

2024-25 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



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SURVEYORS

Vital To Australia's Development

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1. Introduction

Surveyors Australia is the peak industry association for surveyors across Australia. With a membership of close to 500 businesses we are uniquely placed to comment on the industry sector of surveying in relation to the broader property and construction sector.

Our members are key to the Australian economy and community and are often referred to as land surveyors. Our members play a critical role in various fields and industries, primarily focused on:

- Land Measurement, Boundary Definition and Topographic Mapping
- Construction Surveying
- Geospatial Data Collection
- Hydrographic Surveying
- Legal Expertise on Land Administration

Surveyors ensure that infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges, and utilities, are constructed accurately within land ownership, contributing to land value and often efficient transportation. No building or infrastructure project can start or finish without a land surveyor involved.

Surveyors are critical to environmental management, urban planning, emergency response and precision agriculture. They ensure the accuracy, safety, and sustainability of land and infrastructure development while contributing to various aspects of our daily lives, including property ownership, navigation, environmental protection, and urban planning.

2. Submission

Surveyors Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government's Treasury in response to the call for submissions regarding priorities for the 2023-24 Budget. Our submission is focused on the key priorities of supporting small businesses, taxation support, skills investment, streamlining migration, unlocking infrastructure.

3. Supporting Small Businesses

Most surveying companies are small and medium size enterprises. Surveyors Australia advocates for a dedicated focus on small business support through training incentives, tax reform and procurement initiatives. Recognising that small businesses play a pivotal role in the economy and that they need tailored measures and assistance to ensure their growth and resilience.

4. Taxation Support

Surveyors Australia emphasises the need for taxation and regulatory reforms. Ideally this Budget would see measures to streamline the tax system, reduce regulatory burdens, and create an environment conducive to business innovation and growth.

This support could take the form of eliminating barriers, amplifying incentives for both individuals and businesses, fostering increased economic activity, and encouraging the pursuit of opportunities and innovation.

It is crucial for the government to replace or eliminate inefficient taxes that could hinder GDP and employment growth both during the recovery period and in the long term. This strategic move is vital for steering the nation towards a robust and resilient economic future.

The surveying industry is facing a specific issue with the decommissioning of the 3G network in September 2024. Without access to upgraded surveying equipment to utilise the 4G and 5G networks, many in our industry will cease to be able to perform even simple tasks. This could potentially grind construction in Australia to a halt. Assistance with affordability issues through depreciation or write offs for new equipment could help ensure this dire situation is avoided.

Recommendations:

1. Lower the company tax rate to 25% for small and medium sized enterprises.
2. Extension of Instant Asset Write-Offs to a minimum of \$30,000 per annum, specifically designed to support investment in emerging technologies and the construction sector. This extension provides businesses with enhanced financial flexibility, promoting growth and innovation in these critical sectors.

5. Skills Investment

Surveyors Australia stresses the importance of investing in training programs geared towards addressing the skills shortage in our industry.

The skills shortages are extremely pressing in our sector and more skilled and trained surveyors are desperately required. According to research from Oxford Economics based on the 2021 Australian Census, there will be a need for 20,631 professions in the surveying sector to meet the supply needs in building and infrastructure. However, there are only 18,549 professionals available. This means that in 2024 we are short 2,083 surveyors to complete the infrastructure and building required to house and support Australians.

Surveyors are required from the commencement of a land release until the final stage of a project. More surveyors are therefore needed to meet the Government's housing targets and assist with the faster release of developable land.

Interest in becoming a surveyor can be sparked at any age. Funding for programs to support exposure to surveying at school, and to develop their skills at Vocational and University levels would be of assistance in addressing the shortage of surveyors into the future. This could also be extended to help offer opportunities for people looking for a career change and could particularly target women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

There is currently no TAFE program delivering Surveying courses in Queensland, the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory or Tasmania. Nationally greater funding for Vocation Education beyond TAFE is required.

Surveying is responsible for the creation of GPS technology and has always been at the forefront of technology. This brings new opportunities and need for skills development to make the most of emerging global technologies. Currently there is a strong focus on sub-surface utility mapping.

Incentives to encourage surveyors to become teachers of our profession are required to have the next generation of modern surveyors trained and experienced.

The Surveying Industry actively promotes the profession to schools and students and surveyors have contributed at least a million dollars to the surveying careers promotion. But still only 3% of our workforce are female. Funding focussed on niche

profession such as surveying must be considered by the government, or we are at risk of losing this vital profession.

To make a change of career towards surveying requires considerable training and it can be difficult for middle-aged adults to return to an apprentice/trainee wage. The Government must consider how to further support change-of-career through wage subsidies.

Our profession has further contributed half a million dollars over the last three year to create a new program to deliver VET courses to train survey technicians. However, our highly qualified Registered and Licensed Surveyors are not able to teach these courses without a VET qualification. If this is the government's requirement to teach in the VET sector, then they must make funding available to remove this additional burden.

We are already asking our small businesses to take time out of their businesses to teach and upskill the next generation, it is an added burden to ask these highly training professions to also pay for a qualification the government says they should have to deliver on training they often deliver to individuals in their own companies every day. Subsidies are needed for TAE courses.

Recommendations:

1. Provide additional funding and incentivise Traineeships and Cadetships in Surveying particularly in the following courses.
 - a. Certificate IV Surveying and Spatial Information Services
 - b. Diploma of Surveying
 - c. Diploma Spatial Information Services
 - d. Advanced Diploma of Surveying
2. Provide additional subsidies for adult apprenticeship positions within the construction sector, with a specific focus on supporting mature-age female apprentices and trainees. This measure aims to enhance opportunities and inclusivity within this field.
3. Provide incentives or funding for people choosing to undertake further training to become teachers within the VET sector (the TAE course specifically).

6. Streamlining Migration

Reduce costs involved in sourcing a key worker from overseas to address the skills shortage and keep the Australian economy heading in the right direction.

Recommendations:

1. More resources to be directed to the processing of working visas to assist job vacancies to be filled efficiently.
2. Reducing the cost burden on businesses to employ a skilled and necessary worker from overseas.

7. Supporting Our Neighbours

Accurate survey maps are an important component of Australian life, as it is in most developed countries. Unfortunately, though, 70% of the world has still not been surveyed and mapped. This is becoming an issue for our neighbours in the Pacific. Australian expertise and training can assist them to have boundaries they can rely on – especially important for countries such as the Solomon Islands where traditional tribal and hereditary ownership can be disputed as land sales become more prominent.

Recommendation:

Surveyors Australia advocates for greater opportunities to offer and deliver training for the Pacific; to be offered both internationally and domestically as a two-way undertaking.

8. Unlocking Infrastructure

Surveyors Australia emphasises the significance of infrastructure development as a catalyst for job creation. It calls for strategic investments and initiatives to unlock infrastructure projects, fostering employment opportunities and contributing to the overall economic recovery.

Surveyors are at the forefront of any infrastructure project and actively involved in the business case for that infrastructure build. Surveyors identify the land and ownership required for change should the infrastructure go forward. And yet surveyors are not involved in the pipeline discussions held by government. Surveyors can provide significant input and expertise towards this program of works ensuring that later projects will not need to be cancelled.

Recommendation:

1. The Government identify, prioritise, and initiate infrastructure and renewal opportunities that are ready for immediate implementation.

Surveyors Australia believes that addressing the skills shortage for surveyors and these key priorities in the 2024-25 Budget will contribute significantly to fostering economic resilience, job creation, and sustainable growth in Australia.