

MARCH 2023

NATIONAL OFFICE MONTHLY REPORT

FROM THE CEO

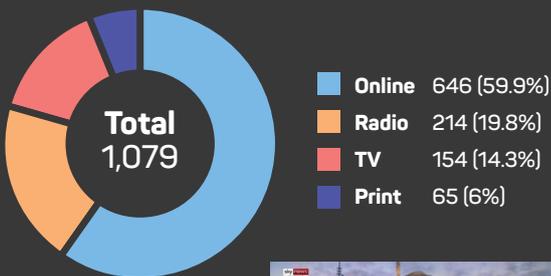
The volatility and fragility of the industry have been front and centre of our advocacy during March. The difficulties in managing fixed price contracts signed prior to the inflationary peaks, shortage of trades, and dwindling number of new contracts due to costs and interest rate hikes have resulted in a significant increase in media coverage of the sector. We are mindful that this is not just a stress in the housing sector but the entire ecosystem of the built environment, with the industry always in a precarious position during demand peaks. Our strategy is to identify the system's stress but not undermine industry confidence. Interestingly, the insolvency figures identify that current insolvencies are in-line with the 10-year average for the industry.

Our approach to assisting the industry is two-fold. First is to advocate on the issues that are adversely affecting the industry, including labour shortages, materials, planning, lack of titled land, government support of social and affordable housing, government investment in infrastructure, and limit costs on doing business, including industrial relations changes. Secondly, to lead on long-term sustainable business measures that will be encompassed in our 2050 Industry Sustainability Goals to be released in May. Much work has been undertaken by the various Master Builders Australia policy committees over the past month to identify the priorities and pathway for our ambitions, following the endorsement of the Goals by the Policy Forum in February.

ADVOCACY

March saw a lot of reactive media around economic challenges from interest rates, labour shortages, inflation and housing shortages.

We responded to over 30 media queries which generated over 1,000 news items across print, online, TV and radio. Our potential audience reach over the period was 35.26 million.



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

We issued a number of media releases responding to economic developments and ABS data over the month including the RBA's decision to raise interest rates and the stubbornly high entrenched inflation figures in the building and construction industry.

Our messaging acknowledges the difficult decision by the RBA to continue to raise rates without the government exploring other fiscal and policy measures to control inflation. We continue to promote the importance of a strong building industry which underpins a strong economy.

Despite an easing in the annual rate of inflation, the cost of new dwelling purchases was still up by 13 per cent this month and we used the opportunity to advocate for regulatory changes to tackle these challenges head-on, such as fairer ways of sharing the risks between those paying for major projects and the businesses carrying out the work. We also pushed for the need to reduce the cost of doing business by lightening the regulatory burdens and increasing the flexibility of our planning laws, as well as ensuring a flexible industrial relations system.

There were also reports that Australia is facing a migration surge of 650,000 people over the next two years and we were quick to warn that substantial investment in infrastructure and housing is required.



Pay surge hits building sector

Employment
Larry Schilinger
Inflation coupled with labour shortages has led to the strongest growth in property pay since the global financial crisis, leading to a 10% increase in wages for building and construction workers, where profit margins have been hit and a lot of business has been lost to the work.

In the money
Total annual remuneration for property professionals, Mar 2023

Role	Median	Change
Finance manager & IT	460,000	+5.0
Project development	340,000	+5.0
Business development	290,000	+4.8
Senior manager	240,000	+4.1
Senior analyst	180,000	+4.1
Senior project manager	130,000	+3.0
Senior business manager	90,000	+4.0
Assistant manager	60,000	+4.0

...and 6% per cent for mid-level employees, as firms find it difficult to retain high quality workers are expected to bid...

HOUSING LEGISLATION

Earlier this month National Director of Industry Policy Alex Waldren addressed the Housing Bills Economic Legislation Committee inquiry which looked at the Housing Australia Future Fund, Supply and Affordability Council and Housing Australia.

Alex spoke of the imperative to find solutions to address affordable housing and that these bills are a measured next step. Her opening statement was circulated with the media and relevant MPs.

While the government intended to pass this legislation in the last sitting fortnight before the May budget, the Greens were unable to reach a deal with the Labor Party. While members of NAHA including the MBA were advocating for increased investment to \$20 billion into the HAFF, we urged The Greens and crossbench to consider passing the legislation as is and to not hold up the important infrastructure required to enable increased investment in the affordable and social housing space. We will continue to lobby the crossbench to support the legislation over the coming weeks.

Following our conversations with Minister Julie Collins at the Leaders Summit in February and continued dialogue with her office on the impact the HomeBuilder deadline of 30 April will have on clients, the Minister announced a two-year extension. We backed in the announcement in the media throughout the day.



PARTNERING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

There's been an uplift across industry associations wanting to partner to tackle some of the challenges facing the economy. The first partnership was the establishment of the National Alliance for Regionalisation which saw 32 industry bodies come together to discuss housing, infrastructure, and population among other things. Master Builders was frequently referenced in the media as one of the peak industry lobbies to participate. The roundtable provided an opportunity for further partnerships to develop including a future roundtable that will be held with the Insurance Council of Australia and other bodies around land use planning. More information will be provided next month.

As part of our work on sustainability of the industry, Master Builders has joined the Australian Sustainable Built Environment (ASBEC) to formalise key stakeholder partnerships to assist with transition to a net zero built environment.

New push to fire up our regional engine room

EXCLUSIVE
STEPHEN LENN
SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

Regional Australia might be the nation's economic engine room but it is spitting and seething with policy-makers and politicians who are million people living there, and the industry's role in it.

Greater emphasis must be placed on measures such as creating school and post-school qualifications, boosting the proportion of skilled workers, supporting more childcare options and encouraging more health professionals and migrants to settle outside the capital cities.

This is the message from a cross-discipline group of peak organisations that form the new National Alliance for Regionalisation, launching in Canberra on Tuesday.

The 32-member alliance, which includes the Business Council of Australia, Australian Medical Association, Australian Industry Group and Master Builders Australia, will sign on to a range of 10-year goals to rebadge the nation from one of the world's most city-centric to one that more equitably supports livability and productivity across the country.

The plan, developed by the Regional Australia Institute, is looking to create a fairer, younger, more prosperous and more balanced regional Australia for the 11 million people anticipated to be living there by 2032. If achieved, RAI modelling calculates a \$180 billion boost to national GDP.

"If we want regional kids are still behind their school counterparts at school, RAI chief executive, All these issues are in-



"People in regional year. "There's no lack of wonder- out of step with global population trails, or being handed to arson for

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Sustainability | Video

Sustainable built environment imperative for the future of the industry

Eco Voice | March 31, 2023 | Reply

Media release

asbec
Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council

Master Builders Australia and Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council

31 March 2023

The peak national body representing the building and construction industry has taken another step in its commitment to a sustainable built environment by joining the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC).

Master Builders Australia CEO Denita Wawn says the industry is committed to meeting its net zero obligations and is formalising partnerships with key stakeholders to better utilise the network of expertise on critical policy reform areas.

"The transition to a net zero built environment is one of the most significant policy reform areas impacting building and construction and the future direction of the sector.

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2023 AND WOMEN BUILDING AUSTRALIA

Promotion is underway for the Business Excellence Awards both online and in the media. The awards recognise business best practice, improvement and innovation initiatives, compliance, safety, customer service and corporate social responsibility.

Nominations are open to Master Builders members across all state and territory associations providing an opportunity to be recognised as leaders in the industry.

Nominations will close Friday 4 August 2023 with the gala dinner and awards night held on Wednesday 6 September in Sydney, NSW. For more information visit the Master Builders Australia website.

Through Women Building Australia we used International Women's Day on March 8 to promote the brand and advocate for policy prioritisation towards attracting more women into our workforce. As Minister O'Connor recently pointed out, most of the jobs on the skills shortage list are struggling with gender imbalances. With only 14 per cent of the workforce in the industry being female, we are missing out on the skills and talents of half the population.



COVER STORY

Women's work
#EmbraceEquity

“Managers take note that women in the kitchen built it. It's an active labour shortage in the industry building and construction leaders see International Women's Day on Wednesday, March 8 as an opportunity to celebrate the women who are all too often overlooked in the industry.

Master Builders Australia (MBA) chief executive Diana Jenkins says the industry is working ahead of attracting more women into the workforce, but also says the industry's gender pay gap is widening faster than average elsewhere.

“Women currently make up only 14 per cent of the industry's total workforce,” says Morgan. “There is still professional working in the industry are women, but only 13 per cent are building trades and technicians. The industry is missing out on the skills and talents of half the population. Improving the attractiveness of the industry to women presents a major opportunity to increase the pool of potential workers.”

Delivered through Master Builders, the Women Building Australia initiative – supported by a Federal Government grant – offers career expos, a female-led business register, business excellence training and a dedicated harassment and discrimination support line.

“There are more female trades and technicians in construction than ever before,” Watts says, “and the number of female construction trade apprentices has more than doubled in the last five years. So it is moving in the right direction.”

IF SHE BUILDS IT, THEY WILL COME

The growing of girls has changed since Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792 – it's always been education. “Thousands” of Australian women have already been through online building and design courses at Builders Collective, launched in 2018 to develop and train-of seven Rebecka Morgan as a “role model for women” who want to research, build and develop.

“The biggest thing about building and renovating is that it's really lonely,” Morgan says. “No one else can do it. It's kind of like having a server hobby. No one actually comes unless they've got a newborn baby of that age... they don't want to know the whole world.”

Today the Collective supports two groups across the country: Builders wanting to get their own house right the first time and Developers looking to make shift or supplement their careers by renovating for profit. Greater awareness among women that they're responsible for their financial future “has been huge,” Morgan says.

“Women now have an understanding that they need to find for themselves,” she says. “In order to be financially free and financially secure, they need to have a plan and an action in place that doesn't involve relying on a man – and I think we're seeing so much of that happen now. Our children (Bianca) have raised with independence in mind and not relying on someone to look after me.”

“Really people just want a hand up. It's always going to be hard and scary. The first time you do anything it's a bit hard and scary, but so worthwhile, and you just want someone to help you along that way.”

SAY IT LOUD, SAY IT PROUD

“Talking numbers is super tedious,” but it's just another false wall Morgan casually demolishes without a backward glance.

“You can't talk about how much things cost or what profit you make on a project in a normal space or forum, but – we can discuss that and collectively learn a lot better through each of our mistakes and wins,” she says.

Morgan believes many women are still too afraid to tell others what they want to do. “I was afraid when I started out,” she says. “It's really hard to say, ‘I'm a builder, I'm a developer.’ Even now it's like, ‘Oh, you a developer is someone who builds high rise?’”

“No, and really, a developer is someone who makes money from renovating and building for profit.”

“It's just that we've got these words

Words: Diana Jenkins, Catherine Nilue-Roules

How the industry is changing one site at a time

Picture: supplied

MASTER BUILDERS PODCAST

Since our last update, we have released two new podcasts. The first was an episode celebrating international women's day featuring a panel of industry leaders:

- Grace Ferreira, Director of Master Builders Australia & Co-founder of Canberra-based Pacific Formwork and Precast Projects.
- Michael Foreman, Manager, Engineering - Fleurieu Connections Alliance & Port Wakefield to Port Augusta Alliance in South Australia.
- Bek Bishop, Co-Founder of Elite Building Services (Vic) Pty Ltd, a custom home builder in South-East Victoria & Gippsland.

The guests shared their passion and stories around increasing female participation in our industry, sharing their knowledge through mentorship, and building programs that bring women and men together to support females in the industry.



CLICK TO LISTEN

The next podcast featured Master Builders Deputy CEO Shaun Schmitke who gave a quick run down of the recent industrial relations legislation and how that impacts business in our industry. This is episode one in a two-part series which will also explore what is on the horizon with the Government's upcoming industrial relations legislation.

NATIONAL ECONOMIC DATA SNAPSHOT

NON-RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

January 2023

1,831 non-residential building jobs valued at **\$3,451.0 million** were approved in AUS.

\$1,884,781 average value of non-residential building jobs approved.

33.8% public sector share of non-residential building jobs approved.

Non-residential building jobs approved

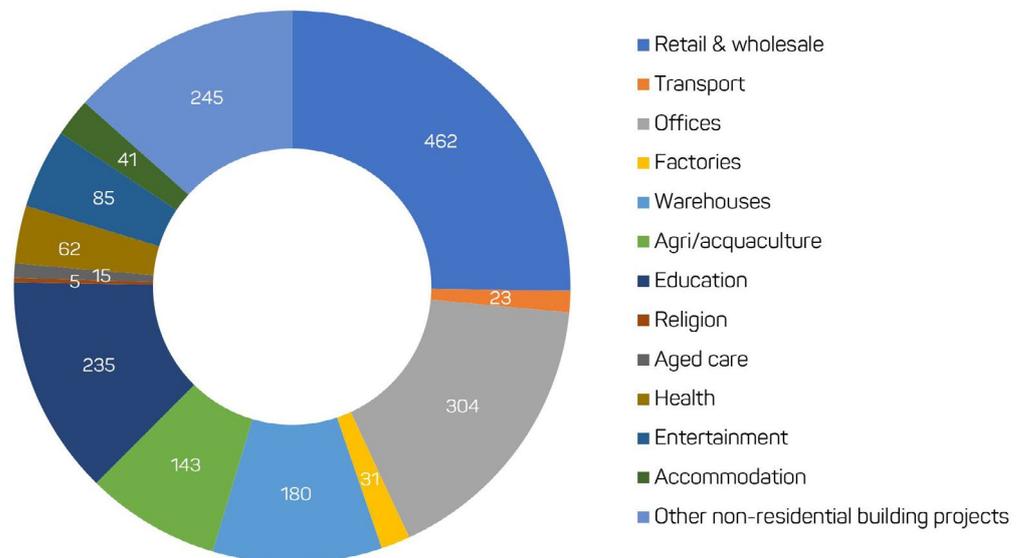
Building Product Inflation %



+14.2%

Year to

December 2022



CIVIL CONSTRUCTION

Civil construction work December 2022 quarter (\$m)



Civil works by activity, December 2022 quarter (\$m)

Activity	Started	Done	To be done
Bridges, railways and harbours	\$3,362.3	\$3,947.0	\$18,893.7
Roads, highways and subdivisions	\$6,435.9	\$6,528.8	\$33,419.3
Water storage and supply, sewerage and drainage	\$1,916.0	\$1,843.0	\$8,026.2
Electricity generation, transmission and distribution incl pipelines	\$6,048.8	\$4,802.3	\$14,482.3
Telecommunications	\$1,817.8	\$1,757.6	\$398.2
Heavy industry	\$7,101.8	\$6,014.6	\$34,492.7
Recreation & other	\$2,756.6	\$3,943.4	\$2,649.4
TOTAL	\$29,439.1	\$28,836.8	\$112,361.8

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

House prices: year to February 2023



Capital city



Regional markets

Unit prices: year to February 2023



Capital city



Regional markets

Rental price changes in Australia

+1.2%
During Dec
2022 quarter



+4.0%
Over year to
Dec 2022
quarter

Building approvals: January 2023



12,065

Total new home
building approvals
-8.4%
change on
Jan 2022



7,664

Detached houses
-12.2%
change on
Jan 2022



4,402

Units/apartments
-0.7%
change on
Jan 2022



\$672.9 million

Home renovations
+1.2%
change on
Jan 2022

Residential building work during September 2022 quarter

COMMENCED NEW HOMES

195,370

All dwellings

124,960

Detached houses

70,410

Apartments/units

COMPLETED NEW HOMES

173,085

All dwellings

116,299

Detached houses

56,786

Apartments/units

New homes still under construction on 30 September 2022



244,480

All dwellings

104,330

Detached houses

140,150

Apartments/units

New homes approved but not yet commenced as at 30 September 2022



30,519

All dwellings

11,419

Detached houses

19,100

Apartments/units

Lending indicators: January 2023

2,840

Loans to owner occupiers for
construction of new home
-33.9% change on Jan 2022

1,338

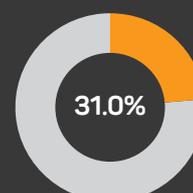
Loans to investors for construction
of new home
-23.5% change on Jan 2022

1,239

Loans to owner occupiers for
residential land purchase
-58.5% change on Jan 2022

690

Loans to investors for residential
land purchase
-51.0% change on Jan 2022



First Home Buyers
share of loans

LABOUR MARKET

February 2023



CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE



1,318,252
People employed in
construction in Australia

335,813 Resi/commercial
builders

144,056 Civil construction
builders

837,395 Resi/commercial
subcontractors



Of Australian
jobs are in
construction



Account for women
working in Australian
construction

CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES

445,081

Construction Businesses
(at June 2022)

Number of workers



258,272	0
180,814	1-19
5,790	20-199
205	+200

Turnover



20.5%
turnover >\$50,000

1.4%
turnover <\$10m

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES

121,490

Construction apprentices in-training
(at September 2022)



54,824 new starts
(year to Sept 2022)

23,837 completions
(year to Sept 2022)



Female share of construction
apprentice commencements
(year to Sept 2022)



6,212
apprentice carpenters
in training



3,913
apprentice plumbers
in training

PRIORITY POLICY ISSUES

POLICY AREA	KEY ACTIONS	ISSUES PROGRESSING
Building Regulation	<p>Standards Australia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demolition Standard update Public Comment review for the Exterior Insulation Finishing System (EIFS) Pool Barriers <p>Office of the ABCB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building Codes Committee Meeting Plumbing Codes Committee Meeting Technical Reference Group Waterproofing and water shedding Livable Housing <p>Reviewing 3500.3 and NCC compliance</p> <p>Department of Industry</p> <p>National Energy Performance Strategy Roundtable - Commercial Buildings</p> <p>Other Work</p> <p>Insurance Council of Australia meeting regarding resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Building Codes Board engagement. Energy Efficiency for commercial buildings is the focus for 2025 NCC. This will include class 3 to 9 buildings and public areas in class 2 buildings. This will focus on services, distributed energy resources and electric vehicle charging. Condensation mitigation Weather and Waterproofing is another focus. Standards Australia – The following key standards are currently under review. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bushfire Standard Tiling Standard Pool Barrier Standard Demolition Standard Insurance Council of Australia regarding resilience
Contracts	<p>Standards Australia – General Conditions of Contract Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Office continues its engagement in the review of AS 4000. The review is progressing rapidly, with the committee currently considering a number of draft changes to update the contract for currency. We have, however, had cause to raise our objection to the inclusion of a number of new proposed provisions that would impose additional and more restrictive obligations with respect to construction programming. <p>Government seeks feedback on Payment Times Reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Office participated in a one-on-one consultation with officials from the Department of Treasury as part of its review of the Payment Times Reporting Act, which commenced in January 2021. The review is considering the efficacy of the Act and its objectives (i.e. to enable small businesses to make informed decisions about potential customers and create an incentive for reporting entities to improve their payment times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We continue to remind Standards Australia that the technical committee must not deviate from the project’s narrow scope. Notwithstanding, the Review will likely result in publication of an updated AS 4000 towards the end of 2023 and then the ultimate withdrawal of AS 2124. During the consultation MBA highlighted the complexities of the construction contracting chain, and that the review should consider any unintended consequences prior to recommending the adoption of mandatory payment terms in any form.

Senate inquiry into Corporate Insolvency

- Following Shaun Schmitke and Shane Garrett's appearance in Sydney before the Senate Joint Committee on Corporate Insolvency, the National Office submitted a detailed response to a number of questions posed by Senators during the Senate hearing.
- MBA's responses supported our overarching position that given the industry-specific nuances of the BCI, there are certain commercial and policy considerations that governments need to take into account when considering any reform to address corporate insolvency in the sector.
- MBA's response to the questions on notice can be viewed - [here](#)

National Contracts Advisory Committee

- The NCAC did not meet formally during the reporting period, however, we will continue to work with the Committee on contracts-related matters out of session.
- A face-to-face meeting of the NCAC will also be scheduled for the coming months.

Economy & Productivity

- Federal Government, in agreement with the States and Territories, has extended the Homebuilder completion time from 30 April 2023 to 30 June 2025. For off the plan applications. We have been advocating for this change since last year and it's great that the ongoing discussions and evidence provided to the Minister has paid off.
- First 2023 meeting of National Economics & Productivity Committee was held in Hobart on Wednesday, 22nd March 2023.
- Master Builders Australia gave evidence at public hearing into Australia's Future Fund Package of bills (March 2023). The Greens are seeking a doubling of funding for the \$10 billion Fund which is delaying the passage of the Bill. The Fund is designed to deliver 30,000 affordable, social and emergency housing dwellings over 5 years.
- The National Reconstruction Fund (NRF) Corporation Bill 2023 passed the Commonwealth Parliament on 29 March 2023. The NRF Corporation will provide finance in the form of debt and equity for projects in priority areas of the Australian economy to diversify and transform Australia's industry and economy. Its investments will leverage Australia's natural and competitive strengths and help Australian industry move up the value chain. It will be governed by a Board who will make independent investment decisions guided by an investment mandate.
- NRF investments will help grow Australia's industrial capabilities, improve value-adding manufacturing opportunities and create secure jobs.
- Productivity research project – in discussions with several economic consultants.
- Preparation of factsheet by national office with regard to \$3m+ superannuation funds and potential effects of proposed policy changes.
- Research update on recent household savings trends following issues raised at NEPC.
- Information note on apparent divergence between building materials prices at retail/wholesale level and on international markets.
- Compilation of Master Builders Australia's response to the Productivity Commission's 5-Yearly Review.

Industrial Relations

Little chance of Olive Branch in Second Tranche?

- MBA met this week with key officials at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations ('DEWR') as part of consultations on its next round of proposed IR changes ahead of an expected introduction in the second half of 2023.
- The key take-out was a general sense that there won't be any relief for employers in the next tranche of amendments, meaning that our long-held concerns about unintended consequences are sadly looking more likely.
- The issues earmarked by Government for change include:
 - Introducing another revised test for when an employee can be classified a casual;
 - 'Same Job, Same Pay' for Labour Hire workers & the implementation of a national licencing scheme;
 - Criminalising wage underpayments;
 - Extending powers of the FWC to enable them to look into 'employee-like' forms of work;
 - Further changes to legislate against discrimination, adverse action and harassment in the FW Act;
 - Addressing issues in the Fair Entitlements Guarantee for Small Business;
 - Providing the FWC with power to issue model terms for EBAs;
 - Establishing transitional arrangements for the current single-interest bargaining stream; and
 - Repealing the recently enacted demerger provisions for ROs.
- As the Government continues to push on with its ambitious IR agenda, the National Office will continue to do everything we can to achieve the most practicable and reasonable outcomes for our members.

Draft of first tranche in advance sees Bill enhanced

- Earlier this month, the National Office attended a meeting of the Committee on Industrial Legislation ('COIL') to review draft legislation which would have formed the first tranche of industrial relations changes for 2023. The Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Protecting Worker Entitlements) Bill 2023 was introduced tabled in the Parliament on 29th May and included:
 - Strengthening protections under the FW Act for migrant workers;
 - Guaranteeing superannuation as a right under the NES;
 - Streamlining payroll deductions for authorised purposes; and
 - Providing stronger access to unpaid parental leave.
- The Bill as introduced has demonstrated the benefits of the COIL process, with many of the concerns raised during that process being now fixed (albeit there are quite a few that remain)
- The Bill has been referred to a Committee and we'll make relevant submissions following consultation with the IR Committee.

ACCI Workplace Policy Committee

- At the end of this month, the National Office attended a meeting of ACCI's Workplace Policy Committee to discuss the Government's next tranche of proposed changes to the FW Act.
- The WPC provides an opportunity to share ideas across ACCI's employer network and facilitate a more co-ordinated approach to IR reform.

Proposed changes to the Privacy Act

- The government has proposed reforms aimed at strengthening the protection of personal information and the control individuals have over their information.
- Several proposals have implications for workplaces including:
 - Amending the definition of 'collection' to expressly cover information obtained from any source and by any means, including inferred or generated information;
 - Recognising collection, use, disclosure and storage of precise geolocation tracking data as a practice which requires consent.
- Geolocation tracking data is obviously relevant to any business that manages mobile trades, employees and/or building services.
- One concern that has been raised with the proposal is that workplace practices are informed by *consultation* and what is '*reasonably practicable*' whereas the proposal is based on the principle of 'consent'.
- The National Office will work to ensure that any changes are workable and recognise modern business practices.

FWC seeks feedback on guidance for small business

- On the 8th March, the National Office attended a meeting of the Fair Work Commission's Small Business Reference Group.
- The meeting focussed largely on implementation of the "Secure Jobs Better Pay" legislation and the Commission's development of a suite of materials to assist small businesses navigate issues within the Commission's jurisdiction.

CFMMEU lines up Surveyors

- There have been significant concerns raised following reports this month of the CFMMEU restricting the access of surveyors to several building sites in Victoria.
- MBA has been advised that CFMMEU shop stewards have targeted a number of infrastructure and construction projects across the State, with some surveyors being asked not to carry out work unless they are unionised.

National Industrial Relations Advisory Committee

- As the Government continues to roll out workplace reform, NIRAC met in March on two occasions to discuss MBA's national response.
- This month also saw the launch of NIRAC's fortnightly "IR catch-ups" which provided State/Territory Associations to share the latest intel around-the-grounds.

- The Commission recently launched its [Online Learning Portal](#), which includes modules on:
 - [Preparing for an unfair dismissal conciliation](#)
 - [Workplace sexual harassment](#); and
 - [Interest based bargaining](#)
- MBA is in consultations about further potential guidance that might be developed to assist our members when interacting with the Commission.

- MBA has highlighted that any unlawful pressure on surveyors to join the CFMMEU must not be tolerated.
- The conduct is particularly concerning in light of the recent abolition of the ABCC. The National Office will continue to press the Government to find a solution to address workplace issues that continue to plague the BCI.

- NIRAC was pleased to welcome three new members of the committee, being Debra Angilley from Tasmania, Eliza Aldridge from the NT and Holly Gardner from SA.
- We look forward to working with the new committee members with a view to further strengthening the national Master Builders movement.

Jobs & Skills

Meeting with Minister O'Connor

- Members of the National Board, Jobs & Skills Committee, and association EDs met with the Minister for Skills and Training on 8 March 2023.
- The Minister expressed interest in the points raised regarding workers, skills and need for flexible and stackable qualifications; agreed that career information is complex and careers education needs to be improved; and agree that university and VET need to be equally valued.

Jobs and Skills Committee Meeting

- The J&S Committee met online on Thursday 23 March.
- Ongoing labour shortages and initiatives to attract more workers and retain those already in the industry were underlying themes of discussion.
- The Department and PwC briefed the Committee on a proposal to reform VET training products into Skills Standards and sought input on challenges, opportunities and areas for improvement.

Perceptions of VET

- Master Builders made a submission to the inquiry into the perceptions and status of VET being led by the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training.
- We advocated for improvements in career education in schools, publicly available information on RTO quality, a national apprenticeship campaign, pre-commencement tools and resources, a national mentoring program, and adjustments to wage subsidies.

Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs)

- JSCs, formerly Industry Clusters, will have carriage of vocational training product development, career mapping and workforce analysis.
- Master Builders is leading the development of a tripartite JSC for the built environment. The final hurdles are being negotiated and we are hopeful that the Board will have its first meeting in April 2023.

VET data streamlining

- Legislation to update and streamline data collection processes in the VET sector has been referred to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee.
- Master Builders is preparing a submission and is broadly supportive of the Bill, particularly enabling data at the RTO level to be made publicly available. This may pave the way for quality indicators and student outcomes to be published at the RTO level enabling users to make more informed decisions and incentivising RTOs to lift training quality.

Data

- Apprentices – 121,479 apprentices in training on 30 Sept 2022 are employed in construction. Construction is the number 1 industry for apprentice employment. 54,810 apprentices commenced in the year to 30 September 2022.
- Labour Force – 1.32 million construction workers in Australia in February 2023, including 140,000 carpenters and 124,000 construction managers and builders.
- Job vacancies – over the last year the construction occupations that have seen the largest increase in online job ads are structural steel workers (up 82.3%) and floor finishers (up 13.5%).

Work Health & Safety

SWA seeks views on the potential prohibition of the use of engineered stone

- The National Office has spent significant time this month considering a number of options posed by SWA around the potential prohibition of the use of engineered stone.
- The three options under consideration include either a total or partial ban on the use of engineered stone products. The various proposals also include a licensing regime and substantially broadened regulatory framework for working with silica-containing products.
- In preparation for drafting our response to the consultation paper, the National Office both facilitated and took part in numerous meetings over the course of the month, including with the NWHSC and ACCI's Silica Reference Group.
- The meetings were held not only to establish a potential national position, but to ensure a consistent approach was taken to the issue by industry stakeholders.
- MBA's proposed position in response to a potential prohibition on the use of engineered stone will be put to the Policy Forum and National Board in the coming week.
- Submissions are due to SWA by 16th April.

Safe Work Australia Members Meeting

- SWA Members met again this month with an agenda full of key items, many relevant to the BCI, including:
 - Progress of the Crane Licence Review;
 - Significant increases to Category 1 penalties;
 - Whether to remove the reference to AS 4801 in the model Regs;
 - Consideration of a draft Sexual Harassment Code; and
 - Potential reduction of the WES for respirable crystalline silica ('RCS').
- MBA provided a significant amount of feedback to SWA, via ACCI, on the raft of issues under consideration.
- We were particularly concerned about SWA Members' recommendation to halve the WES for RCS in the absence of any recognised technology capable of measuring such acute levels of exposure.
- Before any recommendation to further reduce the WES is put to WHS Ministers, we will be pressing the Government to undertake a RIA to allow for robust consideration of the consequences and practicability of such a significant change.

MBA consulted on SWA SWMS tool

- Earlier this month, MBA attended a meeting with SWA to provide feedback on an early iteration of its online SWMS tool.
- SWA Members agreed last year to develop an online SWMS learning resource and information toolkit in response to a recommendation coming out of the Boland Review.
- The interactive tool is intended to provide necessary information and actions to complete a SWMS, to signpost and reinforce SWMS requirements, and to increase knowledge and understanding of the practical purpose of SWMS.
- As part of SWA's SWMS Working Group, the National Office will have a key role in shaping the tool to ensure that it is both user friendly and contains information that will actually improve SWMS compliance and useability.

ACCI WHS & WC Committee Meeting

- The National Office attended a meeting of ACCI's WHS & Workers Compensation Committee meeting this month, with key issues for discussion being; silica, psychosocial regulations and outcomes from last month's WHS Ministers' meeting.
- We continue to work closely with ACCI on a raft of safety-related matters as a key member of its WHS & WC Committee.

Parliament passes WHS Amendment Bill

- This month the [Work Health and Safety Amendment Bill 2023 \(Cth\)](#) received Royal Assent.
- The Bill amends the Model WHS Act to:
 - Include negligence as a fault element in relation to a category one offence;
 - Clarify that a work group is negotiated with workers who are proposed to form the work group;
 - Amend the obligation to train health and safety representatives to provide that representatives are entitled to choose a course of training;
 - Amend the process for the issuing and services of notices under the Act and enable an inspector, within 30 days of entering a workplace, to issue certain written notices relating to the reason for entry;
 - Specify that Comcare is able to share information with certain other persons for the purpose of performing functions under relevant laws;
 - Extend from 12 to 18 months the deadline for a person to make a request to the regulator to bring a prosecution for a category one or two offence;
 - Prohibit a person from entering into a contract of insurance to provide coverage over liability for monetary penalties imposed under the Act, and create a related offence; and
 - Amend the *Safe Work Australia Act 2008* to specify that Safe Work Australia may be provided with information necessary to its data and evidence functions.
- The amendments give effect to a number of the remaining Boland Review recommendations.
- A reminder, however, that the changes do not have effect at the State/Territory level until adopted under that jurisdiction's WHS legislation.

Safety prevails in Queensland Precast Code

- Common sense prevailed this month, with MBQ successfully advocating for the removal of a requirement for the use of back-up lifting systems within the QLD Tilt-up and pre-cast construction Code of Practice. The inclusion of secondary lifting systems has been strongly supported by unions for a number of years.
- The decision follows lengthy discussions which resulted in MBQ successfully influencing the State Government to conduct rigorous testing of the lifting equipment used for pre-cast panels.
- As suspected, the test results showed that back-up lifting systems were not an effective and reliable control measure in the event of primary lifting systems failing.
- The findings also have implications for the work of Standards Australia, who are currently considering whether to include back-up lifting systems for pre-cast panels in *AS 3850 – Prefabricated Concrete Elements*.
- MBQ should be commended for their perseverance of this issue and in ensuring optimum safety standards prevail.

OFSC IRG meeting

- The National Office attended a meeting of the OFSC's Industry Reference Group ('IRG') this month with key items of discussion being; an update of the FSC's statutory review & Scaffolding Roundtables and changes to the WHS regulatory landscape.
- MBA continues to work closely with David Denney and his team with a view to improving WHS outcomes across the sector.

ASEA Asbestos Awareness Campaign

- The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency is continuing its National Asbestos Awareness Campaign during March and April.
- We encourage members to review and share the materials, which can be found [here](#).
- The latest campaign materials focus on improving awareness and influencing behaviour change for DIYers and their families, as well as tradespeople.

National Work Health and Safety Committee

- The NWHSC met on three occasions this month largely to discuss its position on increasing calls for the Government to prohibit the use of engineered stone products.
- The National Office has been extremely grateful for the generosity of the NWHSC in giving such a significant amount of its time this month to consider such an important issue.

KEY DATES IN APRIL

WED, APR 5	Risk Management Committee Meeting
FRI, APR 7	GOOD FRIDAY
MON, APR 10	EASTER MONDAY
WED, APR 12	Fortnightly Executive Directors Zoom
THURS, APR 13	Monthly Board Zoom Finance Committee Meeting
THURS, APR 20	Casual Dinner - National Board, EDs & MBSA Board - Adelaide
FRI, APR 21	Policy Forum - Adelaide National Board Meeting - Adelaide
TUES, APR 25	ANZAC DAY
WED, APR 26	Fortnightly Executive Directors Zoom

WOMEN BUILDING AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM 2023

The Women Building Australia National Mentoring Program commenced on 28 March. Momentum for the program has increase over the four years with businesses embracing the program and promoting it internally, coupled with past participants strong endorsement of the utility of the program for both mentors and mentees.

This year's program has 95 Mentoring pairs, the most in the history of the program. This has resulted in WBA achieving the target for 300 mentoring pairs as per the grant agreement. We hope that the success this year will flow into the program again next year.

WBA Mentoring Program Key Dates:

- 28 Mar - Program Launch Webinar
- 20 July - Mentee's Mid Program Review Webinar
- 27 July - Mentor's Mid Program Review Webinar
- 15 Nov - Program Close Webinar

BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Focus for WBA now moves to Business Resilience. Business Resilience training will commence again this quarter. The program will again focus on training provided in conjunction with MYOB. The training will be on-demand with participants able to commence and attend training at times that suit the individual participant while allowing the to move through the training program at participants own pace.

WBA will also be adding specific on-demand mentoring for business. Mentoring for Business allows participants to seek help from mentors about a specific acute issue they are facing in their business, gaining advice and support from seasoned industry practitioners.

CAREER EXPOS 2023

WBA will again be attending Career Expos in 2023 promoting careers in the industry to female school leavers. The confirmed Career expos program will feature all mainland States and Territories.

The WBA will attend the following career expos:

- 6 May - VCE & Careers Expo Melbourne
- 13 May - Adelaide Careers & Employment Expo
- 27 May - Brisbane Careers & Employment Expo
- 24 June - Western Sydney Careers Expo
- 29 July - Perth Skills West Careers & Employment Expo
- 31 July - Townsville Careers Expo
- 10 Aug - Canberra Careers Expo
- 16 Aug- Darwin Careers Expo
- 19 Aug - Victorian Skills West Careers & Employment Expo
- 9 Sept - Sydney Skills West Careers & Employment Expo



Be sure to follow us on our social media handles for timely updates on all WBA Activities at the below links:

-  [@WomenBuildingAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/WomenBuildingAustralia)
-  [@womenbuildingaustralia](https://www.instagram.com/womenbuildingaustralia)
-  [@women-building-australia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-building-australia)