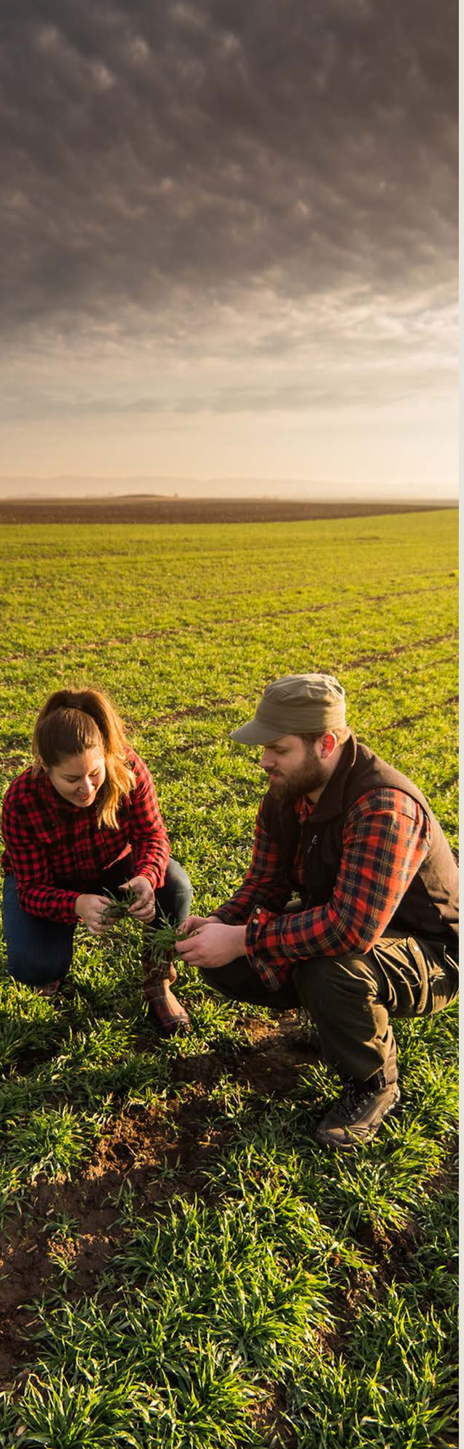






Skills Insight

Year in Review

2025 - 2026

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Message from the Chair

This year demonstrated the value of bringing employers, workers and governments together to shape the future of Australia's skills system. Across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries, this tripartite collaboration sharpened our understanding of workforce challenges and identified practical responses that improve productivity and safety in the workplace.

As Australia's Jobs and Skills Council for these industries, Skills Insight plays a unique role. This role is exercised through genuine industry leadership: our Members, Stakeholder Networks and Stakeholder Forum guide our priorities and direction, ensuring our work reflects the needs of industry, workers and communities. Supported by our partners ForestWorks and MINTRAC, this provides a trusted mechanism through which the combined experience of industry, unions and government is translated into evidence, advice and action that informs national decision-making.

That advocacy is central to our role. Through national policy submissions, we brought an industry-informed voice to the National Food Security Strategy, the review of the Jobs and Skills Australia Act, and the National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. When the methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List was revised, we made the case that agribusiness industries risked being disadvantaged despite their critical role in food security, biosecurity, regional economies and the net-zero transition. Some of these issues remain, and we will keep pressing them on industry's behalf. We also helped stakeholders shape national workforce data, supporting industry to inform the Australian Bureau of Statistics review of occupation classifications. That work will continue, so that the evidence and experience of our industries informs the ABS and other decision-makers who rely on accurate workforce data to guide national planning.

This year also marked the conclusion of Skills Insight's stewardship of the Agriculture, Food and Animal Management Industry Training Advisory Body in New South Wales, as the contract transitions to MINTRAC. Thank you to the many stakeholders who contributed their expertise throughout our time working with AFAM.

Stakeholders continued to emphasise workforce attraction and retention, access to training in regional, rural and remote communities, the capability of the vocational education and training workforce, and qualifications that reflect contemporary practice. These challenges matter because a skilled workforce is fundamental to a more productive and safer industry, and to Australia's economic prosperity, food security, environmental stewardship and sovereign capability.

Our value is measured not by the volume of our activity but by the impact of our work and the strength of the case we make on industry's behalf. On behalf of the Board, I thank our Members, stakeholders, partners and staff. The trust placed in Skills Insight is both a privilege and a responsibility, and as workforce challenges evolve, the ability to bring employers, unions and government together around shared evidence will only become more valuable to the industries and communities we serve.

Todd Loydell



Message from the CEO

Every year, our stakeholders give us a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities facing the industries we support. During 2025-26, one message was consistent: the best workforce solutions are developed when employers, workers, TAFEs and training providers, and governments work together, and when evidence and industry experience come together to drive real impact.

Across more than 4,000 stakeholders and 1,600 organisations, tripartite engagement reinforced the importance of training that keeps pace with industry, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities where workforce pressures are acute. Time and again, stakeholders told us: skills are what allow their people to work more productively and to go home safely, and the two cannot be pulled apart.

What we heard directly shaped what we delivered. We progressed a nationally recognised agricultural trade apprenticeship pathway to create recognised skills and stronger career opportunities in agriculture. We partnered with the Aboriginal Sea Company to support First Nations-led aquaculture training delivered on Country, and we began building the case for a formal skills recognition pathway so that workers' existing on-the-job training can be recognised against national qualifications. Supported by our delivery partners, MINTRAC and ForestWorks, and above all by the close engagement of industry, these are the kinds of concrete outcomes that would not otherwise exist.

Our contribution also extends beyond our own industries. As one of Australia's Jobs and Skills Councils, Skills Insight works alongside the other JSCs to strengthen the skills system as a whole, and this year we were proud to lead cross-JSC work on qualification reform. This is where the tripartite model is most powerful: employers, unions and governments, working through the JSC network, turning a national reform ambition into qualifications that are more usable, more relevant, and better aligned to the demands of modern workplaces.

To the many stakeholders who contributed their time and expertise this year, thank you. Your willingness to engage, challenge ideas and share practical experience strengthens not only our work but the broader skills system. I also thank the Skills Insight team, past and present, whose dedication over the year turned that insight into practical outcomes. In the year ahead, we want to go further: moving from static reporting towards living workforce intelligence that industry can draw on directly, so that the evidence you help us build is easier to access, act on and turn into results.

Dugald Murray



Our role

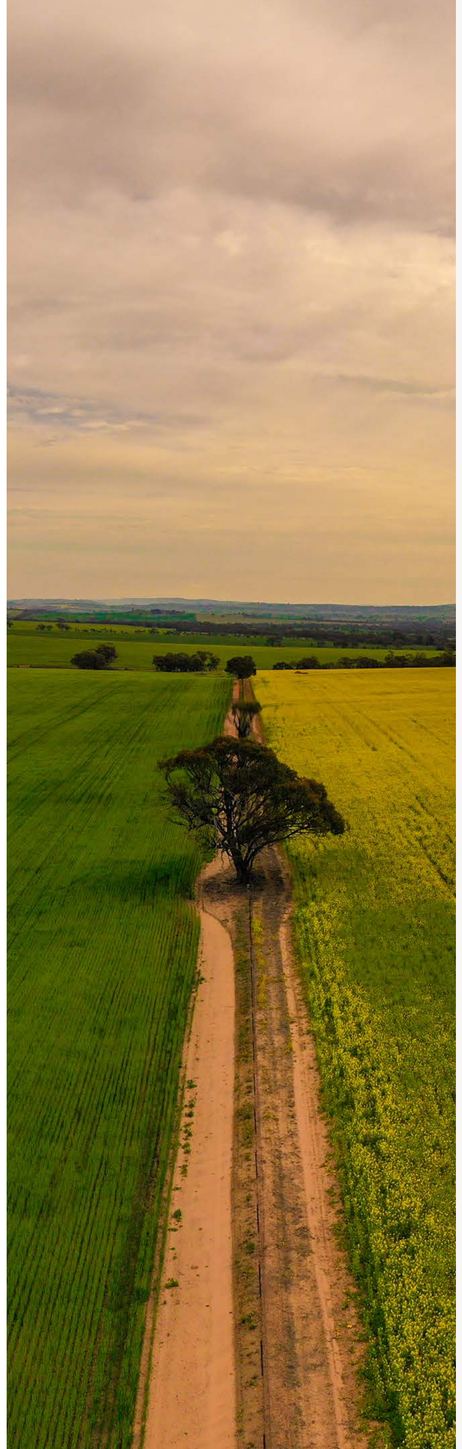
Skills Insight is Australia's Jobs and Skills Council for agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries.

Vision

People have access to quality training and valued careers that support the evolving skill needs of Australian industry.

Mission

Skills Insight, through research and collaboration, provides powerful insights on Australia's skills system to benefit industry, learners and their career development, and support the skills ecosystem responsiveness to current and emerging workforce challenges and opportunities.



Supporting industries that are essential to Australia's future

We work with industries that care for Australia's land, water, animals and food systems, and that underpin essential supply chains across the economy. These industries are critical to national food security, environmental stewardship, sovereign capability, regional employment and Australia's transition to a net-zero future. Operating largely outside our major capital cities, these industries are the economic anchors of regional, rural and remote communities.

Through expertise in biosecurity, ecosystem management and animal welfare practices, these industries sustain Australia's flora, fauna and farm production. They deliver world-class agricultural products and produce, and process the raw materials used for essential items such as housing, clothing, and hygiene products. While this workforce spans diverse areas of expertise, the value chain shares similar priorities, including protecting Australia's $6.5 trillion in environmental assets.

We work with employers, industry bodies, unions, training providers and governments to understand skills needs and develop practical, industry-led workforce solutions.

Skills Insight has collaborative partnerships with MINTRAC and ForestWorks to support stakeholder engagement activities and JSC projects within the following industries:

MINTRAC
RESPECTED LEADERS IN INDUSTRY TRAINING

Meat, poultry and seafood processing

ForestWorks

Forestry, timber, paper, fibre and furnishing

Our work is industry-led

Our work is guided by industry governance groups that provide informed, evidence-based advice to shape our activities and set our priorities. These include Stakeholder Networks, Technical Committees, Subject Matter Expert Working Groups and a Stakeholder Forum. Together, they help influence Australia's vocational education and training system, ensuring it responds to the needs of industry, workers and communities.

The Stakeholder Networks are made up of as many as 200 industry and association members. The Stakeholder Forum is made up of 13 representatives from the Stakeholder Networks and nine representatives from large employee or employer representative bodies and/or organisations with large cross-sectoral coverage.

349
members

13
Network representatives

22
representatives on Stakeholder Forum

4,028
stakeholders engaged across

1,675
organisations

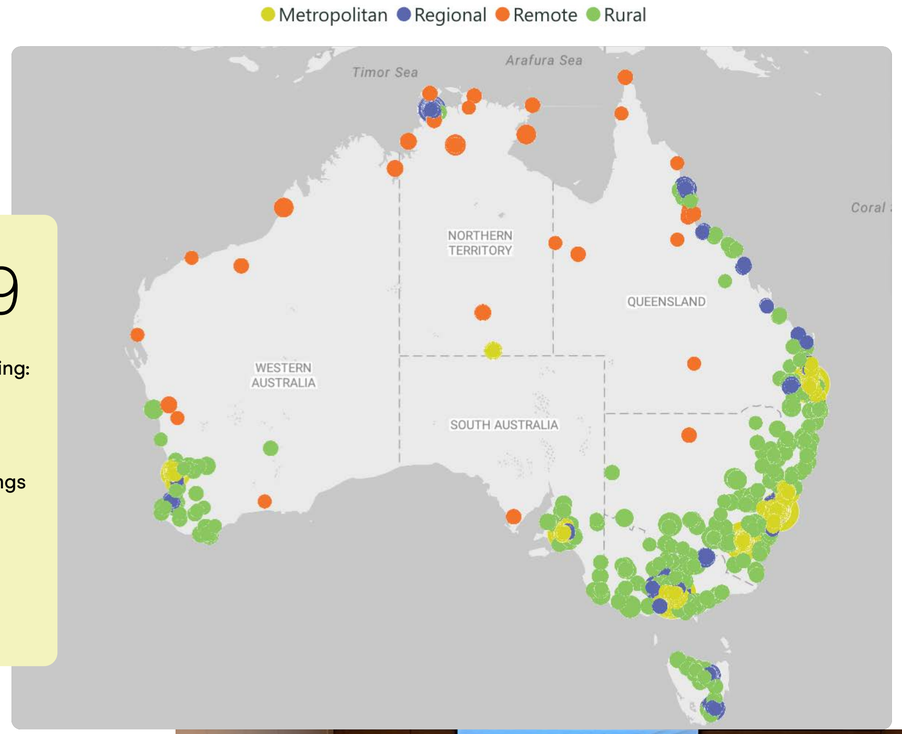
1,381
stakeholders based in regional, rural and remote areas

19,509
enagement interactions, including:

1,818
stakeholder meetings

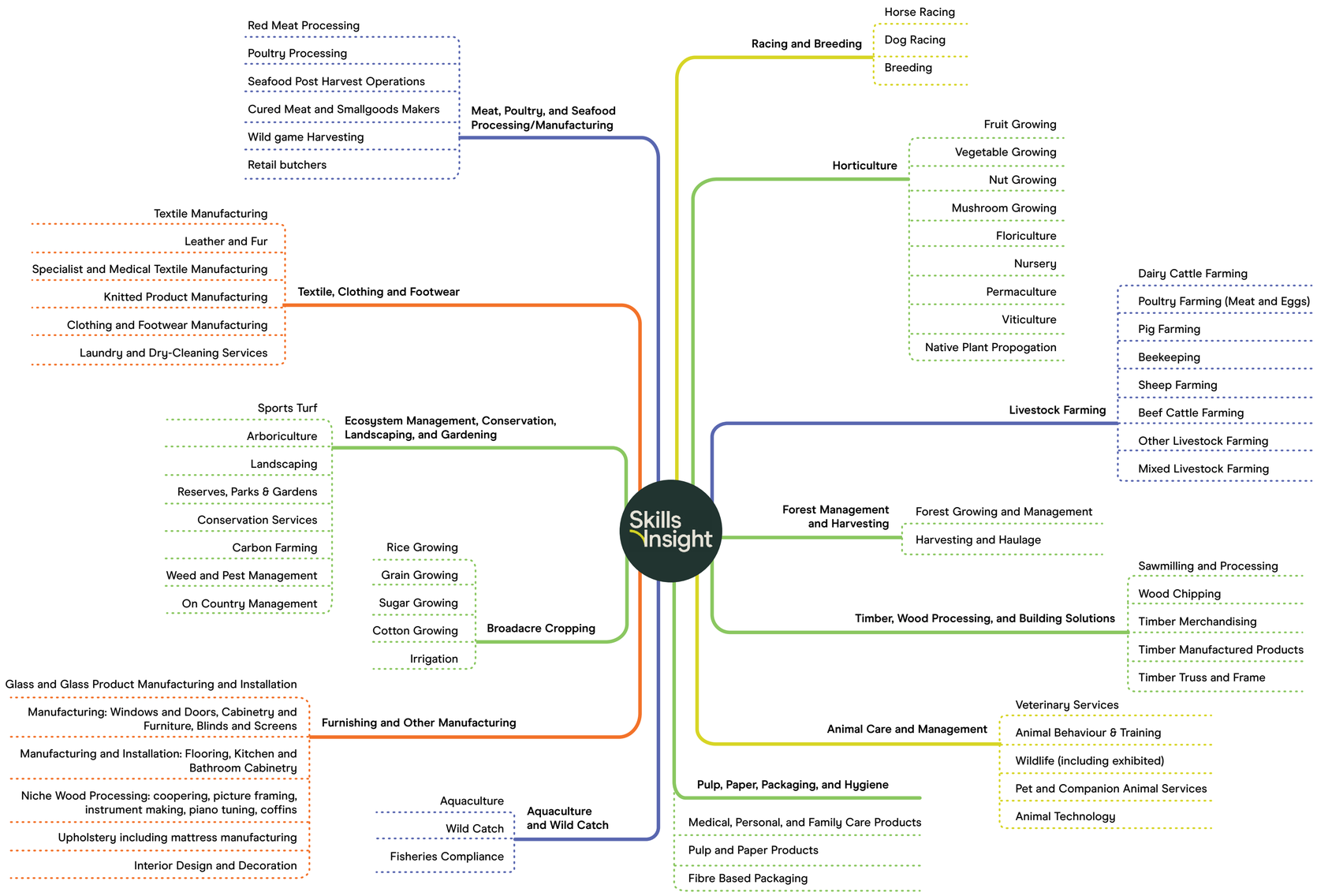
220
site visits and workshops

Stakeholder engagement locations between July 2025-June 2026





Right: The Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training, launching our Workforce Plan 2025-2026 at the Stakeholder Forum September 2025 meeting. The Stakeholder Forum is a key governance body informing and providing guidance on Skills Insight's activities. The Forum is made up of 22 representatives and has been structured in this way to recognise the diversity of our stakeholders.



Industry coverage

13
industries

70+
sub-sectors

626,000+
employees

Workforce Plan

Our annual Workforce Plan is the culmination of all the evidence and insights stakeholders provide to us through our engagements, projects and research. Based on this evidence, the 2025-2026 Workforce Plan outlined priorities, and set out an action plan that guided our projects and research over the year.

Workforce Plan priorities

Access and inclusion

Making sure people in regional, rural and remote areas, and across all parts of the workforce, can access the training they need.

Evidence-based decision making

Closing the gaps in national data so that policy and funding decisions reflect what's really happening on the ground.

Productivity and capability

Keeping qualifications and training current as digital technology, automation and sustainability reshape the way these industries work.

Quality skills system

Making sure the skills system recognises real workplace capability and delivers training that's practical, accessible and fit for purpose.



Above: At the September Forum meeting and Workforce Plan launch: Les Gordon, Skills Insight Director; Jessica Hocking, Skills Insight Chief Operating Officer (acting CEO); Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training; Duncan Fraser, Skills Insight Director; Jenny Kruschel, Skills Insight Director; Joshua Rayner, Skills Insight Executive Director Skills Strategies.



Above: Jessica Hocking, Skills Insight Chief Operating Officer and Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training.



Above: The Hon Andrew Giles MP discussing the Workforce Plan with Dr Niall Smith, Skills Insight Head of Research and Workforce Planning.

Projects

Throughout 2025–26, we collaborated with stakeholders across industry and the VET sector to explore challenges, identify opportunities, and develop practical solutions.

Highlights

- Work continued the **development of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship** that gives learners clearer career pathways and recognised skills, while strengthening agriculture's ability to attract, develop and retain its future workforce.
- We were proud to partner with Aboriginal Sea Company to support the growth of First Nations aquaculture enterprises. By working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Aboriginal Sea Company is leading the development of tools to support the delivery of **culturally appropriate aquaculture training on Country**.
- Continuing to support the application and improvement of national **qualification and VET system reform**.
- Investigating alternative sources of evidence to inform decision-making for VET policy, to **support access to training in regional, rural and remote areas**.
- Developing industry-led strategies to improve the **attraction and retention of a suitably skilled VET workforce**.
- Building a case for a **formal skills recognition pathway** by mapping existing workplace training to nationally recognised PPM qualifications.

27
completed projects

12
new projects

15
projects ongoing

171
project workshops/ site visits

121
in person

50
online

276
Rural interactions

207
Regional interactions

46
Remote interactions



Projects



Training Package projects

- Ag Trade Apprenticeship Qualification
- Essential Meat Processing Skills
- Improved Training Pathways in Racing and Breeding
- Meat Processing Pathways
- Retail Butchery and Smallgoods
- Rural Operations
- Textile Flooring Manufacturing Pathway
- Veterinary Nursing Review
- Window Furnishings and Shade Sails

Above: Stakeholder Engagement Manger Jess Cleary and Project Manager Penny McQueen visited Avenel Equine Hospital during National Thoroughbred Week and as part of the Veterinary Nursing Review Project.



Pilot projects

- Attraction and Retention Guidance
- Flock Safe
- Mapping Workplace Training to PPM Qualifications
- New Entrants as Sewing Machinists
- Tree Allocation Partnerships
- Worker Safety Induction Pilot

Above: Working Group Members for the Attraction and Retention Guidance project.



Above: Developing Northern Australia: Skills Insight hosted a consultative workshop and, together with the other JSCs, ran an interactive booth to engage directly with attendees, gaining insights into workforce development, training access, and delivery challenges unique to northern Australia. Left to right: Niall Smith (Skills Insight Executive Manager: Research and Workforce Planning) Jana Perera (Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance), Amy Prendergast (HumanAbility), Lena Way (Skills Insight Executive Manager Stakeholder Engagement), Joshua Rayner (Skills Insight Executive Director Skills Strategies), Emma King (HumanAbility), Trevor Gauld (Jobs & Skills Australia), Alison Wall (Future Skills Organisation)

Projects with the below symbols are managed with the support of MINTRAC or ForestWorks as part of our collaborative partbership.

MINTRAC

ForestWorks

Projects



Implementation support projects

- Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools
- Furnishing Apprenticeship Guidance Project
- Workshop to aid the development of the Northern Australia Workforce Plan

Above: Workshop attendees for the Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools Project, including Aboriginal Sea Company; community members from Anindilyakwa, Quandamooka, Mantiyupwi and Wadeye; Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board; Darwin Aquaculture Centre; Charles Darwin University and Skills Insight.



Research projects

- Biosecurity Skills Review
- Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades
- Landscaping Skills Review
- Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations
- Pathway to Tree Felling Skills
- Regional, Rural and Remote VET Policy Decision Making
- Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights
- Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Skills Mapping
- Vocational Education and Training Workforce

Above: A visit to Second Stitch to explore the skills, experiences and challenges within the clothing repairs and alterations sub-sector was an important part of the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) Skills Mapping Project.



Above: The Vet Workforce Project roundtables and networking events across the country with stakeholders joining the team in South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. Pictured in Kununurra (WA), L-R: Courtney Topliss, Richard Beeck, Belinda Hutchinson, Allison Coleman, Di Bates. Front: Rose Stephens and Diana McNaughton.

Submissions

Skills Insight contributed to national policy discussions throughout 2025–26, using stakeholder feedback and workforce planning insights to advocate for industry-informed skills and workforce solutions.

- Climate Change Authority 2025 Annual Progress Report
- Jobs and Skills Australia Regional Roadmap Phase 1
- National Food Security Strategy discussion paper
- National Skills Taxonomy update
- National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry discussion paper
- Productivity Commission National Competition Analysis 2025
- Review of the Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022
- Senate Select Committee on Productivity in Australia discussion paper
- Our response to the Revised Methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List highlighted concerns the agribusiness industries could be disadvantaged despite being critical to food security, biosecurity, regional economies and aspects of the net-zero transition.
- Skills Insight helped stakeholders engage with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) review of the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), supporting industry to provide evidence on occupation definitions, skill levels and emerging workforce needs to help inform national workforce data and planning.

View our submissions on our Resources webpage

Our ITAB role

This year marked the conclusion of Skills Insight's stewardship of the AFAM ITAB contract which has now transitioned to MINTRAC. We thank the many stakeholders who contributed their expertise, insights and support throughout our time working with AFAM.

Throughout 2025–26, the Agriculture, Food and Animal Management (AFAM) Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB) worked with stakeholders across New South Wales to understand factors influencing workforce development, training outcomes and future skills needs.

These consultations informed two major reports, providing evidence to inform decisions about training investment, access and workforce development:

- The Industry Training Priority Report 2025
- Identifying the True Costs of RTO Delivery in Regional NSW.



AFAM Executive Officer Ben Holmes visited Ballot Box Farm in Yeoval where Australian Agricultural Training (AAT) are delivering shearing qualifications.



On Bollanolla Farm in Valla on the Mid North Coast staff discussed plans to operate as an Indigenous nursery and First Nations social enterprise, with a strong focus on self-determination in product development and a minimal maintenance production system.



Current apprentices in front of Gumnut Patisserie's 'Apprentice Wall of Fame' showcasing the more than 30 apprentices that have undertaken or completed training at the Southern Highlands bakery.

Snapshot of collaborations and connections



Left: South Australian Horse Industry event. Roundtable and networking events were held around the country to engage with stakeholders about local workforce development needs, including discussions on the VET Workforce Project and Ag Trade Apprenticeship project.



Left: A visit to the Bribie Island Research Centre with delegates from the Proaqua Australian Prawn Farmers Association (APFA) Symposium was an opportunity to learn how cutting-edge aquaculture innovations, including the use of AI, are building a future-ready seafood sector.



Right: Brant Doyle and Lynne McCartney from ConnectGV at the Billabong Gardens Complex, where discussions explored the training and skill requirements of clients participating in the wholesale nursery program.



Left: Skills Insight's Executive Director Skills Strategies Joshua Raynor facilitating the JSC workshop at the Developing Northern Australia Conference.

Snapshot of collaborations and connections



Left: Stakeholder Engagement Manager Diana McNaughton attended an industry event hosted by Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria (NGIV) including a behind-the-scenes tour of Kurranga Native Nursery.





Left: Stakeholder Engagement Manager Brendan White connected with Lucy Gregg and Alexandra Lashchuk from AUSVEG at their offices in Glen Iris, Melbourne (left) and with Mark Pullin from VEG Ed at Velisha Farms.

Left: Executive Manager Skills Standards and Qualification Reform Danni McDonald and Project Manager Penny McQueen presenting at the National VET Conference about putting Qualification Reform into practice.



Right: The AgXChange Conference provided an excellent opportunity to meet and collaborate with key industry stakeholders and present an update on the Ag Trade Apprenticeship Project.



Left: Skills Insight hosted a senior delegation from India, bringing together organisations responsible for skills policy, workforce development and agricultural capability in both countries. Discussions included the valuable perspectives of Dr Satender Singh Arya, CEO of the Agriculture Skill Council of India.

Skills Insight

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