

Fighting for positive change:

Plumbing industry priorities

FEDERAL ELECTION 2025



**MASTER
PLUMBERS**
AUSTRALIA AND
NEW ZEALAND

The plumbing industry is vital to Australia's future

Plumbing is part of Australia's Building, Civil and Construction industry - the second largest contributor to the nation's economy. Collectively the industry contributes nine per cent of Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has more than 380,000 enterprises and employs over 1.2 million people.

Plumbing is an enabler of growth, and the primary catalyst for new energy adaptation. The community cannot be healthy and thrive without safe water, sanitation and ventilation and it is plumbers, drainers and gasfitters who are key to making the transition happen successfully.

MPANZ Plumbing Industry Priorities outlines the key national issues facing the plumbing industry and the path forward, shaped by research and industry intelligence of the 30,000 businesses which we represent.

Our policy priorities comprise three critical areas:

- 1** Championing consistent, evidence-based regulation
- 2** Securing the sustainability and integrity of the plumbing industry
- 3** Future proofing our skilled workforce



Our calls to action are summarised on the following pages and detailed in the full Plumbing Industry Priorities report.

Industry snapshot

160,864

building permits
approved in 2024

\$70 billion

total value on new
residential buildings

\$21.9 billion

plumbing services
revenue

94,800

plumbing industry
employees

28,835

plumbing businesses
in Australia

97%

of the workforce
are male

32 years

the median age of
plumbers in Australia

92%

of the workforce
work full time

\$2000

the median
weekly wage

PRIORITY ONE

Championing consistent, evidence-based regulation

Plumbing is a key mitigator of community risk. Well-designed, functioning and effective plumbing systems are the community's first, and often only, line of defence against a range of hazards, toxins, substances, diseases and disasters and other risks. From lead-free products to consistent national legislation and consumer protections, more needs to be done to counter ultimately dangerous threats. Our industry is safe, but it could be safer.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must drive a program of national consistency across jurisdictions, targeting best practice national regulation. This requires removal or minimizing jurisdictional variations in the National Construction Code and coordination with State and Territory Governments.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must ensure that all plumbing products sold, imported into and used in Australia must hold Watermark certification

Recommendation: The Federal Government must drive a program for nationally consistent legislation on point-of-sale regulations for plumbing products in all states and territories.

PRIORITY TWO

Securing the sustainability and integrity of the plumbing industry

Plumbers, drainers and gasfitters and other trades generally work as contractors and subcontractors in the construction industry. Like any other business, they need cash flow to maintain their operations and are entitled to get paid appropriately and in a timely fashion for the work they do. When things go wrong on a building construction project it's common that subcontractors get squeezed on payment or end up not getting paid at all.

Unfair Contract Terms (UCT) have emerged as a crucial issue across the construction sector particularly in the plumbing industry with unprecedented challenges including escalating labour costs, skills shortages, supply chain issues and escalating material costs.

The UCT Reform Bill commenced on 9 November 2023 but recent legislative amendments to the UCT present unintended consequences to the construction industry which impact the standard contracts, contract terms and customer engagement processes. The National Subcontractors Forum, including MPANZ has called on the Federal Government to determine a path forward for the removal of unfair, partial, imbalanced, and anti-competitive contracts and terms.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must, as a priority, implement in full the recommendations of the Unfair Contract Terms: Construction Industry Submission to the Federal Government (May 2024) report.

PRIORITY THREE

Future proof our skilled workforce

Fairer redundancy provisions

The Plumbing and Fire Sprinklers Award, unlike other modern awards, requires employers to pay redundancy for employee-initiated separation. Employers should remain liable to pay for genuine redundancies, but the current Award is an outlier which is manifestly unfair and a burden on business and employment.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must facilitate changes to the Plumbing and Fire Sprinklers Award to reflect redundancy in line with National Employment Standards.

National licensing

The Australian Government Mutual Recognition Amendment Bill 2021 provides a quasi-national scheme allowing plumbers to use their home-state occupational registration to work in participating Australian states and territories. MPANZ supports in principle mutual recognition of occupational licensing and the concept of a national license. When it comes to plumbing, however, the lack of consistency across jurisdictions of scope of regulation, licensing regimes, required insurances and gazetted requirements for qualification levels mean that a cautious approach to national licensing is needed to ensure that consumers and practitioners are protected.

Recommendation: The Federal government must drive a program of work towards a national licensing scheme that caters for the needs of all jurisdictions and is based on a risk minimization approach.

Making sure the community and the industry itself has access to a suitably skilled and qualified workforce is vitally important as we engage and deploy new energy, water and air tempering technologies over coming decades.

But we know that demand for the skills of plumbers across the country exceeds supply by a considerable margin. Plumbing apprentices have a very high completion rate because the qualification is the regulated entry point to the profession. Plumbing, however, has a 'commencements' problem – we need more people starting an apprenticeship. But the cost of putting on a new apprentice is a barrier for business, especially SMEs, so government incentives and tax support for employers is critical to enable the industry to meet the ambitions housing and public infrastructure programs of governments.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must provide tiered apprentice wage support to plumbing businesses and group training organisations equivalent to 30% for the first 12 months of the apprenticeship and 15% for the second year.



Immigration

The skilled migration system is not delivering the outcomes that the plumbing industry requires in terms of employers being able to convert employment needs into employment outcomes quickly and efficiently and to the required standard. It is vitally important for our industry, and the economy more broadly, that the Australian skilled migration system be updated and contemporised

Australia has world-leading plumbing training and it is timely to consider whether opportunities exist for migrants to come to Australia as fee-paying students (similar to current higher education) to commence an apprenticeship in the Australian system; and what incentives or obligations may be appropriate for them to contribute back once qualified.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must prosecute its review of the skilled migration system as an urgent priority and give consideration to more efficient and new pathways for skilled migrants to access qualification and registration in Australia.

The energy transition

MPANZ supports Australia's goal to move to a low carbon emission economy. As Australia accelerates the energy transition, the skills and contribution of plumbers and gasfitters become even more critical and at the forefront of domestic, commercial and industrial energy changes.

There is no room in the energy transition for ideological opposition to natural gas, an energy source which governments (apart from Victoria and ACT) agree must be part of the medium-term energy mix as we electrify the economy and develop fuels such as low carbon biogas and zero carbon hydrogen which have enormous potential in the medium to longer term energy mix.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must ensure Australia takes a pragmatic approach to energy transition policies, recognising the role of natural gas will continue to play in the medium term.

Recommendation: The Federal Government must provide funded programs to upskill plumbers on low carbon gases and on electrification recognising the integral role they play in the clean economy.

Master Plumbers Australia and New Zealand (MPANZ)

is the peak industry body for Australia's plumbing, gasfitting, roofing and mechanical services industry, through its constituent Master Plumber associations in every Australian State and Territory and New Zealand. Collectively, MPANZ constituents represent more than 30,000 plumbing businesses from sole operators to Australasia's largest plumbing contractors.

MPANZ constituent associations also provide training services through Registered Training Organisations, directly training more than 2,600 apprentices and plumbers per year in Australia, and partner closely with public TAFE providers and other industry RTOs. Group Training Organisations run by MPANZ constituents also directly employ around 400 plumbing apprentices across Australia.



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