

Anna Collyer | Chair, Australian Energy Market Commission

Just transition: empowering youth and women to transform the energy sector

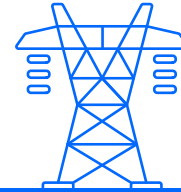
Australia performs strongly on gender equality, but energy remains a clear exception



Australia overall

- **8th/145 economies** – World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index
- Women are **just over half** of employees across WGEA-reporting workplaces
- Women are **around 43%** of managers

The WEF index is broader than employment. It measures gender gaps across economic participation, education, health and political representation. Australia rose to 8th globally in 2026.



Traditional energy and utilities

- Women are **28%** of the workforce
- **27%** of managers
- **29%** of key management personnel
- **2%** of CEOs (based on a relatively small population; this figure fluctuates year to year)

WGEA's closest industry category is Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services.



Global energy context

- IEA estimate: women hold about **1 in 5 energy-sector jobs globally**

The IEA estimates women hold around 20% of energy-sector jobs globally, compared with roughly 40% of employment across the global economy. It identifies technical and trade occupations as a particular constraint on participation.

The gender gap in energy is not uniquely Australian, but it stands out sharply against Australia's broader workforce picture.

Clean energy may offer a different trajectory, but we need better evidence

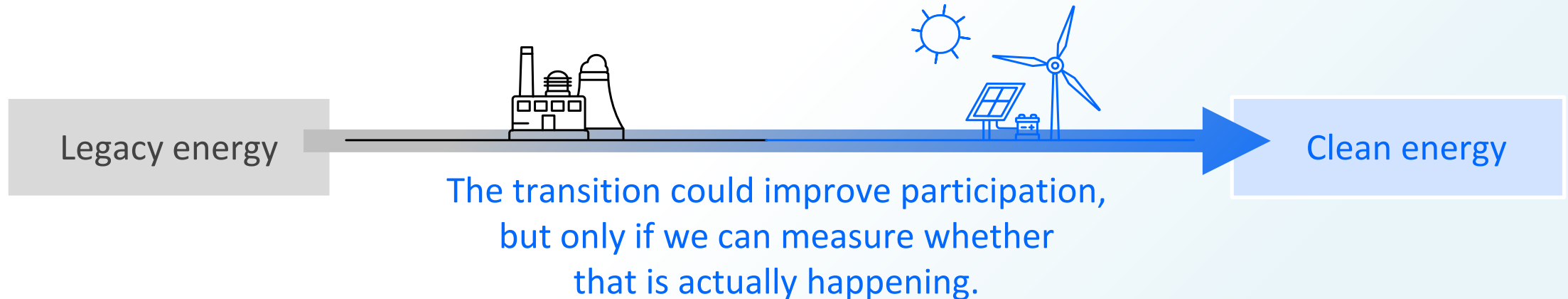


Encouraging sign

Clean Energy Council's last comprehensive workforce survey found women represented around 39% of Australia's renewable-energy workforce.

Caution

No directly comparable public update. Difficult to know whether the progress has continued.



An ecosystem of interventions



There is no single lever for change



• Connect • • Align • • Amplify •		
Part of ecosystem	Examples	Primary contribution
Government and policy	WGEA, Equal by 30, state / federal programs	Regulation, funding, accountability
Leadership	Champions of Change, Chief Executive Women	Senior accountability, organisational change
Evidence	WGEA, Jobs and Skills Australia, IEA	Measurement and benchmarking
Education and pipeline	Orbispace, Building Women's Careers, apprenticeships	Entry pathways and capability
Networks and visibility	Women in Renewables, Women in Energy	Mentoring, networks, role models
Technical institutions	Engineers Australia, CIGRE, ATSE	Technical careers and professional participation

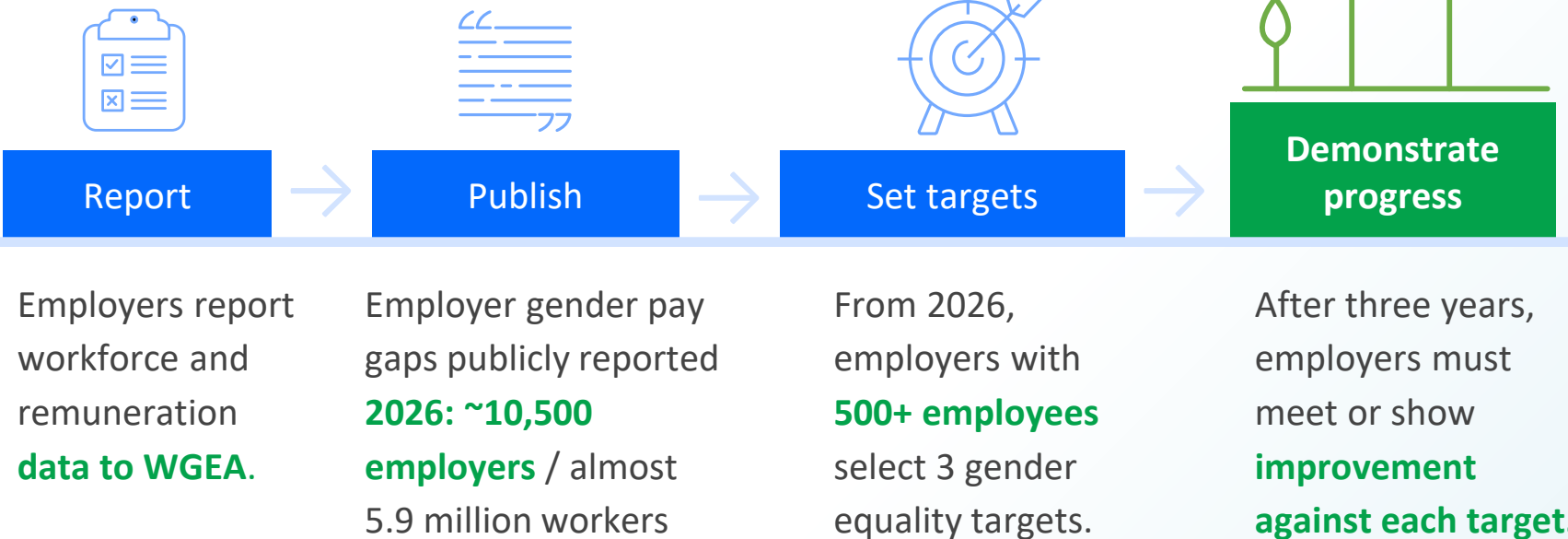
What the ecosystem map says is still comparatively underserved:

- coordination across initiatives
- identifying gaps and duplication
- aligning efforts around common priorities
- translating evidence into coordinated action.

Australia's Equality in Energy Transitions Ambassadors increasingly see their role as connecting existing activity rather than creating another standalone initiative.

Government can make performance visible

From reporting to accountability: Australia's gender data framework is becoming more interventionist



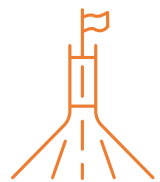
Why transparency can change behaviour

Public reporting allows employees, boards, competitors, investors and the media to compare organisations. It turns data from an internal diagnostic tool into a source of external accountability.

Measure → make visible → require measurable action

Government can also build pathways and use purchasing power

Government lever	Australian example	How it is intended to work
Workforce design	Building Women's Careers Program	Partnerships between employers, unions, training providers and community organisations to address structural barriers in male-dominated industries including clean energy
Financial support	Key Apprenticeship Program	Eligible clean-energy apprentices can receive up to \$10,000, reducing barriers to entering and completing priority trades
Purchasing power	Victorian social procurement	Uses state government procurement to seek evidence and commitments on gender equality from suppliers



What these approaches have in common

Government can influence participation at different points in the workforce pipeline:



Before entry — funding training and apprenticeships

At entry — reducing financial and structural barriers

During employment — supporting safer, more flexible and inclusive workplaces

A personal case study: when equality became part of core business

The equality evolution at Allens (law firm)

1. Leadership

Senior leaders took ownership rather than treating gender equality as an HR issue.

2. Targets

Clear representation goals made gaps visible and forced organisations to examine barriers.

3. Peer pressure

Highly competitive firms compared their performance and did not want to fall behind.



4. Commercial pressure

Clients began asking about gender and diversity in legal-panel tender processes.

Result: diversity performance became relevant to winning work.



What changed over time?

At Allens, women were:

- ~4% of partners when I joined in the early 1990s
- 17% when I became a partner in 2001
- 35% by 2020
- later reached a 40:40:20 objective.



Participation starts long before someone applies for an energy job

Year 8

Build confidence and interest

Orbispac Innovation Program

- Girls work on innovation and real-world problem solving.
- Mentoring with women from **100+ organisations**.
- **80%+** choose at least one STEM elective.*
- **90%+** report stronger confidence and communication.*



Year 10

Make future careers visible

PowerHer / UNSW

- Delivered before senior subject selection.
- Exposure to researchers, industry and emerging careers.
- Students work as **engineers, planners, analysts and designers**.
- **85%+** report increased interest in STEM pathways.*



Post-school

Create routes into the workforce

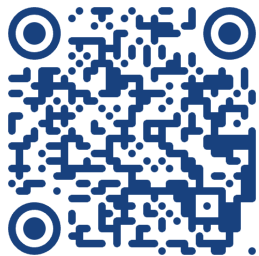
University
Vocational education.

New-energy apprenticeships.
Employers.

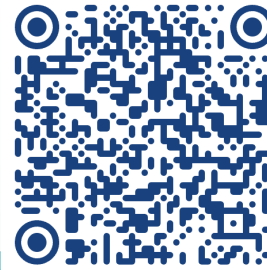
Energy workforce

Why intervene early?

By the time someone applies for their first energy job, decisions about subjects, qualifications and career expectations have already shaped who reaches the recruitment stage.



* Public employer gender pay-gap reporting



AI could widen participation or reinforce existing barriers

Opportunity

New skills and new voices

- Younger workers may be quicker to identify practical uses for new technology.
- AI can remove repetitive work and create new ways of working.
- Australia's National AI Plan emphasises skills development and broad participation in AI's benefits.

**Inclusive AI:
questions
organisations
should ask**

- Who was represented in the data?
- Who was involved in design and testing?
- Do outcomes differ between groups?

Risk

Existing bias at greater scale

- AI learns from existing data and institutions.
- Historical bias can be reproduced in automated decisions.
- Changes to entry-level work may disrupt traditional career pathways.

- Can an automated decision be challenged?
- Who remains accountable?



www.championsofchangecoalition.org

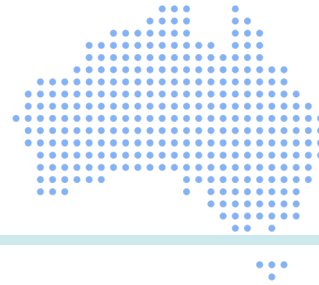
**Champions of
Change Coalition:
Inclusive AI prompt**



Inclusion is easier to build in from the start than to retrofit after disadvantage becomes embedded.



Five approaches emerging from the Australian experience



1

Measure outcomes

Good evidence helps identify where barriers actually exist.

2

Make performance visible

Transparency enables comparison and creates accountability.

3

Put incentives behind the objective

Leadership, targets and commercial incentives can change behaviour.

4

Intervene early

Participation is shaped well before recruitment.

5

Connect the ecosystem

Identify gaps, reduce duplication and help successful approaches spread.

Examples:

WGEA workforce and pay data

Public employer gender pay-gap reporting

Champions of Change; legal-sector client pressure

Orbispace, PowerHer, apprenticeships

Equality in Energy Transitions Ambassadors as system connectors



Three questions for any intervention



1. Who holds the lever?

2. What behaviour are we trying to change?

3. How will we know whether it worked?



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