ability to maintain business operations, influence hiring decisions, and challenge workforce development in regional areas. Many businesses rely on these supports to manage the costs associated with recruiting and training apprentices, especially in sectors vital to regional economies. Read our full briefing paper for more information.

The survey findings underscore the risks associated with reducing financial support and excluding critical occupations from the incentives system, particularly when apprenticeship commencements and completion rates are already facing pressure (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Respondents highlighted that these changes could undermine the ability to develop a skilled workforce, with potential negative consequences for both businesses and regional communities.

Figure 1: Apprenticeships and traineeship commencement and completion rates

Skills Insight-supported industries are highly supportive of apprenticeships and traineeships; however, participation is sensitive to policy changes that impact on learner and employer support, and recent years have seen a decline in commencements.



Source: NCVET (2025) VOCSTATS, Apprentices and trainees - June 2025

Recent research by Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance highlights persistent drivers of low completion rates in manufacturing, including supervisor-apprentice relationships, the quality of on-the-job training, workplace culture, and financial pressures faced by apprentices²². These factors are inter-related and point to system-level challenges rather than isolated causes.

In 2019, 12,855 learners commenced apprenticeships and traineeships in Skills Insight training packages. The overall completion rate was 51.8%, below the national average of 56.1% across all training packages.²³ This gap reinforces the need for coordinated action across employers, training providers and the broader jobs and skills system. Completion outcomes vary by employer size and learner cohort:

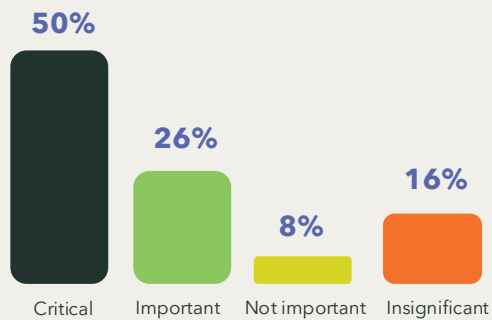
- **Employer size:** Medium-sized employers recorded the highest completion rate (53.7%), while large employers recorded the lowest (49.6%).
- **Gender:** Women achieved higher completion rates (55.8%) than men (50.9%), although commencements were predominantly male (10,445 men; 2,410 women).
- **First Nations learners:** A pronounced completion gap persists. Across all training packages nationally, the completion rate for First Nations learners was 49.1%. Within Skills Insight training packages, 1,110 First Nations learners commenced, with a completion rate of 43.0%, compared with 52.6% for non-First Nations learners (11,010 commencements).

Skills Insight will continue to examine barriers to participation and identify practical opportunities to lift completion rates for learners and industry.

Survey findings

- Changes to the apprenticeship incentive system are perceived to work against national skills priorities such as food security and sovereign capability, reducing the system's capacity to deliver on stated workforce and industry objectives.
- Employers are dependent on incentives to offset the financial, time, and productivity costs of apprenticeships - without them, many businesses will seek alternative labour market solutions.
- Small businesses are particularly vulnerable to incentive changes, with reductions threatening future viability of apprenticeships and even some businesses.
- Removing incentives will lead to lowered demand for VET delivery, further exacerbating supply pressures (especially in regional, rural and remote areas).
- A reduced pipeline of apprentices would compromise workplace safety and productivity.
- Greater reliance on migrant labour to address skills needs would curtail regional opportunities for young people to work and learn.
- Reducing incentives would lead to lower apprenticeship completion rates and greater regional out-migration as people pursue opportunities in better-supported industries.

76% of current employers say **financial incentives are essential** in maintaining apprenticeship pathways



1 in 5 employers would not have hired their apprentice if government support had been unavailable at the time of hiring

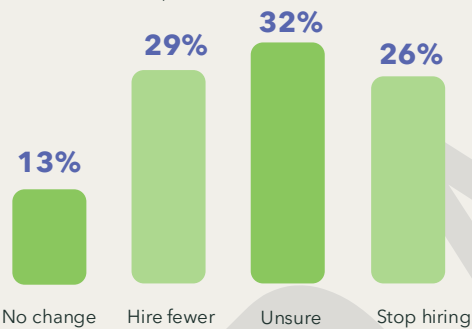
Over 50% of apprenticeships rely solely on the incentives system to supplement training costs

A further:
 → **14%** rely on Fee-Free TAFE
 → **13%** rely on other subsidies

What happens to apprenticeship hiring patterns when incentives change?

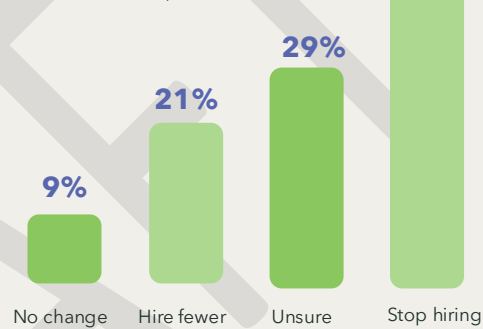
If incentives were **reduced**:

Results across all respondents



If incentives were **removed**:

Results across all respondents



Shifting from a reduction scenario to a removal scenario **increases the share of employers who would stop hiring** apprentices by nearly **60%**

What do employers think?

Among employers already committed to training: **75% would stop hiring or hire fewer apprentices** if incentives were removed



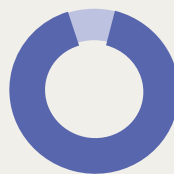
Four in five employers think **food security and sovereign capability apprenticeships should be incentivised equally** with housing construction and clean energy



How will changes to incentives affect the workforce?



87% of respondents believe **reduced incentives will lead to fewer opportunities for young people**






92% of respondents agree that **reduced incentives will drive young people away** from their sector or region

Recommendations to strengthen apprenticeship and traineeship support, pathways and industry uptake

1. **Increase funding and incentives to expand total apprenticeship participation, not redistribute labour between sectors.** The incentives system should focus on growing the overall apprenticeship pipeline rather than shifting labour into temporarily more attractive sectors, as this can exacerbate relocation from RRR areas and undermine local social and economic outcomes.
2. **Implement an evidence-based, inclusionary methodology:** the AAPL should be designed to systematically address the full spectrum of structural and financial barriers currently impeding apprenticeship success. This requires robust evidence inputs and weighting to account for regional challenges, worker safety risks, and addressing barriers to priority cohorts' participation.
3. **Strengthen data monitoring and transparency to support evidence-based decision-making.** Regular, disaggregated reporting on incentive uptake, completion and attrition, combined with structured industry and regional outcomes data, should inform continuous refinement of apprenticeship policy settings and reduce reliance on lagged or incomplete data.
4. **Support essential industries equitably and consistently:** align incentives with all, not some, of the national priorities in the National Skills Agreement to enhance collaboration and long-term commitment to addressing critical skills and workforce shortages.
5. **Recognise critical supply chain operations:** If the 'priority industries' approach is extended, the incentives system should recognise and incorporate their broader supply chains to ensure incentives support the workforce ecosystems that enable these industries to function (e.g. forestry occupations without which housing construction would stall).
6. **Improve awareness, accessibility and uptake of supports beyond apprenticeship incentives.** Strengthen communication, coordination and guidance around complementary supports, such as other workforce development programs and funding, to ensure apprentices and employers can access the full range of assistance needed to commence, sustain and complete apprenticeships.

Actions and consultation

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connecting RTOs & Employers
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ag Trade Apprenticeship• Furnishing Apprenticeship Guidance Project• Retail Butchery and Smallgoods Project
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills Insight response to Revised Apprenticeship Priority List Methodology Discussion Paper• Stakeholder survey on Changes to Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System

Improving training access in regional, rural and remote Australia

Delivering training in RRR Australia presents persistent structural challenges that differ markedly from metropolitan contexts. Challenges reaching a critical volume of students, long travel distances, limited infrastructure and connectivity, and difficulties attracting and retaining qualified trainers all affect the viability, consistency, continuity and quality of local training provision. At the same time, workforce demand data is often unreliable or incomplete at the local and regional level, meaning that understanding skills needs in RRR areas relies heavily on local intelligence, trusted relationships and sustained consultation. These challenges are compounded by higher delivery costs and smaller, more geographically dispersed cohorts, which can constrain the range of training options available and reduce completion rates where delivery models are not sufficiently flexible, place-based, culturally appropriate or supported by wrap-around services.²⁴

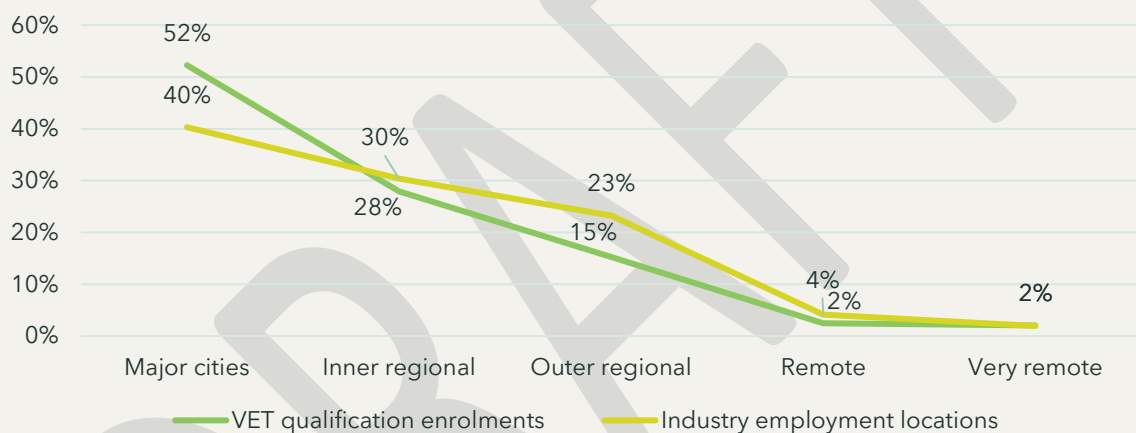
While demand for training in RRR areas is not well captured in existing data, evidence shows that the true costs of delivery are not adequately covered, limiting the ability of RTOs to consistently offer industry-relevant courses.²⁵ Training that can be delivered at scale in metropolitan classrooms or online often costs only a fraction of what is required to deliver equivalent outcomes in regional settings – for example, in agricultural colleges – where lower learner volumes are combined with higher capital, operating and compliance costs associated with maintaining crops, livestock, land, equipment and safety during and between teaching terms. Although many of these cost differentials are unavoidable, current funding arrangements do not sufficiently account for them, undermining the sustainability of regional delivery.

At the heart of the Australian Government’s Employment White Paper is a commitment to sustained and inclusive full employment, underpinned by ensuring people have access to appropriate education and training, where and when it is needed, to participate in the labour market. However, this opportunity is not experienced equally across Australia.

This has direct implications for food security and sovereign capability, reinforcing the need for a more comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the true costs of training delivery in RRR Australia to inform more equitable funding models.

Data also shows a geographic mismatch between where training is delivered and where jobs are located, with major cities over-represented in VET enrolments relative to industry employment in RRR areas (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Distribution of VET and industry employment (Skills Insight coverage)



Sources: a) NCVET VOCSTATS (2024 enrolments; Student remoteness region: ARIA+, 2023); b) ABS, 2021 Census of Population and Housing

Outer regional areas show the largest gap, signalling a likely under-supply of locally trained VET graduates relative to workforce demand. While remote areas have a smaller overall base, they exhibit a much higher employment-to-enrolment ratio, which can translate into persistent vacancies, higher turnover and reduced workforce resilience. Although graduate mobility from metropolitan areas may help address some shortages, liveability constraints – particularly housing availability and affordability – continue to limit the effectiveness of this approach, reinforcing the need for locally accessible and sustainable training delivery in RRR communities.

Actions and consultation

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring Training Demand & Supply Challenges• From Training Package to Training Delivery• Connecting RTOs & Employers
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VET Workforce Project• Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making• AFAM - Identifying the true costs of RTO delivery in regional NSW
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• JSA - Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia

Strengthening recognition of foundational supply chain industries aligned with national skills priorities

While strengthening apprenticeship and traineeship pathways is essential to building workforce pipelines, those pathways will only succeed if national skills priorities recognise and support the full range of foundational industries that underpin priority outcomes.

The [National Skills Agreement](#) and its supporting National Skills Plan define national priorities that governments have agreed require focused effort to address critical skills and workforce shortages. The *Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System*²⁶ elevates construction and clean energy as dominant national priorities, embedding them at the centre of incentive reform, procurement policy, GTO pilots and workforce planning to deliver housing, infrastructure and net zero objectives. In doing so, the Review narrows the definition of public benefit to only include some sectors while largely excluding those related to food production and other national priorities.

[Skills Insight's response](#) to the [Consultation on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List](#) highlights this as a structural and strategic flaw: agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries - many of which underpin construction, care, net zero and regional economies through complex supply chains - are systematically marginalised by a methodology that privileges administrative simplicity, headline shortages and metropolitan delivery over regional resilience, safety-critical roles, biosecurity, climate adaptation and sovereign capability. The net effect is a policy shift that concentrates skills investment on construction and clean energy as outcome sectors, while under-recognising and under-incentivising the foundational industries that feed the

nation, sustain rural and regional communities, manage land and water systems, and provide the sovereign, environmental and food-system capacity on which construction and other priority sectors ultimately depend. The below case study illustrates this point.





Case study: domestic forestry and wood processing foundational to housing delivery, affordability and sovereign capability

Australian-grown timber-framed structural systems are the dominant construction material for detached housing structures, with domestic demand for structural softwood sawnwood projected to grow as much as 50% by 2050.²⁷ The supply chain below shows that housing construction outcomes are inseparable from forestry, wood processing, manufacturing and regional logistics capacity, meaning sustaining skilled workforces across these industries is foundational to Australia's housing system. However, without government incentives, including to enable apprenticeship incentives for [forest operations](#), supply chain and future workforce vulnerabilities persist.

DRAFT



Actions and consultation

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tree Allocation Partnerships
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pathway to Tree Felling Skills• Tree Felling• Wood Machining Research
 Proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interior Design: Develop Integrated Career Pathways
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills Insight response to Revised Apprenticeship Priority List Methodology Discussion Paper• Stakeholder survey on Changes to Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System

Priority skills

The following skills priorities apply across much of Skills Insight's industry coverage, signalling where skills development and policy is expected to drive significant change. They should be read in the context of overarching drivers of the JSC program, [presented above](#).

Sustainability

Sustainability is increasingly shaping how industries operate, how work is organised, and the skills needed across the economy. Australia's shift to a more sustainable, low-emissions and resource-efficient future is being driven by national commitments to net zero, climate risk disclosure, biodiversity protection and responsible resource use. These settings are influencing decision-making across agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food and animal care operations and value chains, not only environment care sectors.

As a result, sustainability is becoming a core workforce capability. It is increasingly part of everyday roles through environmental, social and governance compliance and reporting, supply chain transparency and risk management, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, landscape and biodiversity preservation, carbon farming, agroforestry, permaculture, regenerative agriculture, soil health management, circular economy principles, and efficient water and energy use.

From a workforce perspective, this transition is increasing demand for both technical and transferable skills that can be applied across industries and occupations. These include systems thinking, data and reporting literacy, sustainable resource management, and the ability to adapt practices in response to regulatory, environmental and market change. Many of these capabilities are already being applied by existing workers in established roles, highlighting the importance of upskilling, reskilling and recognition of prior learning to build on existing capability, rather than relying solely on new occupations or emerging sectors.

Workforce planning in this area should support flexible training pathways and workplace-based learning that help workers build sustainability capability over time. It should also recognise the value of recognition of prior learning in making existing skills more visible and portable, alongside the importance of First Nations knowledge, stewardship, and land and sea management practices in delivering long-term economic, environmental and social outcomes, including through the Indigenous Rangers Program.

Skills Insight's work in this area is framed by a range of policies and frameworks that help industry navigate a more complex operating environment while balancing productivity and market development with sustainability and compliance priorities. These include:

- The United Nations' [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [Climate-Smart Agriculture Program](#)
- [Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy](#)
- [National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land by 2030](#)
- [The Australian Government's National Forest Industries Plan: Growing a Better Australia - A Billion Trees for Jobs and Growth](#)
- [Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework](#)
- [Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Strategy](#) (in development)

Actions and consultation



Proposed

- Growth Skills Review

Technology and innovation

Rapid technological change is reshaping how work is performed across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries. Digital technologies, automation and data-enabled systems are increasingly embedded in production, processing, logistics, compliance and decision-making, supporting improvements in productivity, traceability and risk management. In many cases, innovation is incremental rather than disruptive, with technologies augmenting existing roles rather than replacing them.

From a workforce perspective, this shift is driving demand for both technical and transferable skills, including digital literacy, data interpretation, systems thinking, and the ability to integrate new technologies into established work practices while maintaining safety, quality and regulatory compliance. As a result, workforce capability to adopt, operate and adapt new tools in workplace settings is becoming increasingly important. This reinforces the need for accessible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for existing workers, alongside effective workforce planning to anticipate and attract new workers with evolving skill profiles.

Forecasting and supporting changes to workforce skills composition is challenging because businesses are operating at different stages of technological maturity. While many of the industries covered by Skills Insight benefit from the research, development and extension activities of organisations such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), the uptake of new technologies and innovations is uneven. Diffusion varies significantly across operating environments, regions and business sizes, creating divergent skills needs and limiting the ability to implement uniform workforce or training responses.

In practice, demand for training often follows rather than leads technology adoption. Rapid technological development across critical technologies [identified by the Australian Government](#) - including advanced manufacturing and materials, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and autonomous systems, robotics, positioning, timing and sensing - makes it difficult to anticipate how industry practices, markets and employment structures may evolve. In many cases, new technologies must first be tested and applied in operational contexts before training systems can respond, slowing the translation of emerging capabilities into effective training products and delivery.

In response, Skills Insight is working closely with industry to support the development of robust, future-ready training products and projects. The work draws on established digital skills frameworks, including the [Australian Digital Capability Framework](#), [DigComp 2.2](#), [Digital Foundations for Agriculture Strategy](#), and the [Agricultural Workforce Digital Capability framework](#) ²⁸.

Against this backdrop, Skills Insight is collaborating closely with the Future Skills Organisation (FSO) and other JSCs to contribute industry-specific insights to work under the Australian Government's [National AI Plan](#). This collaboration is focused on understanding how AI is currently being used across industries, the priority AI-related skills required now and into the future, and current training initiatives and gaps. We are also exploring barriers to regional AI skills development, impacts on priority cohorts, data for tracking national progress, opportunities for cross-industry partnerships and actions to accelerate workplace adoption across all business sizes.

Actions and consultation



Consultation

- Cross-JSC contributions coordinated by Future Skills Organisation for the National AI Skills Report.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity underpins Australia's economic resilience, environmental protection and market access, particularly across agriculture, fisheries, forestry and related supply chains. Australia's biosecurity system operates in an increasingly complex risk environment shaped by global trade and travel, climate variability, emerging pests, weeds and diseases, and evolving technologies. National policy settings, including the [National Biosecurity Strategy](#) and the [DAFF Biosecurity 2030 Roadmap](#), emphasise the need for a highly skilled, responsive and risk-based biosecurity workforce spanning government, industry and the community. Recent assessments have identified workforce capability and capacity as a strategic risk, highlighting the importance of sustained investment in workforce planning, training and deployment to maintain Australia's high level of biosecurity protection for animal, plant and environmental health.

For the workforce, this is driving demand for biosecurity capability across frontline operations, surveillance, diagnostics, data and risk analysis, and emergency preparedness and response. Workforce challenges include recruitment and retention pressures, uneven capability across regions, and the need to continuously update skills as biosecurity threats and tools evolve. National initiatives such as the [Biosecurity Training Centre](#) and the [National Biosecurity Training Hub](#) support capability development by improving access to consistent, high-quality training across jurisdictions and industries. For workforce planning, strengthening biosecurity outcomes will require a coordinated approach that builds clear career pathways, supports regional and surge capacity, integrates digital and scientific skills, and enables collaboration across government, industry, research organisations and communities.

Skills Insight is working with Public Skills Australia JSC, with the guidance of the [National Biosecurity Strategy Implementation Committee](#), to undertake a cross-industry skills review. This work is identifying the skills required across all aspects of the biosecurity system, including policy development, research, scientific interventions, prevention, detection, monitoring and crisis response. It also seeks to identify workforces with existing, transferable skills that could be mobilised to support implementation of the *National Biosecurity Strategy* and related projects. Skills Insight is also monitoring work by CSIRO on the future of biological management in Australia to support the Ag2050 and Biosecurity agendas.²⁹

Actions and consultation



Current

- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)

Biological resource management

Biological resource management underpins the health, welfare and safe management of soils, plants, trees and animals across Skills Insight's industries. The growing importance of biological resource management is reflected in the expanding range of legislative, regulatory and standards-based approaches across Australia aimed at safeguarding soil, plant, tree and animal health. Unlike the management of machinery, infrastructure or built assets, biological resource management requires skills that respond to the inherent complexity, variability and unpredictability of living entities. The knowledge required to work with individual plant and animal species is highly specialised, encompassing behavioural, nutritional and physiological requirements, alongside species-specific health, welfare and environmental needs.

Given this variability and the safety risks that can arise when workers lack sufficient experience, workforce competency in biological resource management is best developed through workplace-based training. Practical exposure is critical when working with animals and natural systems that may behave unpredictably, particularly in high-risk or regulated environments. Industry stakeholders consistently emphasise that training package content must therefore be sufficiently flexible to allow contextualisation across different settings. This includes, for example, the safe and compliant handling and care of companion animals, livestock or wildlife, adherence to animal welfare legislation and standards, and the capacity to prevent, mitigate and respond to safety incidents or emergency and evacuation situations.

Key government policies shaping the future direction of industries and the jobs and skills system include [Animalplan 2022-2027](#), the renewed [Australian Animal Welfare Strategy](#), [Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030](#) and [Regional Forest Agreements](#). Together, these frameworks have significant implications for land use, animal production systems, regulatory compliance and workforce capability across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries.

As these policy settings have been implemented, challenges have emerged for workers and businesses, including the discontinuation or restructuring of native forestry, live animal exports and fishery operations in some jurisdictions following federal, state and territory decisions. These transitions have highlighted the consequences of workers not holding formally recognised qualifications, with many required to undertake skills assessments to identify and redeploy their portable capabilities. Upskilling and RPL are therefore critical to supporting workforce mobility and transition.

Actions and consultation



Complete

- [Livestock Operations](#)
- [Shearing and Wool Classing](#)
- [AHC Improvements Project](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Connecting RTOs & Employers](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)
- [Essential Meat Processing Skills](#)
- [Pathway to Tree Felling Skills](#)
- [Tree Felling](#)



Current

- [Veterinary Nursing Review](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)
- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Improved Training Pathways and Safety in Racing](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Tree Allocation Partnerships](#)

Regulatory compliance and quality assurance

Regulatory compliance and quality assurance are core workforce capabilities across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries, underpinning safety, productivity and access to domestic and international markets. Recent Productivity Commission analyses of the [Five pillars of productivity](#) and [National Competition Policy](#) have identified workforce licensing and occupational entry requirements as potential productivity constraints; however, industry stakeholders consistently emphasise that well-designed regulatory and licensing pathways are essential in high-risk and trade-exposed sectors. In these industries, compliance is not an administrative overlay but a defining feature of occupational competence, supporting public and animal health, biosecurity, traceability and consumer confidence.

Regulatory compliance and quality assurance skills are embedded across value chains, rather than being confined to specialist roles. For example, in meat, poultry and seafood processing, workers must operate within complex food safety, animal welfare, biosecurity,

hygiene and importing-country regulatory frameworks. Workforce capability in documentation, audit readiness, traceability systems and the consistent application of standards is critical to maintaining export accreditation and access to international markets, where regulatory failures can result in plant suspensions or loss of market access with significant flow-on impacts for regional workforces and businesses.

Stakeholders have identified that the complexity and risk profile of occupations in the industries supported by Skills Insight are often poorly reflected in the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA, formerly ANZSCO), particularly where roles are designated as 'entry-level' despite requiring high-level compliance, safety and quality assurance skills. Low skill-level designation limits access to funding, incentives and skilled migration pathways, and reduces motivation for workers to undertake formal qualifications or continue lifelong learning, increasing the likelihood of procedural failures arising from insufficient workforce capability and exposing businesses to significant financial and operational losses.

An addition challenge is that, to support training delivery and compliance, relevant regulatory and licensing requirements are typically identified only during training product development or review processes. There is currently no central, consistent source of this information to support RTOs in designing, delivering and maintaining training that reflects current regulatory settings. In response, Skills Insight is undertaking a pilot initiative to map licensing and regulatory requirements, beginning with animal care and management occupations, to improve transparency, support recognition of existing capability, and strengthen alignment between training products, regulatory settings and workforce mobility.

Actions and consultation



Current

- [Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations Project](#)

Safety and wellbeing

The Stakeholder Forum advising Skills Insight identified workforce safety and wellbeing as a major skills priority requiring deeper analysis and coordinated action. In response, Skills Insight published a [consultation paper](#) seeking stakeholder views on how the jobs and skills system can better support safe, healthy and equitable work across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries. Safety is a concern for all JSC-supported industries, with Future Skills Organisation (FSO) collaborating on an update to the BSB Training Package [Safe and Respectful Workplaces Unit of Competency](#).

From 2026, Skills Insight will identify priority skills issues and time-sensitive policy questions and publish targeted, policy-relevant research and discussion papers for consultation and feedback. These papers form part of our broader workforce planning approach, providing a structured way to engage stakeholders, test evidence against lived experience, and connect industry and regional priorities to the identification, design and delivery of future projects.

The findings presented below are informed by input from local governments, industry associations and peak bodies, industry employers, sole traders, community organisations, RTOs, and researchers. Contributions were received through over 20 survey, email, and feedback hub responses, as well as a forum convened by MINTRAC and attended by over 30 representatives from across Australia. We thank all stakeholders for their valuable contributions.

Safety and wellbeing: a workforce planning issue

Safe and supportive workplaces are fundamental to workforce resilience and long-term industry sustainability. Work is not risk-free, and while injury rates have improved over time, further gains require continued effort from employers, workers, unions and governments.³⁰ Safety is strengthened through practical action - regulation, training, leadership and technology - and must address physical, psychosocial and cultural risks holistically.

Agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care remain among Australia's highest risk industries, with 'vehicle incidents' and 'contact with moving objects' accounting for the majority of workplace incidents. In 2024, agriculture, forestry, and fishing recorded 44 deaths - almost one quarter of the national total - and a fatality rate of 14 per 100,000 workers, more than ten times the national average.³¹ While fatality rates have declined since the early 2000s, progress has slowed in recent years.³²

Safety and wellbeing are not only compliance issues but also directly linked to workforce supply.³³⁻³⁵ Poor safety outcomes contribute to turnover, skills loss and reduced attraction to high-hazard roles. This creates a downward spiral, whereby pressure and risk for the remaining workforce is exacerbated. Conversely, safe and healthy workplaces support

retention, training participation, and productivity. Strengthening industry safety capabilities is therefore central to building a sustainable, effective workforce.

Key challenges and drivers of safety and wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing outcomes emerge from the interaction of physical hazards, psychosocial pressures, and workplace cultures that can either support or suppress safe behaviour. These outcomes are not the product of isolated incidents or individual action; they often reflect deeper structural, demographic, and economic drivers that shape how work is organised, resourced, and experienced. Understanding these influences is essential to designing policies and interventions that deliver lasting improvements, rather than addressing symptoms while underlying conditions remain unchanged. The key challenges and drivers of safety and wellbeing outlined below integrate established evidence with stakeholder insights from our consultation.

RRR access and inclusion

Access barriers in RRR areas: The majority of workers in industries supported by Skills Insight reside in RRR areas, where health services, emergency response, and training infrastructure is limited compared with metropolitan areas.³⁶ Greater distances and longer emergency response times mean that injuries which might be effectively treated with rapid intervention can become life-threatening when help is hours away. Social isolation and limited mental health services further heighten psychosocial risk. Persistent attraction and retention challenges in RRR areas also drive reliance on seasonal and migrant labour, disrupting continuity of safety culture as businesses must continually induct new workers who are less familiar with the specific workplace context, hazards and expectations. Stakeholders emphasise these gaps, with Cotton Australia noting that ‘training access is limited in regional, rural and remote areas, leaving many cotton and broadacre workforces without consistent pathways to essential safety competencies.’

Cultural and demographic barriers to safe work and training opportunities:

Workplace conditions, training models and safety resources are not consistently designed with workforce diversity in mind. Feedback indicates that First Nations people, CALD workers, women in male-dominated industries, mature workers and workers with disability can encounter safety and training approaches that do not always align with their lived experience. Where workers feel culturally or socially excluded, confidence to report hazards, near misses or inappropriate behaviour is diminished. The consequence is not only inequitable access to safe work, but weaker early hazard identification overall.³⁷ Inclusive design, therefore, is not simply an equity issue - it is a core component of workforce safety and performance. Stakeholders emphasised the need for translated safety training materials, multi-format delivery and culturally adapted content, including ‘advice on how other cultures view safety so we can meet people where they are at’ [Livestock farming stakeholder, VIC].

Productivity (social and economic)

Leadership as a determinant of safety culture in the workplace: workplace incidents result in worker compensation claims, lost output, damage to equipment and reputation, higher turnover, and further recruitment costs. In industries already facing acute skills shortages and ageing workforces, the loss of even one experienced worker can cause disproportionate operational strain. When businesses operating under tight margins respond to financial and time pressures by deferring safety investment or reducing training, they risk entrenching a weakened safety culture that is detrimental to longer-term productivity and resilience.³⁸ As stakeholders note, leadership capability is a critical determinant of workplace safety outcomes, both because 'managers set the tone for workplace culture, safety, and overall performance' [Meat, poultry and seafood processing stakeholder, NSW], and also make decisions on adopting new technologies that can reduce the risk and incidence of injury and illness.

Climate change as a safety and productivity risk: Shifting weather patterns and extreme conditions threaten worker safety through exposure to heat stress, dehydration, vector-borne diseases, and injury from extreme weather events.³⁹ The industries supported by Skills Insight face increasing climate-related safety risks. Disruption to seasonal production cycles, volatile supply chains and the financial stress of yield losses compound existing psychosocial and physical safety hazards. Cumulative wealth loss in Australia from reduced agricultural and labour productivity from climate change could exceed \$4.2 trillion by 2100.⁴⁰ Consequently, integrating climate adaptation into workforce safety planning is no longer a peripheral concern but a prerequisite for sustaining the labour supply and operational continuity that many food and fibre industries depend on.

Quality skills system

Misalignment between training design, delivery and workplace realities:

Stakeholder feedback suggests that VET may not consistently align with contemporary workplace safety needs. Some respondents identified what they view as gaps in psychosocial risk management, wellbeing and inclusive practice within current qualifications, while others pointed to limitations in how safety content is delivered in practice. Safety training is described as concentrated in discrete units rather than reinforced across the broader qualification, with delivery 'focused on the what to do rather than the why' [Meat, poultry and seafood processing stakeholder, NSW], preventing a deeper understanding of risk and decision-making in high-pressure environments.

Emerging technologies, such as automation, precision tools and AI systems, are also felt to be outpacing training package updates and delivery models, creating emerging capability gaps in areas increasingly central to safe and efficient operations.

Workplace-based training delivery barriers: Practical, workplace-based training models such as apprenticeships and traineeships, mentoring and peer learning and on-the-job training are identified by stakeholders as the most effective approach in building

and maintaining safe work practices. Yet both formal and informal workplace-based training can be inconsistent in quality and accessibility. Many small businesses, which comprise around 98% of enterprises across Skills Insight's industry coverage,¹¹ lack the structured supervision capacity to deliver workplace-based training consistently. Additionally, [changes to the Australian apprenticeship incentive system](#) threatens the supply of training required to ensure a safe, productive workforce.

Evidence-based decision making

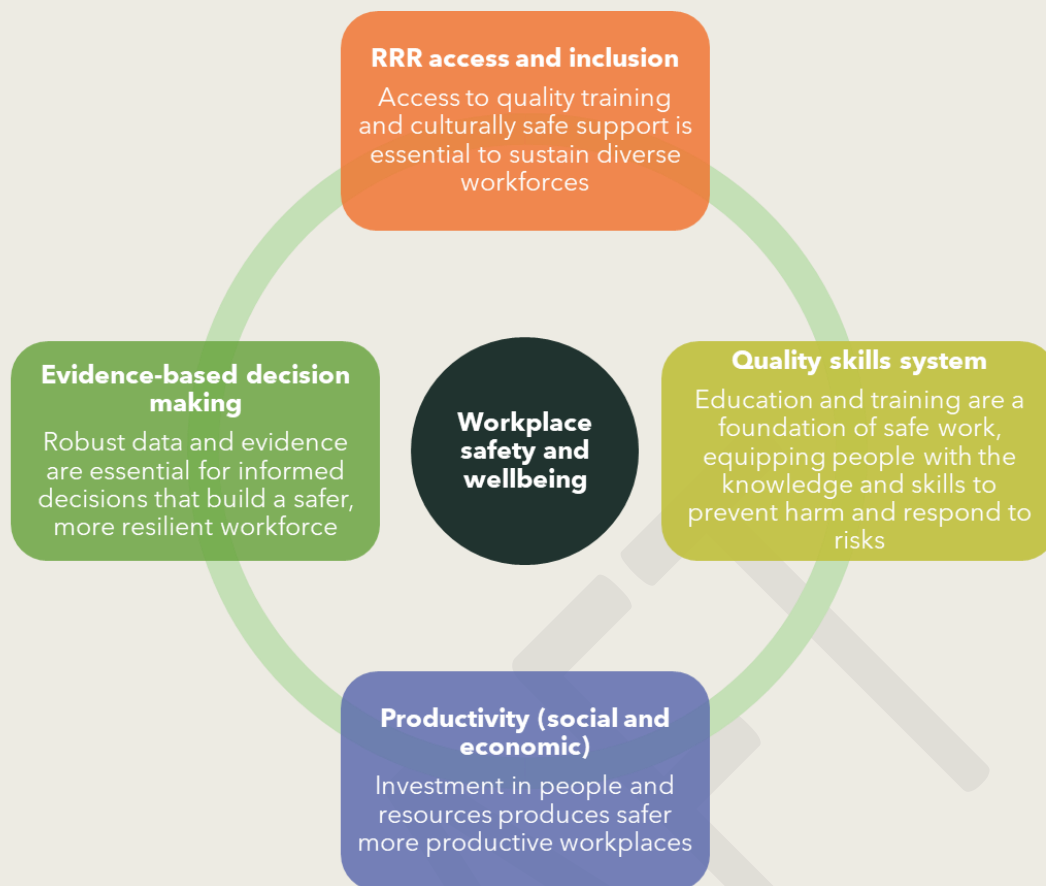
Fragmented and inconsistent data affects planning and prevention: Stakeholders report that data is difficult to access and often presented in formats that prevent national aggregation. Where data does exist, it is often deemed 'ad hoc' and 'inaccurate' as many workplaces still rely on paper-based reporting systems rather than a digitised, centralised database. Indeed, existing safety data systems are fragmented across jurisdictions and do not consistently disaggregate findings by gender, sector, or cultural background, producing generic interventions that fail to address actual disparities across workforce groups. This limits opportunities to identify where risk is concentrated, how trends emerge over time and where targeted intervention is most needed.

Limited early-warning systems and under-reporting of emerging risks: Current safety reporting systems rely heavily on worker self-disclosure; however, stakeholder feedback, supported by broader evidence, suggests that early-warning mechanisms - particularly for capturing near-misses and minor incidents - are not consistently embedded or utilised across workplaces. Respondents observed that hazards and incidents may go unreported where workers 'workers do not feel safe to speak up' [Cotton Australia, NSW], while near-miss reporting remains limited 'for fear of being ridiculed or disciplined by management' [Cotton Australia, NSW]. Psychosocial hazards, including fatigue, stress, bullying, and workplace gender-based violence, are frequently cited as areas where visibility and reporting remain limited.^{41,42} Reporting patterns may also be shaped by structural or demographic factors. For example, mature workers may attribute injuries to the effects of ageing rather than appropriate adjustments not being made, while migrant and PALM scheme workers face vulnerabilities that inhibit the reporting of unsafe conditions.⁴³ With these risks not being systematically captured, the jobs and skills system has a weaker evidence base for identifying which worker cohorts, regions or occupations are most at risk, weakening equity, accountability and effective allocation of safety resources and prevention efforts.

Workforce planning priorities

Skills Insight's four [workforce planning priorities](#) set out a shared agenda for strengthening workforce safety and wellbeing across the jobs and skills system. They articulate where coordinated action is required - across access and inclusion, skills and training, productivity, and data and evidence - to help stakeholders align actions, target resources and advocate for reform where it can deliver the greatest workforce and productivity impact.

- **RRR access and inclusion:** Equitable access to safe work and training is a precondition for workforce sustainability. In the context of geographic and service availability constraints, improving the accessibility and delivery of safety training and support, and addressing cultural, linguistic and demographic barriers, is critical to safer work and stronger workforce participation. Inclusive design strengthens hazard reporting, safety culture and retention, particularly in high-risk industries with diverse and transient workforces.
- **Quality skills system:** Safety capability must be embedded across training systems, not treated as a standalone requirement. Training that reflects real workplace risks, including psychosocial, cultural and climate-related hazards, and keeps pace with technological change is critical to preventing harm and supporting sound judgement in high-pressure environments. Strong alignment between training design, delivery and workplace practice underpins both worker wellbeing and operational effectiveness.
- **Productivity (social and economic):** Workplace safety is a core driver of productivity, labour supply and workforce resilience. Effective leadership, sustained safety investment and proactive risk management reduce turnover, downtime and skills loss, while supporting retention and participation in training. In the context of skills shortages, ageing workforces and climate disruption, strengthening safety capability is integral to maintaining viable businesses and securing long-term returns on workforce investment.
- **Evidence-based decision making:** Robust, accessible data is essential for prevention-focused workforce planning. Improving the quality, consistency and granularity of safety and workforce data, including better visibility of psychosocial risks and cohort-specific impacts, enables earlier intervention, targeted responses and more equitable allocation of resources. Strong evidence foundations support accountability, better decision-making and sustained safety improvement across the system.



Collectively, these four areas form Skills Insight’s strategic priorities and highlight where action is required to better enable access, equity, and resilience for education and training and workforce development.

Case study: safety and wellbeing in the Australian Cotton Industry

The Australian cotton industry faces safety and wellbeing challenges that reflect the broader structural complexities of regional agricultural workforces. The sector relies on large-scale machinery, seasonal production cycles and a workforce that includes temporary workers, working holiday makers, PALM scheme participants and family operators. Resourcing constraints, climate-related stressors, extended working hours during planting and harvest, and considerable distances to health services, emergency response infrastructure, and training providers all contribute to elevated physical and psychosocial risks. These characteristics underscore the need for safety approaches tailored to industry contexts.

Industry-led programs to increase safety and inclusion

The cotton sector has progressed safety outcomes through various industry-led programs. [My BMP](#) support growers to manage safety risks alongside productivity through accessible online tools and guidance. State-based programs like [AgSkilled](#) in

New South Wales and [SmartAg](#) in Queensland have expanded access to subsidised, workplace-based training, improving the reach of safety-critical skills in RRR settings.

The industry has also adapted how safety training is delivered, with increased use of plain-language materials, translated resources and flexible formats to support CALD workers and transient labour. Alongside physical safety, psychosocial wellbeing has gained greater prominence, reflected in stronger engagement with rural mental health services and programs such as the [Rural Financial Counselling Service](#), helping reduce stigma and support early intervention.

Workforce planning insights

Experience in the cotton industry demonstrates that safety and wellbeing outcomes improve when industry bodies, training providers and governments coordinate action around workplace realities. Targeted training delivery, inclusive design and sustained investment have strengthened safety capability in a high-risk, regionally dispersed workforce. This case study highlights the value of workforce planning approaches that recognise safety as integral to productivity, labour supply and workforce resilience, rather than as a standalone compliance issue.

Action areas

Meaningful and sustainable change requires coordinated action across industry, government, training providers and regulators; not through one-off interventions, but sustained investment in the conditions that enable safe work. When that investment is made, the evidence is clear: skills and training drive safer workplaces and safer workplaces drive productivity, supporting more resilient workforces.

The following action areas outline what needs to happen within the jobs and skills system to lead safer, more inclusive and resilient workforces.

1. **Adopt and scale place-based training in RRR areas.** Prioritise delivery models that reach dispersed and resource constrained workforces e.g. blended delivery, workplace-based training, local partnerships.
2. **Increase funding and incentives to expand total apprenticeship participation.** Focus on growing the overall apprenticeship and traineeship pathways, recognising stakeholder preferences for on-the-job structured supervision and mentoring models to build safety and wellbeing.
3. **Make inclusive delivery and assessment a key expectation of safety training.** Adopt plain-language and multi-format materials (including translated resources where needed) and strengthen guidance to support culturally safe training environments and assessment that address diverse worker needs.
4. **Prioritise management and leadership capabilities.** Support industry and workplace leaders to drive both technical and cultural safety improvements, while equipping workers with leadership capabilities to embed safety and wellbeing practices across all levels of an organisation.

5. **Advocate for improved workplace safety data collection** through national statistical frameworks to provide granular insights into workforce safety patterns and trends.
6. **Embed psychosocial safety, wellbeing and respectful workplace capability across relevant qualifications and pathways.** Strengthen training package outcomes so psychosocial hazard management, wellbeing and inclusive practice are integrated where risk is greatest, aligning skills reform with contemporary safety obligations and workplace realities.
7. **Integrate safety indicators into the OSCA** so the ABS can ensure high-risk occupations are flagged for priority updates as part of its maintenance strategy. This approach would strengthen alignment between the OSCA and other classifications and frameworks, enabling more responsive policy and program design to mitigate risks and support workforce wellbeing and development.
8. **Embed safety and wellbeing indicators into national taxonomies**, so more effective research, data collection and monitoring can occur, with complementary decision-making and strategies to educate, support and enable operators and workers.

Actions and consultation

 Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worker Safety Induction Pilot• Training Support Materials for Meat Safety• Pathway to Tree Felling Skills
 Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved Training Pathways and Safety in Racing• Tree Allocation Partnerships
 Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation paper: Leading a safer, inclusive and resilient workforce• Response to the JSA National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper• Skills Insight response to Revised Apprenticeship Priority List Methodology Discussion Paper

Conclusion

Skilling the path to sustainable and productive workforces

This Workforce Plan reinforces the central proposition that accessible, high-quality education and training are foundational to safe, sustainable and productive workforces. By investing in skills at all levels, industry can lift productivity and profitability, strengthen professional capability, and support the adoption of best practice. These outcomes, in turn, enable safer, more resilient workplaces and improve the attraction and retention of a diverse workforce across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. Progress across these dimensions is mutually reinforcing: improvements in skills, systems and workforce capability compound over time, delivering benefits for individuals, businesses and the broader economy.

The Workforce Plan also reflects Skills Insight's commitment to translating evidence and industry intelligence into action. Workforce planning is not a static product, but a cycle of listening, analysis, prioritisation and delivery. In 2026, Skills Insight will launch cross-sectoral and industry-specific workforce planning webpages that showcase the latest data, analysis and industry priorities.

Ongoing guidance from the JSC Stakeholder Forum, supported by sector-based stakeholder networks and future Industry Advisory Panels, plays a critical role, helping to test evidence against lived experience, identify emerging risks and opportunities, and shape a focused pipeline of projects and reform priorities. Through these mechanisms, Skills Insight will continue to refine our strategic plan, co-design solutions with industry, and ensure that projects are targeted, credible and capable of delivering measurable impact across the skills system.

Proposed, current and complete projects, activities and consultations

Proposed projects, activities and consultations

- Growth Skills Review

Current activities and projects

- [AFAM - Identifying the true costs of RTO delivery in regional NSW](#)
- [Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)
- [Australia's Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Furnishing Apprenticeship Guidance Project](#)

- [Improved Training Pathways and Safety in Racing](#)
- [Landscaping Skills Review](#)
- [Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations Project](#)
- [Mapping Workplace Training to PPM Qualifications](#)
- [Meat Processing Training Resources](#)
- [New Entrants as Sewing Machinists](#)
- [Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making](#)
- [Retail Butchery and Smallgoods](#)
- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Textile Flooring Manufacturing Pathway](#)
- [Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Skills Mapping](#)
- [Tree Allocation Partnerships](#)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Veterinary Nursing Review](#)

Active and complete consultations

- [A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List](#)
- Cross-JSC contributions coordinated by Future Skills Organisation for the National AI Skills Report.
- [Gender Economic Equity study](#)
- [JSA - Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia](#)
- [Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [OSCA Maintenance Strategy](#)
- [Skills Insight response to Revised Apprenticeship Priority List Methodology Discussion Paper](#)
- [Stakeholder survey on Changes to Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System](#)

Complete activities and projects

- [AHC Improvements Project](#)
- [Attraction and retention tools for employers](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Connecting RTOs & Employers](#)
- [Essential Meat Processing Skills](#)
- [Exploring Training Demand & Supply Challenges](#)

- [From Training Package to Training Delivery](#)
- [Livestock Operations](#)
- [Pathway to Tree Felling Skills](#)
- [Shearing and Wool Classing](#)
- [Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights](#)
- [Training Support Materials for Meat Safety](#)
- [Tree Felling](#)
- [Window Furnishings and Shade Sails](#)
- [Wood Machining Research](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)

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