NATIONAL COMPETITION COUNCIL

Review of Australia's Mutual Recognition Schemes for Workers

Final report to the Council on Federal Financial Relations

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Contents

Foreword

Labour mobility allows workers to pursue opportunities where their skills are needed most. It helps businesses access skilled workers, supports productivity and economic growth, and contributes to a more flexible workforce. Occupational licensing plays an important role in protecting public safety and consumers, but differences in licensing requirements can create barriers for workers seeking to work across state and territory borders. Australia's mutual recognition schemes are directed at reducing barriers to mobility while preserving state and territory licensing systems.

On behalf of the National Competition Council (the Council), I am pleased to present the Council's independent evaluation of Australia's mutual recognition schemes for workers.

The Council undertook this evaluation at the request of the Treasurer, the Hon Jim Chalmers MP, under section 29B(1)(b) of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth). The evaluation supported a review overseen by the Council on Federal Financial Relations.

The Review examines how well Australia's mutual recognition schemes support labour mobility, productivity and workforce flexibility while managing worker safety and consumer protection risks.

Through its consultations and analysis, the Council found strong support for the objectives of mutual recognition. However, stakeholders identified significant challenges in the practical operation of the schemes, including complex processes, inconsistent implementation and uncertainty in how arrangements apply across jurisdictions.

These issues limit the potential and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes in supporting a more integrated national labour market. They also raise questions about whether national licences would better support labour mobility.

The Council consulted Australian, state and territory governments, licensing regulators, industry, unions, professional bodies and other stakeholders. It also analysed relevant data on the operation and practical implementation of the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth) and related intergovernmental agreements.

The Council also considered how licensing interacts with broader regulatory frameworks that apply to licensed workers, as well as the national training and qualifications framework. This nationally coordinated system of vocational education, training and qualifications was developed following a national agreement in 1992. It applies to most vocational employment and creates minimum nationally accepted qualifications and training standards. However, with some notable exceptions, this has not been followed by the establishment of national licences or consistent regulatory and licensing schemes in most vocational occupations. A notable and inspiring exception is the establishment of national licensing for health practitioners. That example demonstrates that national licensing promoting labour mobility in a critical sector can be achieved with goodwill, cooperation and persistence.

This Review sets out the Council's findings and observations in accordance with the Terms of Reference. It also highlights some surprising and even absurd aspects of how the current systems operate.

The Review is intended to inform future policy development to reduce unnecessary occupational licensing barriers and support a more seamless national labour market, while maintaining appropriate protections. Progress will depend on continued collaboration across governments, licensing regulators and stakeholders.

The Council thanks all those who contributed to the Review through roundtable discussions, bilateral meetings and written submissions. The Council also acknowledges the support of the Australian Treasury, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, New South Wales Treasury and the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance for seconding officials to the Review Secretariat. I would also like to acknowledge Sarah Beasley and Tim Hewett from the Australian Treasury for their support and leadership of the Secretariat that supported the Review. Finally, I express my appreciation for the contribution of my fellow Councillors, Catherine Dermody, the Hon Dr Craig Emerson and Sally McMahon to the Review.

Marcus Bezzi
President, National Competition Council

Summary

Background

In Australia, one in five workers require a licence to perform their work. To obtain a licence, a worker must demonstrate that they are qualified and able to conduct their work in line with safety and quality standards. This keeps workers, consumers and the public safe and assured of the quality of the work. It assures a high level of quality, competence and confidence in regulated professions.

However, differences in licensing requirements across states and territories make it harder to move and work across borders. Productivity is reduced where skilled workers cannot move to where the work is and businesses and industry cannot secure the workers they need. Someone who is qualified to perform work in New South Wales, for instance, may not be authorised to do the same work in Western Australia. For consumers, this means less choice and higher prices.

Australia’s mutual recognition arrangements are designed to overcome state differences and allow licences to be recognised across borders. The objective is to facilitate worker mobility to improve productivity. National licensing also supports labour mobility as it allows workers to operate across Australia using one licence with nationally harmonised requirements and standards. This approach does not require mutual recognition and minimises the impact on workers and businesses.

The *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth) (MR Act) established 2 mutual recognition schemes for licensed workers: Mutual Recognition (MR) and Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR).

Overview of mutual recognition schemes

- MR allows licensed workers to apply for a licence in another jurisdiction for an equivalent occupation (with an associated processing fee), without the need for further assessment of their qualifications, skills or experience. MR was introduced in 1992 following the passing of the MR Act.
- AMR allows licensed workers to perform the same activities in another jurisdiction after notifying the local licensing regulator, without the need for further application processes or additional registration fees. AMR was introduced in 2021 following amendments to the MR Act.
- Throughout the report, ‘MR’ is used to refer to the 1992 mutual recognition scheme and ‘AMR’ is used to refer to the 2021 automatic mutual recognition scheme. The term 'mutual recognition' is used to refer to the concept of mutual recognition and the schemes collectively.

What the Council was asked to do

On 18 February 2026, the Australian Government, with the support of all state and territory Treasurers, requested the National Competition Council (the Council) conduct an independent review of Australia’s mutual recognition schemes for workers (the Review), and their effects on productivity, workforce flexibility and consumer choice.

The Council was directed to report on the implementation of mutual recognition and identify practical pathways to remove unnecessary barriers to a single national labour market, including the potential for a national licensing framework (see Appendix A. Terms of Reference).

National licences are most likely to provide the greatest benefits to labour mobility but careful assessment is required

The Council found that national licensing schemes have the potential to deliver large benefits for labour mobility by removing many of the barriers that currently arise under mutual recognition arrangements. This includes removing complex equivalence assessments between licences. National licensing would create greater certainty while also simplifying compliance and administration.

Experience from existing national frameworks – such as health practitioner registration, high-risk work (HRW) licences issued under Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws, and nationally consistent work health, safety and consumer protection frameworks – demonstrates the value of coordinated regulatory systems in reducing complexity, supporting workforce mobility and maintaining consistent standards. HRW includes operating specified machinery, erecting scaffolding and undertaking dogging or rigging work.

National licensing can be effectively implemented following 2 broad models:

- Schemes that operate primarily through state and territory powers, such as the health practitioners regime administered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.
- Schemes that operate under federal powers, including the licensing of financial advisers, company auditors and liquidators.

National licensing is not the most appropriate solution for every occupation. The strongest case exists where:

- the occupation has a large workforce or is economically significant
- workers commonly move for work or work across borders remotely
- the occupation involves significant risks that would benefit from nationally consistent standards
- the occupation is underpinned by nationally consistent training and/or internationally recognised standards
- tripartite support for a national scheme exists.

Engineering is an example of such an occupation.

In many cases, a staged approach may be preferable. This could begin with improvements to the mutual recognition schemes, including greater regulatory harmonisation, before progressing towards national licensing.

Mutual recognition schemes have facilitated greater labour mobility but there are opportunities to improve them further

The Council found that mutual recognition schemes have improved mobility in certain occupations. However, their effectiveness is limited by exemptions and Queensland's non-participation in AMR.

Over 30,000 workers use Australia's mutual recognition schemes each year. The largest users of the schemes are the electrical, security, property, building, plumbing and gas, driving and transport, gaming, engineering, building certification and radiation industries.

The Council found that many practical barriers to mutual recognition stem from a deeper problem: licensing frameworks have diverged significantly across jurisdictions.

While employer and employee groups broadly support the intention of the schemes, they also highlighted their limits. The schemes are complicated, information is hard to find and determining equivalence takes time. Together, these issues point to are revealing symptoms of underlying regulatory misalignment between jurisdictions. Many stakeholders advocated for national licensing for their occupation.

Greater harmonisation of licensing requirements and stronger oversight would improve the effectiveness of and confidence in the schemes. Further benefits could be achieved through wider adoption of AMR, fewer exemptions, and improved data collection and sharing.

Inconsistent implementation of mutual recognition across the country has limited uptake

Mutual recognition schemes have been implemented differently in each jurisdiction, which has limited their uptake and effectiveness.

All states and territories have implemented AMR, except Queensland. The Council supports the recently announced decision by the Queensland Government to progress its participation in AMR, which will benefit Queensland and increase the benefits for the whole country.

Jurisdictions that participate in AMR have put in place around 158 exemptions to the scheme. These exemptions prevent thousands of workers from accessing AMR. Security, building, plumbing and teaching occupations are frequently subject to exemptions. The Council considers that the evidence base offered in support of some exemptions is insufficient. Jurisdictions with fewer AMR exemptions have not seen any observable deterioration in safety or consumer protection outcomes.

Ministerial declarations of equivalence, which formally recognise that certain licences are equivalent, have become out of date and do not perform the intended function. This undermines labour mobility and creates safety and integrity risks.

Addressing underlying regulatory misalignment between states and territories is key to improving the effectiveness of the schemes

Regulatory misalignment between jurisdictions is the primary factor limiting the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and a common driver of many barriers to labour mobility identified throughout the Review. The Council identified some surprising aspects of the operation of the current systems, many of which relate to regulatory misalignment (see box 1).

Jurisdictions have distinct licence categories that cover different scopes of work and use varied terminology and definitions. For instance, Queensland’s engineer registration scheme covers 19 classes whereas Victoria’s scheme only covers 5 classes, meaning a Melbourne-based engineer faces considerable uncertainty about whether they could obtain a Queensland licence and what work this licence would enable them to do.

Further, where occupations are not consistently licensed across Australia, workers from jurisdictions without a licensing scheme are doubly disadvantaged: they must obtain a licence in another jurisdiction but are barred from using the AMR scheme elsewhere due to the ‘home state’ requirement.

State-specific requirements for continuing professional development (CPD), police checks, medical tests, insurance policies and trust accounts also add complexities. The need to meet these local requirements imposes considerable costs, making interstate work unviable in some instances, particularly for temporary or short-term work. The Council considers that greater consistency in these requirements and national applicability would reduce administrative burden and improve the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes.

Better information can improve the likelihood that a jurisdiction fully adopts mutual recognition and reduce the costs to workers and businesses seeking to utilise the schemes

Fragmented information collection and sharing across jurisdictions is a major barrier to the full implementation of mutual recognition schemes. While licensing regulators are required to exchange relevant information about licensees, licence status and disciplinary actions, there is no centralised real-time system to support that exchange.

Workers and businesses are also often unclear about when and how they should notify regulators when using AMR.

A further barrier to the full implementation of mutual recognition is the difficulty in determining licence equivalence between jurisdictions. Where licences are not covered by ministerial declarations, regulators must assess whether interstate licences authorise activities that are “substantially the same” as local licences. Variations in licence categories, terminology and scope of work make these assessments complex and can create uncertainty for regulators, employers and workers.

Improving information sharing and accessibility would reduce compliance costs and support labour mobility. Technologies including digital licensing systems and centralised information registers would improve the availability and reliability of information for regulators, workers and businesses. A coordinated approach, supported by clear accountabilities, could help identify and communicate state-based differences, AMR coverage and relevant obligations.

Opportunities to achieve greater labour mobility will be unlocked by strengthening governance, providing central oversight and support, and leveraging technology

Application processing systems, information sharing and compliance monitoring vary between jurisdictions, which reduces efficiencies and creates unnecessary barriers for applicants. Greater consistency in regulatory practices would support more effective operation of the schemes and improve the experience of users.

The administration of mutual recognition schemes is decentralised. Jurisdictions are responsible for implementation and enforcement, and there is no central body overseeing performance or driving reform. This limits progress towards national consistency. Stronger and more transparent institutional arrangements would help coordinate reforms, monitor outcomes and provide ongoing leadership to support labour mobility.

Structured governance mechanisms would promote continuous regulatory alignment. A national steward or coordinating body could play an important role in facilitating harmonisation, monitoring progress and encouraging jurisdictions to justify any ongoing regulatory differences.

Technology also presents significant opportunities. Modernised licensing systems, including interoperable or national licensing registers and digital licences, could improve information sharing, streamline notification processes and support real-time licence verification.

Box 1: Eight surprising facts in the operation of Mutual Recognition and Automatic Mutual Recognition

- A licensed security guard who wants to work in Western Australia must travel to Perth, visit the licensing office that’s only open 4 hours a day, provide original documents and photocopies, be fingerprinted, and pay $540 to do work they are already licensed to do in their home state.
- An architect or surveyor working across multiple states can face different continuing professional development requirements, reporting periods and paperwork in each jurisdiction, just to stay registered for the same work.
- An air conditioning installer with a national refrigerant handling licence can do a job in one state but find that the exact same job in another state requires an additional plumbing, building or electrical licence.
- Despite having nationally recognised qualifications for engineers, there are 3 categories of engineers’ licences in Tasmania, 5 in Victoria and 19 in Queensland.
- Electricians from outside the Australian Capital Territory are not permitted to install solar panels or electric batteries in the ACT unless they obtain a special endorsement on their licence from the ACT Government.
- Regulators may not always know when a worker operating under mutual recognition in their jurisdiction has had their licence cancelled or suspended elsewhere.
- The governance body to oversee mutual recognition has not been convened since 2022, even though it was agreed it would report to Heads of Treasuries every 6 months.
- Errors exist in ministerial declarations of equivalence which are widely known but have not been addressed, since there has been no work to update the declarations for more than 10 years.

Next steps

This Review will be delivered to the Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR) to inform the development of more effective licensing arrangements and pathways to a single national labour market.

The Australian, state and territory governments have committed to establishing a tripartite group – comprising industry groups, unions and federal, state and territory governments – to identify options to strengthen, streamline or replace current licensing arrangements and support the development of a more seamless national labour market. This group will consider the Council’s findings and develop solutions to progress national licensing as part of Commonwealth, state and territory governments’ commitment to develop a single national labour market under the National Competition Policy (NCP) framework.

1. Findings

1.1 Impact and effectiveness of current mutual recognition schemes

The Council was asked to consider the impact and effectiveness of current mutual recognition schemes, including:

a) The extent to which they have improved labour mobility in participating jurisdictions;

b) Their economic effects, including on participation, addressing skills shortages and productivity;

c) The extent to which they have managed worker safety and consumer protection risks; and

d) Identifying the sectors where these schemes have had the most significant effects.

The Council makes the following findings on these issues.

Finding 1: Mutual recognition schemes have facilitated greater labour mobility but there are opportunities to improve them further

1.1 Mutual recognition schemes operating in Australia – in which one jurisdiction allows a worker to obtain a new licence or undertake specified work based on a licence issued to that worker by another jurisdiction – have improved labour mobility in participating jurisdictions for the occupations to which they apply.

1.2 The extent to which mutual recognition has improved labour mobility varies across occupations. In some occupations, such as architecture and gaming technology, mutual recognition works relatively seamlessly. In others, such as surveying and the legal professions, mutual recognition operates through schemes agreed between some states but not others. In occupations such as building and engineering, differences in how jurisdictions classify activities – and in the practical requirements workers must meet before starting work – create barriers for workers. This complexity discourages workers from taking up work in other jurisdictions. It also discourages businesses from seeking work, or sourcing workers, across borders.

1.3 Where jurisdictions have not adopted AMR or have exempted specific occupations, both the adoption, and the effectiveness of the scheme to further contribute to national labour mobility, have been constrained. National participation and greater inclusion of occupations would increase the effectiveness of the regime.

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Finding 1: Mutual recognition schemes have facilitated greater labour mobility but there are opportunities to improve them further. (continued)

1.4 Employer and employee groups were broadly supportive of the intention of mutual recognition schemes, but highlighted the complexity of application processes, lack of information on the schemes, difficulties determining equivalence, and broader regulatory misalignment between jurisdictions as factors limiting their effectiveness. Many employer and employee groups advocated for national licensing for their occupation.

1.5 Although some concerns were raised, the Council sought but did not find any evidence that current mutual recognition schemes have led to increased worker safety and consumer protection risks or failed to manage those risks. Embracing opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements (see finding 4), including consideration of consistent training, compliance and enforcement, would enable any such risks to be managed. If this were to be a continuing perceived concern, a common assessment framework and reporting would assist in understanding and assessing the drivers and materiality of these risks.

1.6 A common framework for assessing the need for jurisdictional differences and exemptions would facilitate national consistency and harmonisation. Periodic review and oversight by an independent agency would further improve the effectiveness of the schemes.

1.7 The mutual recognition schemes have contributed to improved labour market participation, workforce flexibility and productivity by enabling businesses to access skilled workers more readily across jurisdictions. They have also helped to address local skills shortages by facilitating short-term, surge or project-based work. There is potential for substantial additional benefits if improvements are made to the operation of mutual recognition schemes or if some occupations adopt national licensing.

1.8 Application of the schemes has been most effective where there is a high degree of harmonisation and consistency at the outset. This was observed, for example, for gaming technicians, architects and work conducted under radiation protection and pesticide management licences.

1.9 The largest users of the mutual recognition schemes are the electrical, security, property, building, plumbing and gas, driving and transport, gaming, engineering, building certification and radiation industries.

1.10 Stakeholder feedback suggests the benefits of mutual recognition schemes have been most significant for work being undertaken by builders, carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, real estate agents and security guards. This is despite problems identified with the operation of mutual recognition (MR) and automatic mutual recognition (AMR) for these occupations including exemptions and broader regulatory misalignment.

1.11 The collection, reporting and sharing of information on the adoption and outcomes of the schemes would assist in monitoring their impact and effectiveness over time. Data limitations, primarily due to inconsistent reporting or lack of data, constrain evidence-based improvements and reform of mutual recognition schemes. There is an opportunity to improve data collection and comparability across jurisdictions by establishing common data definitions and protocols, including on regulatory outcomes. Reporting on where the schemes have not been adopted, or where exemptions persist, particularly where this is due to perceived risk of harm, would further inform future refinements.

1.2 Implementation and alignment of the current schemes

The Council was asked to consider the implementation and alignment of current mutual recognition schemes, including:

(a) Variations in implementation across jurisdictions, such as exemptions, delays or inconsistencies in recognition;

(b) The rationale for these variations, and whether they are proportionate to risk; and

(c) The extent to which laws and standards are harmonised across jurisdictions, and areas where misalignment creates barriers to labour mobility.

The Council makes the following findings on these issues.

Finding 2: Improving alignment of jurisdictional requirements will support more widespread implementation of the schemes.

2.1 There are significant variations in the implementation and alignment of current mutual recognition schemes across jurisdictions, and among occupations, which materially undermine the effectiveness of these schemes.

2.2 Most significantly, Queensland does not participate in AMR at all. In its response to the 2025 Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into opportunities to improve productivity of the construction industry, the Queensland Government agreed to progress its participation in the AMR scheme. The Council supports the Queensland Government's commitment to progressing participation in AMR.

2.3 Jurisdictions that do participate in AMR have exempted numerous occupations from its operation, with an estimated 158 exemptions across jurisdictions. Common examples include security, building and plumbing. Exemptions are permitted where necessary to guard against significant risk to consumers, the environment, animal welfare, or the health and safety of workers or the public. However, it is not obvious that the benefits of these exemptions have been assessed against their costs. Taking up the opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements (see finding 4) should reduce or eliminate the need to rely on some or all of these exemptions.

2.4 Differences between jurisdictions in the categorisation of activities covered by particular licences, and labels given to these categories and activities, gives rise to unnecessary complexity for workers, employees and those administering the schemes and creates uncertainty. This complexity and uncertainty increases costs disproportionately to any perceived or actual impact on risk, deters workers and businesses from using the schemes and results in delays in commencing work. Further, as identified in finding 4, these kinds of differences can be readily addressed, particularly where occupations are underpinned by, and have as their starting point, already nationally endorsed qualification competencies and standards. Similar observations apply in connection with differences in licence conditions and ongoing requirements, such as continuing education.

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Finding 2: Improving alignment of jurisdictional requirements will support more widespread implementation of the schemes. (continued)

2.5 Ministerial declarations of equivalence, which formally recognise that certain licences are equivalent and are directed at removing the complexity and uncertainty of jurisdictional differences, have become out of date and do not perform their intended function. Most ministerial declarations currently in force were developed between 2007 and 2015 and have not been reviewed for more than a decade, despite significant changes to licensing frameworks and in some cases, to the scope of occupations over that period. Providing a register that can be easily and readily updated and expanded without ministerial decisions would improve the timeliness, flexibility and effectiveness of capturing this information.

2.6 Other differences that can give rise to misalignment of the current mutual recognition schemes include worker screening requirements (medical testing, working with children checks, police checks and fingerprinting) and local law requirements (codes of conduct, insurance requirements, financial tests and trust account frameworks). Requiring worker screening or testing to be done in multiple jurisdictions imposes additional costs on workers and businesses. Multiple different state-based requirements are unlikely to lead to better outcomes than harmonised national screening, testing regimes or national applicability of jurisdictional attainment.

2.7 Greater alignment between state and territory occupational licensing requirements and nationally recognised competency frameworks would enhance the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and improve labour mobility. Jobs and Skills Councils play an important role in this process through the development and maintenance of national training packages.

1.3 Making it easier for workers and businesses

The Council was asked to consider the experience of workers navigating the current mutual recognition schemes, including:

(a) The effectiveness of communication to workers regarding eligibility, processes, and requirements under existing mutual recognition schemes;

(b) The impact of notification requirements on workers; and

(c) The role of registration authorities in supporting cross-border mobility.

The Council makes the following findings on these issues.

Finding 3: Better information can improve the likelihood that a jurisdiction fully adopts the mutual recognition schemes and reduces the costs to workers and businesses seeking to utilise the schemes.

3.1 Effective communication between licensing regulators is undermined by poor information collection, sharing and updating. Relevant information regarding use of the schemes, licence status, disciplinary actions and the differences (and equivalence) of requirements between jurisdictions is not always shared among regulators. Timely sharing of this information would assist with the effective adoption and operation of the schemes, and minimisation of harm.

3.2 Licensing regulators are obliged under the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth) (MR Act) to exchange relevant information relating to a particular licensee with other regulators if they know the licensee is using MR in the other regulator's jurisdiction. The MR Act also requires licensing regulators, once notified, to share any information reasonably required about a person in connection with AMR in a second state or with actual or possible disciplinary action against the person. However, there is no centralised register or other system updated in real time that captures or enables sharing of such information.

3.3 While the requirement to provide notification under AMR is sensible, the difficulty in understanding when and if notification is required, and differences in notification processes between jurisdictions, increase costs to workers and limit the uptake of AMR.

3.4 Licensing regulators, employers and workers face uncertainty when attempting to determine the equivalence of licences under the MR scheme. Where licences are not covered by a ministerial declaration of equivalence, licensing regulators must determine whether the activities authorised by an interstate licence are "substantially the same" as those authorised by a local licence. This assessment can be complex where licence classes, terminology and scopes of work vary between jurisdictions.

3.5 A commitment by state-based licensing regulators to regularly review differences between jurisdictions and adopt a common assessment framework for retaining differences as a consequence of safety, consumer protection or specific necessary state requirements would facilitate more consistency at the outset, making it easier for AMR to be fully adopted.

3.6 Licence types and scope could be mapped to nationally accepted qualifications or training, with a standardised set of categorisation, functions, eligibility, notification requirements and local obligations. This would enable workers and businesses to more readily assess requirements and would reduce their costs and downtime. These requirements could be captured on a website outlining state-based differences.

3.7 The collection and updating of information is fragmented and relies heavily on manual processes and systems. Digital licences, registration and automated updating systems would improve the availability of information and likely reduce the cost of administration and maintenance. State licensing regulators play an important role in collecting and sharing this information, which is particularly important for cross-border communities. Clear accountability for this function, including through a single centralised body to coordinate information sharing, would provide further benefits.

3.8 The ease with which licensees can work in another jurisdiction depends not only on the availability of a licence but also on the capacity to discover and comply with licence and non-licence obligations specified under state or territory laws. Information about these obligations can be difficult to obtain in some jurisdictions. These additional requirements can impose substantial costs on workers and/or their employers. This is made worse if they must meet multiple state requirements.

1.4 Opportunities to strengthen and streamline the schemes

The Council was asked to consider opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements, including:

(a) Improving the consistency and efficiency of mutual recognition processes across jurisdictions; and

(b) Technologies, systems and/or processes that can reduce costs and improve safety, quality and employment outcomes.

The Council makes the following findings on these issues.

Finding 4: Opportunities to achieve greater labour mobility will be unlocked by strengthening governance, providing central oversight and support, and leveraging technology.

4.1 There are opportunities to improve the consistency and efficiency of mutual recognition processes across jurisdictions by improving consistency in the systems and processes adopted by jurisdictions when processing applications, collecting and sharing information, and monitoring compliance.

4.2 The adoption and administration of the schemes are primarily managed by jurisdictions, with no central or independent oversight or review function. This has the potential to limit the progress of wider adoption of the schemes and allow continued divergence rather than convergence toward nationally consistent requirements, compliance and enforcement.

4.3 Stronger and transparent institutional arrangements to support coordination, oversee the scheme and champion change would encourage national consistency and support enduring reform.

4.4 Governance arrangements that promote ongoing regulatory alignment, rather than one-off reforms, are likely to provide substantial benefits. This would include:

- clarifying who should oversee, monitor and evaluate mutual recognition schemes and facilitate regulatory coordination and harmonisation between jurisdictions
- establishing structured coordination mechanisms involving governments, licensing regulators, industry and unions (tripartite governance groups) to progress licensing reforms, such as harmonising licence classes, definitions and entry requirements across jurisdictions
- regular independent reporting and assessment of interstate regulatory alignment to identify inconsistencies and track harmonisation efforts, requiring states and territories to justify inconsistencies from any agreed national regulatory frameworks
- establishing and supporting regulator working groups to undertake periodic reviews of equivalence of occupational licences
- development of a common assessment framework for applying exemptions and assessing potential harm including collection of data on reasons and outcomes.

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Finding 4: Opportunities to achieve greater labour mobility will be unlocked by strengthening governance, providing central oversight and support, and leveraging technology. (continued)

4.5 A national steward or coordinating body could promote consistent application of the schemes and help to drive national labour mobility. This body could oversee and support mandated periodic reviews by jurisdictions to seek to harmonise requirements and justify regulatory divergence. This might be more effective if explicit incentives or public reporting were adopted.

4.6 There is great potential for technology to improve information sharing to licensees and among licensing regulators, such as through digital licensing or the introduction of a national licensing register. In some cases, the underlying technology systems supporting occupational licensing regulation require upgrading. Strengthening these systems would reduce administrative burdens, improve information sharing between regulators and reduce risks to the effective operation and integrity of mutual recognition schemes. For example:

- Establishing a national or interoperable licensing register to provide a single national source of information on licensees, enable improved information sharing among licensing regulators, improve visibility of disciplinary action and allow more seamless notification processes. This information would also support better monitoring and targeted, proportionate intervention to improve safety and consumer outcomes.
- Creating a digital licence to enable real-time licence verification and streamline processes associated with booking inspections, providing certificates and notifying licensing regulators before moving across borders or undertaking high-risk work. A digital licence could also assist workers in identifying additional obligations or differences in rules that apply to them as they work in another jurisdiction, while providing improved information to locally licensed workers on updates to licensing requirements or standards over time and support self-assessment of eligibility for mutual recognition. This would enable more timely and better matching of workers to employment opportunities and facilitate labour mobility.

4.7 Existing schemes that enable automatic mutual recognition for some occupations between multiple states or territories but are not yet national in scope would promote labour mobility if further expanded. Examples are the Legal Profession Uniform Law (New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia) and the East Coast Electricians scheme (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory).

1.5 The value of pursuing national licensing

The Council was asked to consider the potential for a national licensing framework to complement or replace mutual recognition, particularly where these arrangements are not working effectively, and are likely to increase labour mobility and remove unnecessary costs for participants.

The Council makes the following findings on these issues.

Finding 5: National licences are most likely to provide the greatest benefits to labour mobility but careful assessment is required.

5.1 National licensing supports a national labour market, workforce flexibility and mobility, and the consumer choice that mutual recognition schemes strive to emulate.

5.2 Existing Australian national licensing schemes, and other mechanisms for interjurisdictional cooperation, provide valuable lessons for the implementation of future national licensing schemes and demonstrate the significant benefits that can be achieved when they are established. Examples of such schemes are the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health occupations, high-risk work licences, driver licensing, Australian work health and safety law, and the Australian Consumer Law which, while not a licensing scheme, maintains national consumer protection obligations for everyone involved in trade and commerce.

5.3 National licensing schemes can be effectively implemented for specific occupations primarily using state-based powers or primarily using federal powers, sometimes supplemented by referrals of state powers. An example of national licensing based on state powers is the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency administered scheme for registration and accreditation of health practitioners. An example of a federal national licensing scheme is the regulation and licensing of financial advisors, company auditors and liquidators.

5.4 Many of the practical issues associated with the implementation of mutual recognition schemes, including incomplete participation, determining equivalence and regulatory divergence, would be solved by national licensing.

5.5 National licensing is unlikely to be the optimal solution for all occupations. In some occupations, improvements to mutual recognition arrangements and/or greater regulatory harmonisation might achieve similar benefits at lower cost.

5.6 National licensing is most likely to deliver net benefits where:

- the occupation has a large workforce or is economically significant
- workers commonly move for work or work across borders remotely
- the occupation involves significant risks that would benefit from nationally consistent standards
- the occupation is underpinned by nationally consistent training or internationally recognised standards
- tripartite support for a national scheme exists.

In such cases, there may be benefits in taking a graduated approach that builds towards national licensing in a sequential manner, focusing on removing barriers to mutual recognition and improving regulatory harmonisation as a critical first step.

2. Context and framework

2.1 Purpose and methodology

2.1.1 About the Review

On 18 February 2026, the Australian Government, with the support of all Treasurers, requested the National Competition Council (the Council) undertake an independent evaluation of Australia's mutual recognition schemes for workers (the Review).

The Review examines how MR and AMR operate in practice under the MR Act and whether they support labour mobility, productivity and workforce flexibility, while maintaining safety and consumer protection.

The Review also responds to a commitment by Australian, state and territory governments to periodically evaluate mutual recognition arrangements under the *2020 Intergovernmental Agreement on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registration* (IGA).

2.1.2 Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the Review is to identify practical pathways to remove unnecessary occupational licensing barriers to a single national labour market, while maintaining appropriate safeguards (see Appendix A. Terms of Reference).

In doing so, the Review assesses:

- whether current schemes improve labour mobility, workforce flexibility and consumer choice
- how schemes operate in practice for workers, employers and licensing regulators
- whether safety and consumer protection risks are appropriately managed.

The findings are intended to inform future decisions by the Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR) on occupational licensing and workforce mobility reforms. Findings will be used to support the *Single National Market for Workers* reforms under National Competition Policy (NCP) agreed in November 2025, intended to promote productivity growth and a more efficient national labour market.

2.1.3 Scope of the Review

The Review considers occupational licensing and registration arrangements for workers in Australia, focusing on:

- traditional MR established under the MR Act in 1992
- AMR arrangements introduced through legislative amendments in 2021.

In line with the Terms of Reference, the Review examines:

- the impact and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes, including effects on labour mobility, workforce participation, skills shortages and productivity
- the implementation and alignment of mutual recognition arrangements across jurisdictions, including exemptions, variations and delays
- the experience of workers navigating mutual recognition schemes
- opportunities to strengthen or streamline existing arrangements, including through improved processes, technology or alternative licensing models
- the potential for a national licensing framework to complement or replace mutual recognition, particularly where these arrangements are not working effectively, and are likely to increase labour mobility and remove unnecessary costs for participants.

The Review focuses on occupational licences covered by the MR Act and does not consider business licences, mutual recognition for goods or the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement. The Review does not include a comprehensive cost–benefit analysis of reform options. Rather than assessing individual occupations, the Council considered the operation of mutual recognition schemes across licensed occupations and noted distinctions where relevant.

2.1.4 Approach to the Review

The Council used a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence to assess the operation and performance of Australia's mutual recognition arrangements, including:

- stakeholder submissions and consultation
- regulator data and administrative datasets
- previous reviews and academic literature
- case studies and economic analysis.

The Council drew on information provided by state and territory licensing regulators, data from the GovTEAMS platform used to verify licence status for MR and AMR, and publicly available data and information published by other Australian Government departments.

To support the Review Secretariat's work on behalf of the NCC, the Commonwealth Treasury commissioned Mandala Partners to undertake quantitative analysis of the effects of mutual recognition schemes on labour mobility and economic activity

2.1.5 Stakeholder engagement

The Council undertook 2 rounds of stakeholder consultation to inform the Review. These comprised meetings with government and industry stakeholders and a public submissions process.

Initial round of consultation

The Council released a call for submissions paper in March 2026, seeking stakeholder views on the effectiveness of Australia's mutual recognition schemes and broader issues relating to occupational licensing and registration. Stakeholders were invited to identify which elements of the schemes were working well and opportunities for improvement, supported by data and case studies where available. The Council received 55 submissions.

The Council also met with representatives from Australian, state and territory governments, employers and unions. Feedback from this consultation informed the development of 14 interim findings.

Second round of consultation

In May 2026, the Council released a Consultation Paper seeking feedback on the interim findings. The Council received 51 submissions in response.

The Council undertook a further round of consultation with governments and stakeholders, including bilateral meetings and roundtables with representatives from the construction, engineering, surveying, architecture, property, security and transport sectors. Additional roundtables with Cross Border Commissioners and representatives of relevant Australian Government agencies.

Members of the Review secretariat attended the Australasian symposium for building industry licensing bodies, hosted by the Queensland Building and Construction Commission in May 2026.

2.2 Overview of mutual recognition arrangements

2.2.1 Occupational licensing

Occupational licensing requires people to hold a licence or registration before undertaking certain types of work. It is commonly used where there are professional standards and risks to public safety or consumer protection.

Occupational licensing can deliver important benefits:

- protecting consumers, workers and the public from harm
- providing confidence that workers meet required standards or have adequate competence.

Licensing assures that workers have the skills and qualifications needed to undertake regulated activities safely. While licensing can provide important protections, unnecessarily restrictive or inconsistent licensing requirements can increase costs, reduce labour mobility and make it harder for businesses to access skilled workers. In some cases, they may reduce productivity growth by limiting the ability of occupations to evolve as technology and consumer demand change.[1]

Differences in licensing requirements between jurisdictions make it harder for workers to move across borders for work. They also raise the costs to employers to fill job vacancies and expand their business. Where licensing is unnecessarily restrictive or misaligned with regulatory objectives, it can also create and exacerbate skill shortages and make it harder for people to change jobs.

Workers in licensed occupations are often required to obtain qualifications aligned to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Many of these qualifications are underpinned by nationally endorsed training packages (Box 2).

Box 2: National training packages

National training packages set out the knowledge and skills required to perform specific occupations and underpin many vocational qualifications in Australia.

In 1992, all Australian governments agreed to establish a nationally coordinated vocational education and training (VET) system. National VET frameworks are intended to support consistent training outcomes across Australia, facilitate movement between jurisdictions, qualifications and occupations, and ensure graduates develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that industry needs. [2]

Training packages are nationally endorsed and are developed by Jobs and Skills Councils, supported by technical committees with industry expertise.[3] They are regularly assessed for quality and reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of industry, students and the community.

2.2.2 Australia's mutual recognition frameworks

Australia's mutual recognition schemes are intended to improve labour mobility by allowing licensed workers to undertake work in other jurisdictions without having to repeat training, qualifications or competency assessments. The schemes seek to reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers while maintaining appropriate protections for worker safety and consumers.

Australia operates 2 main mutual recognition pathways for licensed workers.

Table 1: Overview of Australia's mutual recognition schemes

Feature	Mutual recognition (MR)	Automatic mutual recognition (AMR)
How it works	Workers apply for an equivalent licence in another jurisdiction	Workers use their existing licence to undertake work in another participating jurisdiction
Additional licence required	Yes	No
Application required	Yes	No
Additional registration fees	Yes – associated processing fee	No
Regulator assessment	Required to determine equivalence and grant registration	Generally not required
Ability to work while application assessed	Yes, through deemed registration	Not applicable – where notification is required, individuals can begin work after notifying the local regulator.
Occupation coverage	Applies nationally	Applies only in participating jurisdictions and occupations not subject to an exemption

Across both schemes:

- workers must comply with the laws of the jurisdiction in which they work
- workers subject to disciplinary action or certain disqualifying conditions may be ineligible
- licensing regulators must share relevant information to support compliance, oversight and enforcement.

These safeguards are intended to balance mobility goals with the protection of public and consumer interests.

Mutual recognition

Part 3 of the MR Act establishes a national framework that allows workers registered in one jurisdiction to obtain registration in another for an equivalent occupation.

To access MR, workers must apply to the local registration authority, provide evidence of their existing licence or registration and pay any relevant application fee. Once a valid application is made, workers receive interim deemed registration, allowing them to work while their applications is assessed.

Under the MR Act, occupations are considered equivalent where the activities authorised by the licence in each jurisdiction are “substantially the same”. Licensing regulators may impose conditions on a licence to achieve equivalence as appropriate.

Automatic mutual recognition

AMR was introduced in 2021 through amendments to the MR Act. AMR allows licensed workers to undertake work in another participating jurisdiction using their home licence, without the need to obtain a separate licence of pay additional registration fees.

In some cases, workers must notify the local regulator before commencing work. Workers may only undertake activities authorised by their home licence and must continue to comply with local laws and regulatory requirements.

AMR commenced progressively between 2021 and 2022. It currently operates in all Australian jurisdictions except Queensland.[4]

The purpose of AMR is to reduce the compliance costs for workers to operate in different jurisdictions while maintaining state specific licensing. However, its effectiveness depends on consistent implementation across jurisdictions.

Under AMR, jurisdictions are allowed to exempt specific occupational registrations from using AMR for a renewable period of up to 5 years, where they are determined to be necessary to address specific risks. In the case that an occupation is exempt from AMR in a specific jurisdiction, individuals must use MR.

AMR is intended to support temporary labour mobility, and individuals are required to hold a licence from their home jurisdiction. Where a worker permanently moves to another jurisdiction, they are no longer eligible for AMR and must obtain a licence in that jurisdiction.

2.2.3 Participation and exemptions

All Australian states and territories except Queensland have adopted AMR. Queensland chose not to adopt AMR due to concerns about risks to regulatory standards and safeguards to workers and consumers. It also sought to defer consideration of AMR adoption until implementation progressed in other states, to allow for a more informed assessment of the scheme's merits and risks.

In January 2026, the Queensland Government agreed to progress participating in AMR following recommendations of the Queensland Productivity Commission.[5]

Participating jurisdictions may exempt occupations where there is significant risk to consumer protection, worker or public safety, the environment or animal welfare. While exemptions are intended to manage risk, they reduce the coverage and effectiveness of the scheme.

2.2.4 Scale and use of mutual recognition in Australia

Occupational licensing affects a substantial share of the Australian workforce. Approximately one in five Australian workers is employed in an occupation requiring registration or licensing.[6] While jurisdictions generally regulate similar occupations, licence categories, terminology and requirements often differ across states and territories.

Available data indicates that mutual recognition schemes are used extensively across Australia. Usage is broadly proportional to population size, with Queensland differing from other jurisdictions because it has not adopted AMR. MR remains more widely used than AMR, although both schemes facilitate interstate labour mobility.

There are, however, significant data limitations. State and territory licensing regulators maintain separate systems for recording MR applications and AMR notifications, and use different approaches to data collection and reporting. Not all licensing regulators were able to provide complete information, and some could only provide data for particular licence categories. As a result, the figures presented in this report should be treated as indicative rather than definitive.

The Council also compared data provided by licensing regulators with data provided by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) from GovTEAMS, the primary platform used by licensing regulators to exchange information about MR and AMR. While GovTEAMS data is likely to understate actual usage because some requests and notifications are processed outside the system, comparison of the 2 datasets provides a useful indication of overall scheme use.

Despite differences between datasets, both indicate that tens of thousands of workers use mutual recognition arrangements each year. One in every 76 people in Australia moved interstate in 2025.[7] Applying this rate to the licensed occupations suggests that around 38,000 licensed workers would be expected to move interstate each year, compared with the 32,259 applications and notifications reported by licensing regulators. This suggests that, while imperfect, the uptake figures used in this Review are likely to provide a reasonable indication of overall scheme use.

Table 2: Uptake of MR and AMR, by jurisdiction, 2025

	Provided by jurisdictional licensing regulators		Sourced from GovTEAMS data	
	Reported MR applications, 2025	Reported AMR notifications, 2025	MR requests, 2025	AMR notifications, 2025
NSW	9469*	931*	2208	743
Vic	5190	1445	2820	1219
Qld	8358	N/A	732	N/A
WA	3090**	472**	2057	458
SA	1980	907	1104	1125
Tas	377	414±	773	511
ACT	575	Not provided	580	473
NT	1051	147†	1244	367
Total	**27,925**	**4,334**	**11,518**	**3,677**

* Note that the NSW Environmental Protection Agency does not differentiate between MR and AMR applications in their system. This means some NSW AMR notifications may have been incorrectly reported as MR.

** WA could not provide MR or AMR data for driving instructors, bus drivers and various licences administered by the WA Department of Health.

± Tas figures are likely an underestimate, as the Department of Justice noted that they could not differentiate AMR notifications from other types of licensing applications.

† NT reported a total of 733 AMR notifications since the scheme's inception in 2021. We have divided this figure by 5 to estimate a figure for one calendar year, noting this is likely an underestimate of frequency in 2025 as uptake has grown over time.

GovTEAMS data indicates that occupations with some of the highest usage of MR and AMR activities include electrical, security, property and building occupations (detailed data at Appendix D). This aligns with feedback from regulators and industry stakeholders. However, differences in regulator practices and data collection methods mean that occupational-level data should be interpreted with caution and is not suitable for comparing uptake between occupations. Data limitations are discussed further in section 3.4.3.

2.2.5 Previous attempts at national licensing

The Australian, state and territory governments have previously sought to establish nationally consistent occupational licensing arrangements. In 2009, governments signed the *Intergovernmental Agreement for a National Licensing System for Specified Occupations* (the NLS IGA), identifying a range of occupations that were considered suitable for national licensing, including electrical, air conditioning and refrigeration mechanics, building-related occupations, land transport, maritime, plumbing and gas-fitting and property agents.[8]

To support implementation, governments established the National Occupational Licensing Authority (NOLA). NOLA was responsible for developing nationally consistent licence categories, eligibility requirements and administrative arrangements – specifically, a single national licence that could be used in any Australian jurisdiction. It was also intended to establish a national register of licence holders, providing a single source of information across jurisdictions. The NOLA was supported by the National Occupation Licensing Board and Occupational Licensing Advisory Committees, both designed to provide advice on licensing policy.

The system was underpinned by a national licensing legislative framework. Under the NLS IGA, governments agreed that Victoria would host the substantive legislation to give effect to the national system, with other states to adopt enabling legislation to apply this system in their own jurisdiction. In 2010, the Victorian Government gained royal assent to the *Occupational Licensing National Law Act*, with all but Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory enacting enabling legislation by June 2011.[9]

Although substantial work was undertaken, the proposed National Occupational Licensing System did not proceed. In 2013, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to discontinue the reforms following concerns raised by jurisdictions regarding the proposed model, implementation costs and the potential loss of licensing revenue.[10] Governments instead agreed to pursue alternative approaches to improving labour mobility and reducing licensing barriers.[11] NOLA ceased operations on 1 August 2014.[12]

Previous national licensing reform attempts remain relevant to this Review. They demonstrate that nationally consistent licensing frameworks can be developed across jurisdictions and highlight the importance of governance arrangements, common licence categories, nationally consistent requirements and shared information systems. They also provide lessons regarding the challenges of implementing large-scale licensing reforms and the importance of maintaining support across governments, regulators, industry and workers. It is also important to assess and address any financial concerns of the states including those relating to any costs of reform processes and potential lost licensing revenue.

2.2.6 National competition policy and the single national market for workers

Mutual recognition forms part of a broader reform agenda to create a more seamless national labour market. In November 2025, all the Australian and state and territory governments agreed to progress a Single National Market for Workers under National Competition Policy (NCP).

The findings of this Review will inform future occupational licensing reforms, including consideration of improvements to MR and AMR, greater regulatory harmonisation and national licensing in appropriate occupations, including electrical trades[13] and engineering professions.[14]

2.2.7 Legislation

The MR Act provides the legislative framework for MR and AMR in Australia. Features of the framework include:

- a national framework implemented through Commonwealth and state legislation
- responsibility for licensing remaining with states and territories
- powers for jurisdictions to determine licensing requirements and exemptions
- information-sharing obligations to support compliance, oversight and enforcement.

Under MR, workers may apply for a licence or registration in another jurisdiction where the occupation is equivalent. Once a valid application is lodged, workers may generally begin practising through deemed registration while their application is assessed. Under AMR, workers rely on their home-state licence or registration to undertake work in another participating jurisdiction, without obtaining a separate licence.

The framework reflects Australia’s federal system, where occupational licensing remains primarily the responsibility of states and territories. Jurisdictions may exempt occupations from AMR where there is a significant risk to consumer protection, worker or public safety, the environment or animal welfare.

Court decisions have provided important guidance on the operation of MR, particularly in relation to the assessment of equivalence. For example, in *Victorian Building Authority v Cau* [2023] FCAFC 120, the Federal Court of Australia confirmed that if the activities are substantially the same, equivalence must be granted.

Courts have also clarified that regulators can address some differences between licences by imposing conditions rather than refusing recognition altogether. For example, if a licence issued in one jurisdiction excludes particular activities, the receiving jurisdiction may apply similar limitations when recognising the licence.[15] In *Victorian Building Authority v Andriotis* (2019) 268 CLR 168, the High Court confirmed that regulators should generally accept the registration status granted by another jurisdiction and cannot routinely re-assess a person’s qualifications of fitness to practice. Together, these decisions support the objective of facilitating labour mobility while maintaining appropriate regulatory safeguards.

Further detail on the legislative framework governing MR and AMR, including administrative arrangements, exemption provisions and relevant court decisions, is provided in Appendix F.

3. Assessment of the current mutual recognition schemes and findings

This chapter assesses the operation and effectiveness of Australia's mutual recognition schemes against the Terms of Reference.

It covers:

- the impact and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes (section 3.1)
- governance, implementation and regulatory alignment issues (sections 3.2 and 3.3)
- the implications for labour mobility, worker safety and consumer protection (sections 3.4 and 3.5).

3.1 Impact and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes

This section assesses the impact and effectiveness of key mutual recognition schemes against the following criteria identified in the Terms of Reference:

- The extent to which they have improved labour mobility in participating jurisdictions.
- Their economic effects, including on participation, addressing skills shortages and productivity.
- For each of the above, identifying the sectors where these schemes have had the most significant effects.

Worker safety and consumer protection risks are discussed in section 3.5.

The assessment draws on historical reviews, administrative data, economic modelling, stakeholder evidence and new Commonwealth Treasury microdata analysis.

3.1.1 Traditional MR has removed barriers to labour mobility

Successive reviews have concluded that MR has broadly contributed to increased labour mobility and economic integration. The Office of Regulation Review's 1997 Review found that the scheme had largely achieved its primary goal of removing many regulatory barriers to the movement of people in registered occupations and identified no significant unintended consequences.[16]

Subsequent Productivity Commission reviews in 2003, 2009 and 2015 similarly concluded that MR had facilitated workforce mobility, reduced the costs associated with interstate work and contributed to a more integrated national labour market.[17] These reviews noted that data limitations make it difficult to isolate the effects of mutual recognition from economic and labour market developments. The Productivity Commission estimated that MR was used in around 15% of new registrations, with particularly strong uptake in building, health, real estate and transport occupations.[18]

MR provides workers with a streamlined pathway to have existing qualifications and registrations recognised in another jurisdictions. Compared with obtaining a new licence through a new application process, MR reduces duplication, administrative burdens and compliance costs. It is particularly important where workers relocate permanently to another jurisdiction or AMR is unavailable.

Stakeholders broadly supported the view that MR has improved labour mobility and workforce flexibility. While many noted that regulatory divergence, licensing complexity and implementation issues continue to constrain the scheme's effectiveness, few disputed that MR represents an improvement on the arrangements that existed before its introduction.

Box 3: Stakeholder views

Stakeholder views illustrate the extent and limits of the benefits of mutual recognition schemes.

The Australian Institute of Architects noted that it "broadly supports the Council's finding that mutual recognition schemes can provide benefits to workers and businesses, particularly where they support short-term, project-based, cross-border or remote work".[19]

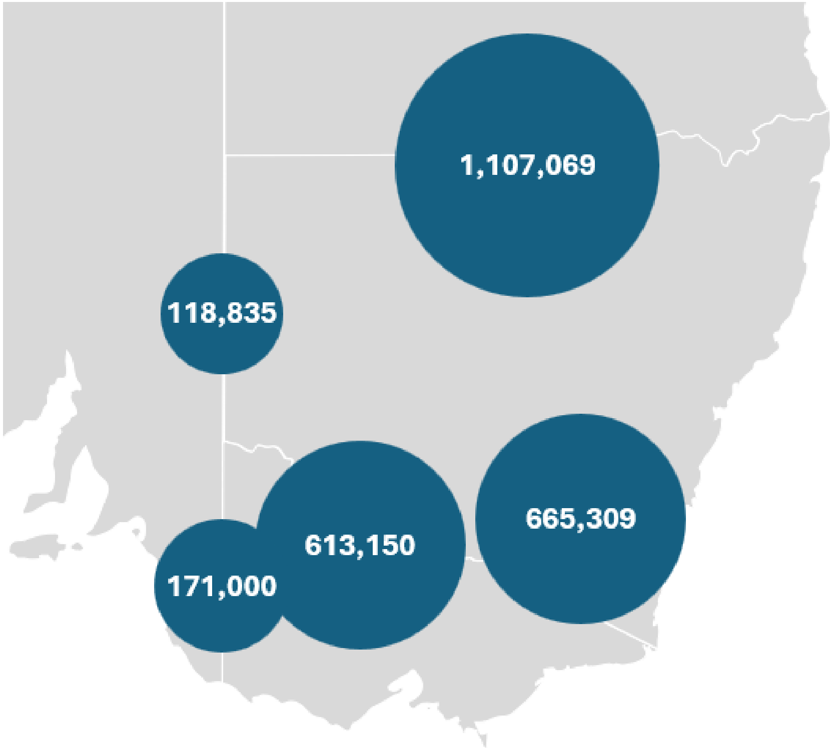
Master Builders Australia similarly expressed conditional support, agreeing that "MR and AMR have delivered partial benefits."[20]

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry also acknowledged tangible gains but emphasised that these are constrained by inconsistent implementation and regulatory fragmentation.[21]

The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman observed that mutual recognition schemes reduce barriers to interstate business activity, lower compliance costs and provide businesses with access to a wider pool of skilled workers at a time of ongoing workforce shortages.[22]

The benefits of mutual recognition schemes are particularly evident in Australia's cross-border regions. Approximately 2.7 million people live in communities located near state or territory borders, representing around 10% of Australia's population (as shown in figure 1). In these regions, labour markets often operate across jurisdictional boundaries, with workers living in one jurisdiction and working in another. Businesses also frequently operate across borders, relying on access to workers who can move between jurisdictions with minimal delay.

Figure 1: Population size in border communities



Source: NSW Cross-Border Commissioner, Vic Cross-Border Commissioner (using ABS data from 2024).

Note: The NT–Qld border has a population of 21,123. Population data was not available for the SA–WA border.

Stakeholders consistently reported that mutual recognition arrangements support workforce flexibility, improve access to labour and help maintain continuity of essential services in border communities. The Victorian Cross-Border Commissioner (VCBC) noted that where mutual recognition operates effectively, border businesses experience improved access to labour, greater responsiveness to short-term demand, and better continuity of services.[23]

Overall, the evidence indicates that MR has improved labour mobility and reduced barriers to interstate work. However, its effectiveness varies across occupations and jurisdictions. The greatest benefits are observed where licensing frameworks are already broadly aligned, while differences in licence scope, regulatory requirements and implementation continue to limit the scheme's effectiveness in some sectors.

3.1.2 Automatic mutual recognition has reduced administrative burden but its benefits remain limited

AMR was introduced in 2021 to make it easier and less costly for licensed workers to undertake work across state and territory borders.[24] By removing the need to obtain additional licences and pay duplicate registration fees, AMR was intended to improve labour mobility, increase workforce flexibility and support productivity and service quality, while strengthening workforce responsiveness during emergencies.

Before implementation, modelling undertaken for Australian governments estimated that AMR could generate approximately $2.4 billion in additional economic activity over a 10-year period through reduced compliance costs, productivity improvements and enhanced workforce mobility.[25]

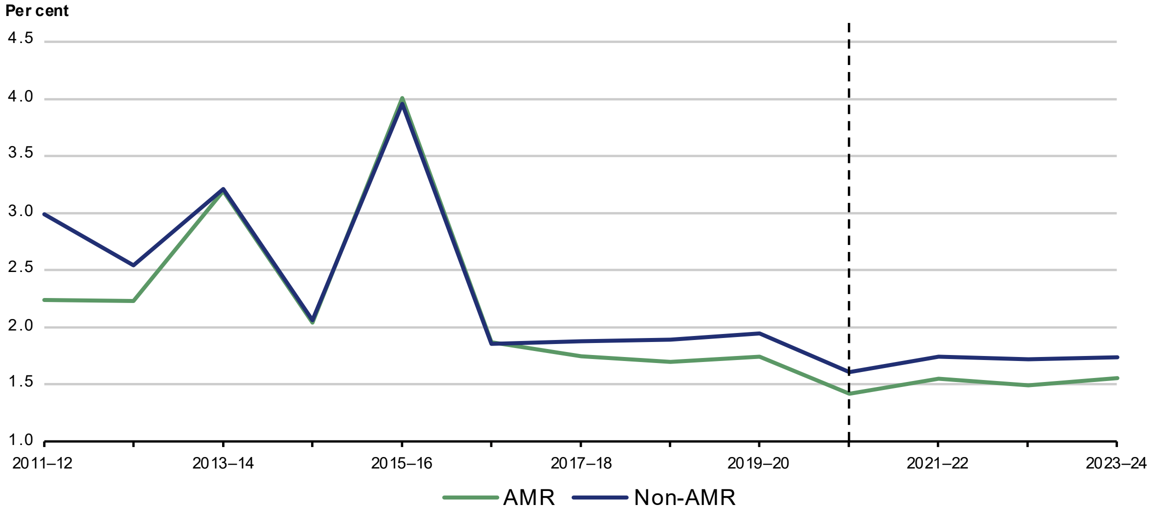
Empirical evidence regarding the impact of AMR on labour mobility remains limited. Previous Productivity Commission reviews identified significant data limitations, making it difficult to isolate the effects of mutual recognition arrangements from broader economic and labour market developments.[26] However, newer linked administrative datasets now provide greater insight into worker mobility patterns over time. Treasury sought to understand if this new data would make it possible to see whether there was an increase in interstate labour mobility due to the introduction of AMR.

Individual income tax return data makes it possible to track mobility by identifying whether someone within a particular occupation moved states in the past year. However, data has limitations because it only captures workers who permanently relocate and change their state or residence. It does not capture workers undertaking temporary interstate work, project-based work, fly-in-fly-out arrangements or work in cross-border communities. These groups are likely to represent a significant portion of AMR users because workers are generally no longer eligible to use AMR once they permanently relocate to a new jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, Treasury analysed this data to compare whether there was any difference in the likelihood that someone would move states (the mobility rate) between workers in occupations eligible for AMR and those in occupations not eligible. If AMR made a difference to labour mobility, there would be an increase in mobility for AMR-eligible occupations above and beyond that for non-AMR eligible occupations, from 2021 when AMR was introduced.

However, there was no clear change in interstate mobility for AMR-eligible occupations following the introduction of AMR (see chart 1). In fact, AMR-eligible occupations were found to have a lower mobility rate than non-AMR applications, starting in 2016–17 and unaffected by the introduction of AMR. This suggests that there was no impact of AMR on labour mobility. However, as mentioned, this finding lacks policy significance because it is unlikely to capture most workers who rely on AMR for temporary work interstate rather than due to permanent relocation. In other words, AMR may have had a real impact on labour mobility, but it is not possible to assess with the available data.

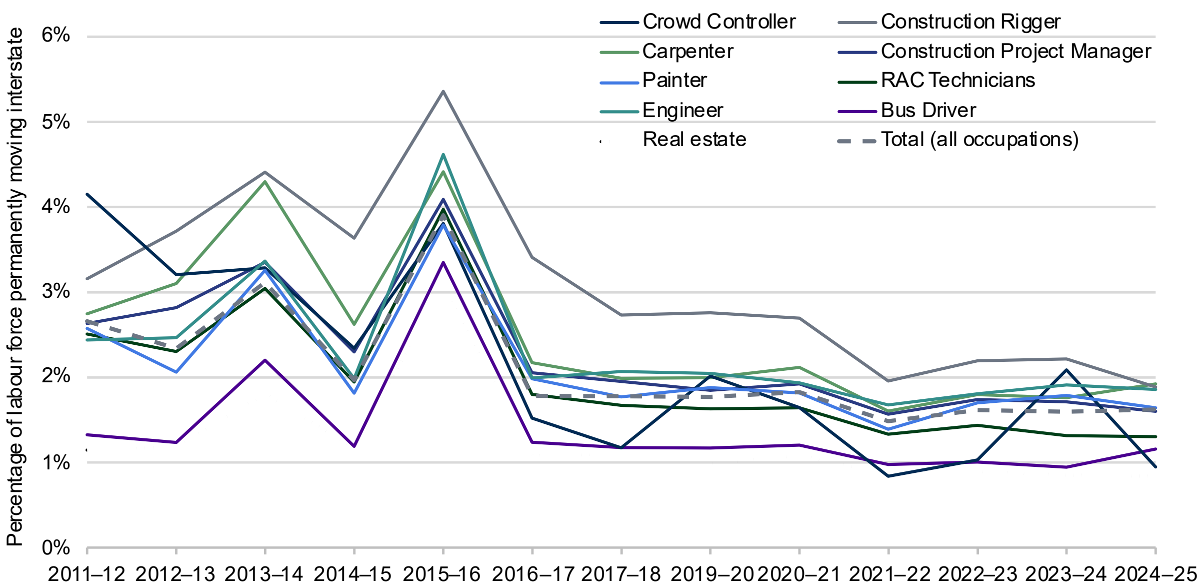
Chart 1: Mobility rates



Source: Treasury.

As a robustness check for this analysis, Treasury also examined mobility rates for selected occupations commonly associated with AMR. If AMR had an impact on labour mobility there would likely be an uptick in labour mobility in AMR-eligible occupations following 2021. Again, no occupation demonstrated a clear increase that could confidently be attributed to AMR (chart 2).

Chart 2: Mobility rates for selected AMR-eligible occupations



Source: Treasury

Stakeholder inputs suggest that AMR has improved labour mobility in precisely these circumstances (temporary work rather than permanent relocation). Stakeholders reported that AMR has improved access to skilled workers for temporary and project-based work, particularly in electrical, plumbing and architectural occupations.[27] The Insurance Council of Australia highlighted the importance of workforce mobility in responding to natural disasters, while the Western Australian Small Business

Development Corporation reported that AMR has reduced licensing delays and improved access to a national pool of workers. [28]

During December 2025, the Productivity Commission assessed the impact of a potential national scheme for electrical trades and high-risk occupations to support the National Competition Policy process.[29] Its study found that a broad reform package to reduce the stringency of occupational entry regulations would reduce prices by 0.2%.[30] In *Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce*, also released December 2025, the Productivity Commission highlighted that AMR cannot resolve all issues related to labour mobility, particularly where occupations are not licensed consistently across jurisdictions, licensing scope differs, or jurisdictions impose additional non-licensing requirements. [31]

The Council also considered broader economic impacts. Treasury commissioned Mandala Partners to develop a framework for assessing the costs and benefits of AMR. The framework (attachment J) identified a number of potential benefits, including reduced licensing costs, lower administrative burdens, improved matching of workers to jobs and greater workforce flexibility.

Among the impacts considered, the benefits to workers were most readily quantified. Mandala Partners estimated that AMR saves workers up to $4.5 million each year through reduced licensing costs and administrative requirements, generating cumulative savings of up to $15 million between 2021 and 2025. These savings include reduced time spent completing and renewing duplicate licence applications (approximately 4,300 hours).

While many of the broader economic effects remain difficult to quantify, stakeholder inputs generally support the finding that AMR has reduced regulatory friction, improved workforce flexibility and helped businesses respond to short-term labour shortages.

Stakeholder also observed benefits for access to services, reduced time to fill vacancies and improved ability to respond to changes in demand.[32] Standards Australia submitted that mutual recognition arrangements have supported workforce participation, helped address skills shortages and contributed to productivity outcomes, particularly in sectors critical to housing supply, infrastructure investment and the energy transition.[33]

Some stakeholders raised concerns that streamlined AMR processes may reduce awareness of local regulatory requirements. For example, the Real Estate Institute of Australia noted that while AMR has increased mobility, it may allow individuals to commence work without sufficient familiarity of local laws and practices.[34] These issues are examined further in section 3.5.

Implications for mutual recognition schemes

The Council considers that there is sufficient supporting evidence that MR is adding significant value. With further refinements such as improving consistency of licensing requirements and scope across jurisdictions, it can continue to improve labour workforce mobility and Australia's productivity.

Feedback from workers, businesses and unions to the Review was that Australia's mutual recognition schemes, both traditional MR and AMR, have reduced barriers to interstate work and facilitated easier movement between states.

Treasury's preliminary microdata analysis did not find evidence of an impact of AMR on labour mobility. However, this may be due to data limitations. More work should be done to examine the association between AMR and labour mobility, ideally an impact analysis comparing the introduction of AMR with the counterfactual scenario.

Beyond labour mobility, the preliminary cost-benefit analysis framework commissioned by Treasury hypothesises that economic benefits arise through reduced regulatory friction, increased competition and improved labour market efficiency (though economic costs, too, arise from these schemes). Stakeholder evidence generally supports this hypothesis, highlighting improvements in service availability, workforce responsiveness and project delivery. A fuller accounting of these economic effects, broken down by their impacts on workers, governments, consumers and the broader economy, would allow for a clearer picture of the effect on participation and productivity.

It will also be important for future work to disaggregate impacts on different occupations, regions and employment characteristics. Qualitative data from consultations and submissions indicated that benefits were greatest for workers in cross-border areas or who worked in occupations with frequent surge or short-term work. However, the preliminary analysis in this Review did not find any occupation to have experienced particularly significant mobility growth resulting from AMR.

Finding 1: Mutual recognition schemes have facilitated greater labour mobility but there are opportunities to improve them further.

1.1 Mutual recognition schemes operating in Australia – in which one jurisdiction allows a worker to obtain a new licence or undertake specified work based on a licence issued to that worker by another jurisdiction – have improved labour mobility in participating jurisdictions for the occupations to which they apply.

1.2 The extent to which mutual recognition has improved labour mobility varies across occupations. In some occupations, such as architecture and gaming technology, mutual recognition works relatively seamlessly. In others, such as surveying and the legal professions, mutual recognition operates through schemes agreed between some states but not others. In occupations such as building and engineering, differences in how jurisdictions classify activities – and in the practical requirements workers must meet before starting work – create barriers for workers. This complexity discourages workers from taking up work in other jurisdictions. It also discourages businesses from seeking work, or sourcing workers, across borders.

1.3 Where jurisdictions have not adopted AMR or have exempted specific occupations, both the adoption, and the effectiveness of the scheme to further contribute to national labour mobility, have been constrained. National participation and greater inclusion of occupations would increase the effectiveness of the regime.

1.4 Employer and employee groups were broadly supportive of the intention of mutual recognition schemes, but highlighted the complexity of application processes, lack of information on the schemes, difficulties determining equivalence, and broader regulatory misalignment between jurisdictions as factors limiting their effectiveness. Many employer and employee groups advocated for national licensing for their occupation.

Continued on next page

Finding 1: Mutual recognition schemes have facilitated greater labour mobility but there are opportunities to improve them further. (continued)

1.5 Although some concerns were raised, the Council sought but did not find any evidence that current mutual recognition schemes have led to increased worker safety and consumer protection risks or failed to manage those risks. Embracing opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements (see finding 4), including consideration of consistent training, compliance and enforcement, would enable any such risks to be managed. If this were to be a continuing perceived concern, a common assessment framework and reporting would assist in understanding and assessing the drivers and materiality of these risks.

1.6 A common framework for assessing the need for jurisdictional differences and exemptions would facilitate national consistency and harmonisation. Periodic review and oversight by an independent agency would further improve the effectiveness of the schemes.

1.7 The mutual recognition schemes have contributed to improved labour market participation, workforce flexibility and productivity by enabling businesses to access skilled workers more readily across jurisdictions. They have also helped to address local skills shortages by facilitating short-term, surge or project-based work. There is potential for substantial additional benefits if improvements are made to the operation of mutual recognition schemes or if some occupations adopt national licensing.

1.8 Application of the schemes has been most effective where there is a high degree of harmonisation and consistency at the outset. This was observed, for example, for gaming technicians, architects and work conducted under radiation protection and pesticide management licences.

1.9 The largest users of the mutual recognition schemes are the electrical, security, property, building, plumbing and gas, driving and transport, gaming, engineering, building certification and radiation industries.

1.10 Stakeholder feedback suggests the benefits of mutual recognition schemes have been most significant for work being undertaken by builders, carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, real estate agents and security guards. This is despite problems identified with the operation of mutual recognition (MR) and automatic mutual recognition (AMR) for these occupations including exemptions and broader regulatory misalignment.

1.11 The collection, reporting and sharing of information on the adoption and outcomes of the schemes would assist in monitoring their impact and effectiveness over time. Data limitations, primarily due to inconsistent reporting or lack of data, constrain evidence-based improvements and reform of mutual recognition schemes. There is an opportunity to improve data collection and comparability across jurisdictions by establishing common data definitions and protocols, including on regulatory outcomes. Reporting on where the schemes have not been adopted, or where exemptions persist, particularly where this is due to perceived risk of harm, would further inform future refinements.

3.2 Governance and oversight

The Terms of Reference require the Council to assess the impact and effectiveness of the legislative and governance arrangements underpinning mutual recognition schemes. While mutual recognition schemes have improved labour mobility and reduced barriers to interstate work, stakeholders consistently identified aspects of the governance framework that limit its effectiveness and constrain attempts to improve the scheme.

The Council found that current governance arrangements have provided limited oversight of implementation, monitoring and reform. Inconsistent data collection and reporting have constrained efforts to evaluate the schemes and identify emerging issues. Existing institutional arrangements also provide limited incentives for jurisdictions to pursue ongoing regulatory harmonisation, contributing to ongoing divergence in licensing requirements and reducing the effectiveness of mutual recognition.

Stakeholders broadly supported stronger institutional and governance arrangements including a dedicated stewardship function to oversee implementation, improve data collection and support greater regulatory alignment over time.

3.2.1 Governance arrangements have not supported implementation and reform

The MR Act and associated intergovernmental agreements establish the governance arrangements for Australia’s mutual recognition schemes. While these arrangements set out responsibilities for governments and relevant regulators, they do not provide a strong national framework to oversee implementation, monitor performance or coordinate reform.

Responsibility for implementing and administering mutual recognition largely rests with states and territories. In the absence of a clearly identified steward responsible for monitoring outcomes and driving improvements, implementation has been uneven across jurisdictions and occupations. Stakeholders consistently identified this fragmented governance model as a significant constraint on the effectiveness of the schemes.

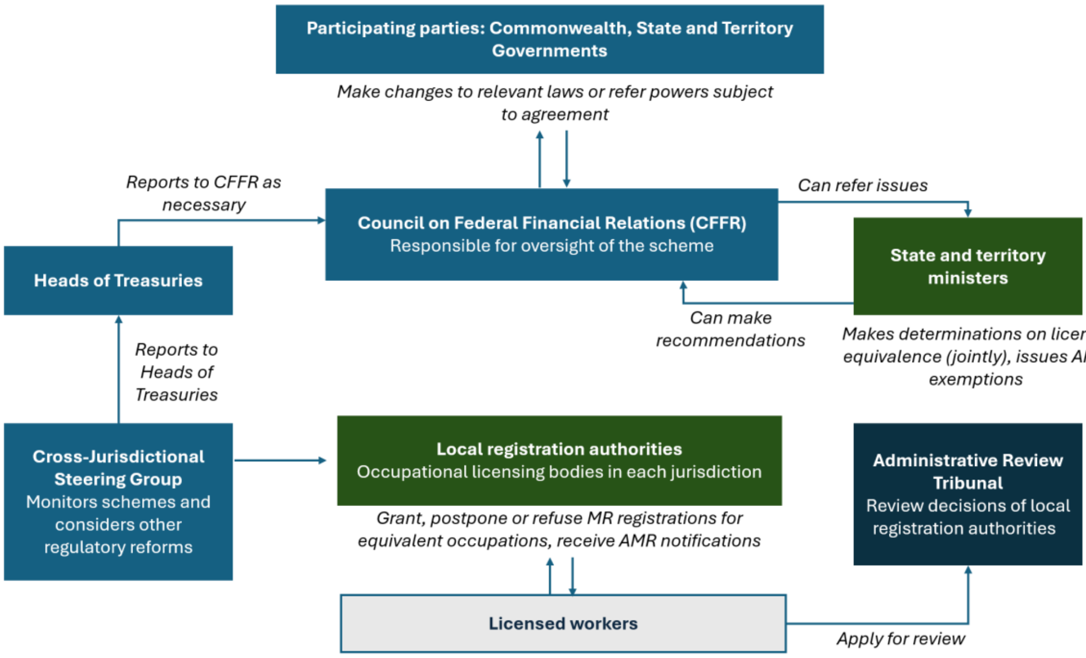
The Commonwealth Minister for Skills and Training is responsible for administering the parts of the MR Act relating to mutual recognition for workers. However, the MR Act provides the Minister with limited powers to oversee or direct how the mutual recognition schemes operate in practice.[35] Most implementation decisions, including declarations of licence equivalency and AMR exemptions, remain the responsibility of states and territories.[36]

The Council also understands that Commonwealth resources dedicated to mutual recognition functions are limited, with only a small team currently supporting administration of the schemes. Together, these institutional and resourcing constraints limit the Commonwealth's ability to provide ongoing oversight, monitor implementation or drive improvements across the system.

Current oversight bodies have been ineffective in monitoring the scheme

The December 2020 *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registration* (IGA) set out a governance framework to support implementation of AMR.[37] These governance arrangements, as agreed by Commonwealth, state and territory governments, are outlined in Chart 3.

Chart 3: Agreed governance arrangements



Source: NCC[38]

Under the IGA, jurisdictions agreed to establish and resource a Cross-Jurisdictional Steering Group (CJSG) co-chaired by the Commonwealth and a state or territory, with secretariat support provided by the Commonwealth. The CJSG was intended to:

- monitor implementation of AMR
- develop an annual work program to support ongoing improvements to the regulatory environment for occupation registration and mobility
- consider further regulatory reforms, such as broadening the types of registrations in scope for mutual recognition, improved collaboration on regulatory actions, streamlining registration requirements and information provision where appropriate to improve national consistency, and reducing impediments to labour mobility and employment and productivity growth
- report to Heads of Treasuries every 6 months from 1 January 2021.

Heads of Treasuries were, in turn, responsible for monitoring implementation and the effectiveness of AMR, and reporting to the Council on Federal Financial Relations as required.

Table 3: Roles and responsibilities of oversight bodies

Body/agency	Role	Parties responsible	Activity and effectiveness
Cross-Jurisdictional Steering Group (CJSG)	Monitor implementation of AMR, develop an annual work program, consider other regulatory reforms, and report to HoTs every 6 months	Commonwealth (co-chair), state and territory governments	Appears to not have been convened since 2022
Heads of Treasuries (HoTs)	Monitor implementation and effectiveness of AMR, and report to CFFR as necessary	Commonwealth, state and territory treasury departments	Limited evidence of active oversight
Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR)	Commission independent review of AMR every 5 years	Commonwealth, state and territory treasurers	Independent review commissioned in February 2026
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)	Administer Parts 3 and 3A of the MR Act	Commonwealth Government	Limited resources and powers

Source: NCC

While these arrangements were established under the 2020 IGA, they have been largely dormant and ineffective in practice. Available information suggests that the CJSG has not been convened since 2022, and it is unclear whether it ever met regularly following its establishment. Since the CJSG has not been convened, key elements of the governance framework, including secretariat support, have not been implemented.

As a result:

- the CJSG has not reported on the implementation of the scheme to Heads of Treasuries as intended
- Heads of Treasuries have not actively overseen implementation, nor held the CJSG to account for failing to report on the implementation of AMR every 6 months as required
- there has been limited accountability for progressing agreed reforms.

These issues reflect a broader challenge with decentralised governance in this area. Similar concerns have been raised in previous reviews. For example, the Productivity Commission’s earlier work noted that intergovernmental forums have often lacked the resources and continuity needed to provide effective oversight.

Governance arrangements have limited the ability to improve the schemes

The current governance arrangements do not provide sufficient central oversight over how mutual recognition is being implemented across jurisdictions. They also do not provide consistent mechanisms to:

- identify and escalate concerns about the scheme
- reach agreement between governments and licensing regulators on reforms
- coordinate improvements and system-wide alignment across governments.

Submissions reinforced this point, noting that while many licensing regulators participate in forums, these can often focus on technical issues rather than improving national consistency in licensing and registration approaches. There is no overarching structure to support system-wide policy alignment or ongoing reform. Submissions highlighted that licensing regulators often have limited incentives to prioritise national consistency, as most responsibilities sit with individual jurisdictions rather than the system.

The absence of coordinated government structures has had practical impacts on labour mobility, as well as on safety outcomes and consumer protection. These impacts are illustrated in box 4.

Box 4: Outdated ministerial declarations of equivalence

Governments agree that a number of current ministerial declarations contain errors and are outdated due to changes in licence classes and requirements since 2015 (section 3.4). Although these issues are widely known, no work has been undertaken to update the ministerial declarations. There is no clear mechanism to coordinate updates nationally and it is unclear which entity has responsibility for leading this work or providing the necessary resourcing. Outdated declarations continue to create practical issues, including opportunities for jurisdiction shopping and licence uplifting in some occupations and jurisdictions.

While governance arrangements for mutual recognition are set out in legislation and intergovernmental agreements, they have not operated as intended. The current model relies on decentralised implementation, and some governance arrangements established to support mutual recognition have become inactive or have not operated as intended over time.

The Council considers that current governance arrangements have not provided effective oversight of mutual recognition schemes. Existing structures have not consistently monitored implementation, coordinated reforms or resolved known issues. As a result, implementation has been uneven across jurisdictions and opportunities to improve labour mobility have not been fully realised.

Stronger governance arrangements, with clearer accountability and ongoing oversight, would support more consistent implementation and improve the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes. Options to strengthen governance arrangements for mutual recognition schemes are further explored at the end of this sub-chapter.

3.2.2 Inconsistent data collection and reporting limits evaluation of the schemes

Inconsistent data collection and reporting across jurisdictions limits governments' ability to monitor, evaluate and improve mutual recognition schemes. The Council considers this to be a consequence of the broader decentralised governance model, which lacks common reporting requirements, agreed data standards and consistent oversight.

To support the Review, the Council requested information relating to scheme usage, processing times, administrative outcomes, workforce mobility, compliance outcomes and safety impacts. While jurisdictions provided substantial information, the data was often incomplete, inconsistent or difficult to compare. Similar concerns have been raised in successive Productivity Commission reviews.

State and territory licensing regulators collect information using different systems, definitions and reporting approaches. For example:

- not all licensing regulators distinguish between MR applications and standard licence applications
- not all licensing regulators are able to produce records of MR applications
- some licensing regulators record AMR notifications on a separate system or not at all
- few licensing regulators break down compliance, disciplinary and safety outcomes by whether the worker is operating under a local licence, MR or AMR.

The lack of consistent data collection and reporting constrains the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and in turn improve legislative and regulatory frameworks. Licensing regulators and governments have limited ability to assess how mutual recognition is affecting safety, service quality or labour mobility in their state or territory. It also undermines public trust in the scheme, as the data to assuage stakeholders' concerns about impacts on safety and quality does not exist.

The Council considers that these data deficiencies are a consequence of the broader governance framework. In the absence of common reporting standards, agreed data definitions and ongoing oversight, jurisdictions have developed different approaches to collecting and managing information.

Improving data collection and comparability would support more effective monitoring, evaluation and reform of mutual recognition schemes. Establishing common data definitions, reporting requirements and protocols for regulatory outcomes would provide governments with a more reliable evidence base for making decisions.

Over time, broader reforms such as digital licensing systems and national licensing registers could further improve the consistency, quality and timeliness of data collected across jurisdictions.

The Council considers that current data collection arrangements are insufficient to support effective monitoring and evaluation of mutual recognition schemes. Without more consistent reporting, governments cannot reliably assess whether the schemes are improving labour mobility, reducing barriers to work or maintaining appropriate safety and consumer protection outcomes. Strengthening data collection should therefore be a priority for future reforms.

3.2.3 Current institutional arrangements do not promote regulatory harmonisation

The effectiveness of mutual recognition depends heavily on the alignment of occupational licensing frameworks across jurisdictions. Where licensing requirements are broadly consistent, mutual recognition generally operates smoothly. Where regulatory frameworks diverge, workers, businesses and regulators face additional complexity, cost and uncertainty.

Stakeholders consistently observed that current institutional arrangements provide limited incentives for jurisdictions to pursue ongoing harmonisation. In the absence of effective coordination mechanisms, regulatory divergence is likely to continue over time.

As AMCA submitted:

"AMR will continue to deteriorate as a practical tool if jurisdictions continue to independently amend licence categories, scope definitions and local requirements without a nationally coordinating framework".[39]

The MR Act was intended not only to facilitate labour mobility, but also to encourage jurisdictions to reduce unnecessary regulatory differences over time. By creating regulatory competition between states and territories, it was theorised that mutual recognition would help drive out bad regulations and incentivise national harmonisation. Earlier reviews suggested that mutual recognition had contributed to greater consistency in some occupations.[40] However, consultation undertaken for this Review indicates that progress towards harmonisation has stalled in many sectors and, in some cases, regulatory divergence has increased.

There is some evidence of continued regulatory convergence over recent years, including:

- The establishment of national licensing or registration frameworks for health practitioners (from 2010), veterinary practitioners (from 2010), heavy vehicle drivers (from 2014), and legal professionals (from 2015).
- The development of the National Registration Framework for building practitioners in 2021 (although implementation has been uneven across jurisdictions, as discussed in section 3.3.3).
- The development of nationally consistent CPD requirements among architects and surveyors.
- Alignment of entry requirements and the development of national competency standards for several occupations, including teachers and surveyors.

These examples demonstrate that harmonisation is achievable. Where regulatory convergence has occurred for an occupation, it has generally been facilitated by 2 key elements:

- high levels of existing regulatory alignment, such as nationally consistent entry requirements and scopes of work, which facilitated further alignment
- strong cross-jurisdictional regulator and/or intergovernmental forums, which have effectively coordinated national harmonisation.

Despite these examples, progress on national harmonisation of occupational licensing frameworks has stalled in recent years, and occupational licensing frameworks remain fragmented across much of the economy. In some occupations, divergence has increased as jurisdictions have responded to high-profile incidents, reviews or technological developments independently. Examples include:

- Professional engineer registration schemes, which were progressively developed across most states and territories in the late 2010s and early 2020s (box 5).
- The introduction of a registration scheme for design practitioners in New South Wales in 2020 following high-profile building failures, with no comparable schemes in other jurisdictions.
- The introduction in the Australian Capital Territory of a requirement for licensed electricians to obtain a Distributed Energy Resources (DER) endorsement to install solar panels and battery systems in 2024. With no equivalent endorsement or licence category in other states, this new requirement has limited the ability of interstate electricians to perform this work.
- The progressive introduction of distinct labour hire licensing schemes across several jurisdictions (Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) between 2017 and 2020. There was an attempt to create a national labour hire licensing scheme in December 2023, however this fell through following disagreements between jurisdictions.

While these reforms were often undertaken in response to legitimate local concerns, in the context of mutual recognition they have contributed to increasing complexity and reduced portability for workers and businesses operating across jurisdictions. Attempts to subsequently harmonise these schemes after they were established have been largely unsuccessful.

For many occupations, it appears that there has been little progress towards national harmonisation over time, outside of alignment of training packages and qualification requirements. As discussed in section 3.3, significant differences remain in the scope of regulated work, licence classes, terminology and definitions. This includes occupations such as electricians, builders, plumbers, real estate agents, conveyancers, fire safety system installers, and security agents.

Box 5: Development of engineering registration schemes

The development of engineering registration schemes illustrates how current institutional arrangements have not consistently supported regulatory harmonisation.

Queensland has maintained a comprehensive registration scheme since 1929. Other jurisdictions only established registration schemes more recently: Tasmania in 2017, New South Wales and Victoria in 2021, and Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory in 2024.

Engineering is not a profession that differs significantly between states, and the required training and qualifications are consistent across jurisdictions. These factors, combined with the fact that the schemes were developed around the same time, should have facilitated the development of nationally consistent engineering schemes between jurisdictions.

Despite this, there is significant variation between engineering registration schemes, which is further discussed in section 3.3.1. Registration categories, known as 'areas of engineering,' differ significantly between jurisdictions. Tasmania's scheme has 3 areas of engineering, Victoria has 5, while Queensland has 19. Other substantive differences include the coverage and scope of registration, definitions used, extraterritorial application, and CPD requirements.

Engineering stakeholders have universally expressed significant frustration with the difficulty of seeking mutual recognition to work in other jurisdictions. As observed by a joint submission of engineering bodies, "in recent years, there has been a perverse rise in fragmentation that has only exacerbated confusion and inefficiency, and increased duplication of costs and administration across jurisdictions."[41]

Why have licensing frameworks not harmonised over time?

The Council considers there to be 3 factors that have limited progress towards greater harmonisation.

First, responsibility for occupational licensing under Australia's Constitution remains primarily with states and territories. While governments can agree to pursue nationally consistent approaches, implementation ultimately requires action by individual jurisdictions. Achieving and maintaining harmonisation can therefore be challenging, particularly where reforms have different impacts across jurisdictions or where governments have differing policy priorities. Even where jurisdictions initially agree to a common approach, there are limited mechanisms to ensure ongoing implementation or alignment over time. This can be seen in the failure of efforts to progress a national labour hire licensing scheme, which fell apart following a withdrawal of support from Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.[42]

Second, incentives for harmonisation are often weak. The benefits of regulatory alignment, including improved mobility, reduced costs and better functioning national labour markets, are generally shared across Australia. In contrast, the effort and costs of reviewing, redesigning and implementing regulatory reforms are usually borne by individual jurisdictions and regulators. This creates a split incentive, where the national benefits of reform may not be sufficient to justify the effort required at the jurisdictional level, particularly where the number of licence holders for an occupation in that jurisdiction is small.

As the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia noted:

"[T]here must be incentives in place for all States and Territories to [adopt AMR and nationally consistent terminology]. At present, there is no incentive for States and Territories to harmonise, which makes the AMR inefficient and ineffective at times."[43]

Third, there is currently no institution with a clear mandate to coordinate and sustain regulatory harmonisation across jurisdictions. While governments and regulators collaborate through various forums, these arrangements generally focus on specific occupations, technical issues or discrete reform projects. Further, licensing reforms are often developed in isolation and often in response to local drivers, including incidents, reviews or stakeholder pressures. These schemes are designed or amended with jurisdiction-specific policy settings and political environments, in response to local pressures and in consultation with local stakeholders. No entity is responsible for monitoring divergence across the broader system, coordinating harmonisation efforts or maintaining progress over time.

For example, the Fire Industry Alliance noted that:

"[without] enduring institutional arrangements, jurisdictional regulatory regimes will continue to diverge – making the alignment task ever larger."[44]

The Council considers that, without stronger coordination mechanisms and greater incentives for alignment, regulatory divergence is likely to continue over time. This will reduce the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and make it more difficult for workers and businesses to operate across state and territory borders.

3.2.4 A 'champion' for mutual recognition could improve outcomes

The Council found that weaknesses in governance, oversight and coordination are contributing to many of the issues identified throughout this Review. These include inconsistent implementation of mutual recognition schemes, limited data collection and reporting, and ongoing divergence between occupational licensing frameworks. Further, the Council found that current intergovernmental frameworks do not incentivise regulatory harmonisation, creating a fragmented occupational licensing landscape that makes it harder for workers to move between states.

Stakeholders broadly supported stronger institutional arrangements to facilitate the operation of mutual recognition schemes and support ongoing regulatory harmonisation. Several stakeholders proposed the establishment of a national coordinating function, or 'champion', to support implementation, lead ongoing reforms to address underlying inconsistency, and monitor performance over time.

As Master Builders Australia (MBA) submitted:

"A standing body with real accountability, and empowered to set and maintain alignment standards, publish compliance reporting, and escalate persistent divergence, changes the incentive structure for states and territories in a way that no one-off reform process can."[45]

The Council considers that a dedicated Commonwealth-based stewardship function with appropriate resources could improve the operation and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes. Such a function could:

- monitor and report on the implementation of MR and AMR across jurisdictions, including by collecting and analysing data relating to the schemes
- establish a common framework for assessing the need for AMR exemptions, and assessing whether exemptions are justified in light of available evidence against this framework
- support licensing regulators to determine equivalence and apply the schemes consistently including through establishing regulator working groups to undertake periodic reviews of equivalence of occupational licences
- assist and 'coach' state and territory licensing regulators on their implementation of mutual recognition (including determining equivalence and information sharing)
- provide a central source of guidance and information about mutual recognition schemes for workers and businesses
- report regularly on opportunities to improve mutual recognition arrangements and evaluating policy changes that have sought to improve the effectiveness of the scheme
- support the development of national registers and other enabling reforms.

The Council also considers that stronger institutional arrangements could support greater regulatory harmonisation over time. In particular, a coordinating body could help identify areas of unnecessary divergence, facilitate collaboration between governments and regulators, and monitor progress towards nationally consistent licensing frameworks.

Several stakeholders also highlighted the need for mechanisms that encourage jurisdictions to pursue harmonisation. Gow, Phillimore and Hampson suggested that incentives similar to those used under National Competition Policy, supported by the National Productivity Fund, could support alignment efforts by encouraging jurisdictions to review and reform regulatory arrangements that unnecessarily restrict labour mobility.[46]

The Council considers that there is a need for an agency or body to support, monitor and administer the schemes. Potential approaches could include:

- expanding the role of an existing independent body, such as the National Competition Council
- establishing a dedicated body within the Commonwealth, akin to the Australian Building Codes Board
- leveraging existing coordination structures, such as Jobs and Skills Councils
- relying on more formalised tripartite arrangements involving governments, industry and unions, with the involvement of other relevant stakeholder groups as necessary.

Regardless of the model adopted, the Council considers that a dedicated stewardship function could improve the operation and effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and support greater regulatory harmonisation over time. Such a body could:

- monitor and report on the implementation and performance of MR and AMR across jurisdictions, including collecting, analysing and publishing consistent data relating to the schemes
- provide a central source of guidance and support for workers, businesses, regulators and governments on the operation of mutual recognition arrangements
- support licensing regulators to apply mutual recognition consistently, including through periodic reviews of licence equivalence and identifying opportunities to improve regulatory alignment
- establish and oversee common frameworks for assessing AMR exemptions, monitoring whether exemptions remain justified and reporting on their ongoing use
- lead and coordinate intergovernmental discussions on the development of nationally consistent licensing frameworks, including licence scope, classes, terminology, continuing professional development requirements and associated non-licensing requirements
- undertake regular reviews of state and territory licensing frameworks to identify unnecessary inconsistencies and track harmonisation efforts
- support governments in assessing and justifying departures from agreed national approaches where regulatory differences are maintained.

To perform these functions effectively, stakeholders emphasised that the body would need clear accountability and reporting arrangements, sufficient resourcing, transparent decision-making processes and strong collaboration with governments, industry, unions, licensing regulators and other relevant stakeholders. Regular reporting to governments on implementation, harmonisation efforts and the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes would improve ongoing oversight and accountability.

Mutual recognition has improved labour mobility, but it has not, on its own, delivered sustained regulatory harmonisation across jurisdictions. The Council considers that stronger stewardship arrangements would improve oversight, support ongoing reform and increase the likelihood that the benefits of mutual recognition are realised over the long term.

Finding 4: Opportunities to achieve greater labour mobility will be unlocked by strengthening governance, providing central oversight and support, and leveraging technology.

4.1 There are opportunities to improve the consistency and efficiency of mutual recognition processes across jurisdictions by improving consistency in the systems and processes adopted by jurisdictions when processing applications, collecting and sharing information, and monitoring compliance.

4.2 The adoption and administration of the schemes are primarily managed by jurisdictions, with no central or independent oversight or review function. This has the potential to limit the progress of wider adoption of the schemes and allow continued divergence rather than convergence toward nationally consistent requirements, compliance and enforcement.

4.3 Stronger and transparent institutional arrangements to support coordination, oversee the scheme and champion change would encourage national consistency and support enduring reform.

4.4 Governance arrangements that promote ongoing regulatory alignment, rather than one-off reforms, are likely to provide substantial benefits. This would include:

- clarifying who should oversee, monitor and evaluate mutual recognition schemes and facilitate regulatory coordination and harmonisation between jurisdictions
- establishing structured coordination mechanisms involving governments, licensing regulators, industry and unions (tripartite governance groups) to progress licensing reforms, such as harmonising licence classes, definitions and entry requirements across jurisdictions
- regular independent reporting and assessment of interstate regulatory alignment to identify inconsistencies and track harmonisation efforts, requiring states and territories to justify inconsistencies from any agreed national regulatory frameworks
- establishing and supporting regulator working groups to undertake periodic reviews of equivalence of occupational licences
- development of a common assessment framework for applying exemptions and assessing potential harm including collection of data on reasons and outcomes.

4.5 A national steward or coordinating body could promote consistent application of the schemes and help to drive national labour mobility. This body could oversee and support mandated periodic reviews by jurisdictions to seek to harmonise requirements and justify regulatory divergence. This might be more effective if explicit incentives or public reporting were adopted.

Continued on next page

Finding 4: Opportunities to achieve greater labour mobility will be unlocked by strengthening governance, providing central oversight and support, and leveraging technology. (continued)

4.6 There is great potential for technology to improve information sharing to licensees and among licensing regulators, such as through digital licensing or the introduction of a national licensing register. In some cases, the underlying technology systems supporting occupational licensing regulation require upgrading. Strengthening these systems would reduce administrative burdens, improve information sharing between regulators and reduce risks to the effective operation and integrity of mutual recognition schemes. For example:

- Establishing a national or interoperable licensing register to provide a single national source of information on licensees, enable improved information sharing among licensing regulators, improve visibility of disciplinary action and allow more seamless notification processes. This information would also support better monitoring and targeted, proportionate intervention to improve safety and consumer outcomes.
- Creating a digital licence to enable real-time licence verification and streamline processes associated with booking inspections, providing certificates and notifying licensing regulators before moving across borders or undertaking high-risk work. A digital licence could also assist workers in identifying additional obligations or differences in rules that apply to them as they work in another jurisdiction, while providing improved information to locally licensed workers on updates to licensing requirements or standards over time and support self-assessment of eligibility for mutual recognition. This would enable more timely and better matching of workers to employment opportunities and facilitate labour mobility.

4.7 Existing schemes that enable automatic mutual recognition for some occupations between multiple states or territories but are not yet national in scope would promote labour mobility if further expanded. Examples are the Legal Profession Uniform Law (New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia) and the East Coast Electricians scheme (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory).

3.3 Structural misalignment in licensing systems

This section examines structural regulatory issues that limit the effectiveness of Australia's mutual recognition arrangements.

The effectiveness of mutual recognition depends heavily on the degree of alignment between state and territory licensing frameworks. Where licence categories, qualification requirements, post-entry conditions and scopes of work are broadly consistent, mutual recognition generally operates smoothly. Where licensing frameworks differ significantly, recognition processes become more complex, confidence in equivalence is reduced, and labour mobility outcomes are diminished.

The Council found that:

- mutual recognition schemes work best where there is a high level of regulatory alignment between jurisdictions
- differences in licence classes, scope and terminology remain frequent despite the existence of nationally harmonised qualification and training packages
- additional requirements, including worker screening, continuing professional development and local law requirements, further contribute to regulatory fragmentation and increase the cost of working across jurisdictions despite often being disproportionate to actual risk
- these differences reduce the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and can delay workers from commencing work.

3.3.1 Mutual recognition works well when licensing frameworks are broadly consistent, and struggles when they diverge

Stakeholders consistently reported that mutual recognition operates most effectively where licence categories, qualification requirements and scopes of practice are broadly consistent across jurisdictions.[47] In these circumstances, recognition processes are relatively straightforward and outcomes are generally predictable.

The Design Institute of Australia observed that MR works best for occupations that generally fall into three broad categories:

- occupations with broadly consistent licensing frameworks
- occupations with material regulatory divergence, and
- occupations lacking consistent statutory recognition.

The experience of architects, security workers and engineers illustrate these differences.

For occupations with broadly consistent licensing frameworks, MR generally operates effectively, and outcomes are predictable. Architects generally operate with relatively consistent regulatory frameworks, with similar legislation, largely consistent entry standards, assessment pathways, scopes of work, and continuing professional development obligations across jurisdiction.[48] Architectural industry stakeholders reported that while administrative barriers remain, mutual recognition generally operates effectively.

At the other end of the spectrum, engineering stakeholders consistently identified significant differences in registration schemes, licence categories and regulatory requirements between jurisdictions. For example, South Australia does not operate a general registration scheme for engineers, while New South Wales requires registration only for professional engineers working on certain classes of buildings. Queensland, by contrast, has a comprehensive registration scheme covering multiple areas of engineering practice.[49] These differences make mutual recognition more complex and less effective.

Occupations such as security workers fall between these extremes. Stakeholders reported that mutual recognition remains beneficial, but is constrained by inconsistent licence categories, administrative processes, fees and local requirements. The Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL) reported a "patchwork of local licensing rules and administrative practices that impede mobility." It said these include "differing fingerprinting/photograph requirements, licence issuance processes, fees, renewal arrangements, categories and local operating obligations".[50]

These examples demonstrate that mutual recognition is generally most effective where licensing frameworks are already aligned. Conversely, where regulatory frameworks diverge, the schemes become more complex to administer and are less effective at supporting labour mobility.

The remainder of this section examines the major forms of regulatory misalignment identified during the Review.

Table 4: Types of regulatory misalignment

Entry requirements and competency standards	Application and renewal processes	Licence coverage, scope and classes	Broader regulatory framework	Continuing professional development (CPD)	Public protection and other local law requirements
• Qualification requirement • Experience requirement • Competency assessments	• Application administration and fees • Fingerprinting, photo ID and identity verification • Worker screening, working with children checks (WWCC) and police checks • Renewal fees • Licence length • Licence expiry dates	• Scope of licensed activities • Licence categories and types • Activity and occupation definitions • Scope of licensed activities • Licence categories and types • Activity and occupation definitions	• Compliance and certification model • Level of regulatory oversight • Enforcement and penalty approach • Supervision requirements	• CPD hours • Prescribed CPD units • Timeframe for CPD completion	• Codes of conduct • Insurance requirements • Financial tests and requirements • Trust accounts and auditing requirements

3.3.2 Entry requirements are disconnected from nationally recognised training frameworks

"If the training and assessment pathway is strong, transparent and nationally consistent, mutual recognition can work as a transitional tool. If it is fragmented, commercialised and uneven, mutual recognition can spread weak standards nationally."

– Michael Sanderson

A key principle underpinning mutual recognition schemes is that occupational licences represent broadly equivalent standards across jurisdictions. However, states and territories continue to apply different qualification, experience and competency standards for the same occupational licence. As a result, workers who meet the licensing requirements in one jurisdiction may not necessarily meet the requirements that would have applied had they originally sought registration elsewhere.

This is occurring despite the existence of national training packages. In many occupations, competency standards are developed through nationally agreed vocational education and training frameworks, yet licensing requirements continue to vary between jurisdictions. These differences can include additional qualification requirements, variations in required experience and jurisdiction-specific competency assessments. For example, Victoria requires those seeking to perform electrical work to undertake a 3-part Licensed Electricians assessment process before obtaining a licence, a requirement that does not apply in other jurisdictions and is not required for workers operating under MR or AMR.

Stakeholders consistently identified a disconnect between nationally recognised training pathways and state-based licensing requirements. The Fire Industry Alliance noted that nationally recognised fire protection qualifications are not consistently required across jurisdictions, despite being identified in the Australian Building Codes Board's National Registration Framework. Similarly, Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association (AMCA) submitted that nationally recognised training qualifications often lead to different licensing pathways in different jurisdictions:

"This misalignment means that mutual recognition cannot deliver on its promise of treating equivalently qualified workers as equivalent. Structural resolution requires aligning licensing entry requirements with national training packages at a national level."[51]

This persistent mismatch between qualifications and licensing can undermine confidence and trust in mutual recognition arrangements. Where jurisdictions apply different entry requirements to the same occupation, regulators may have concerns about whether equivalent licences reflect equivalent standards. Stakeholders suggested that this contributes to additional licence conditions on interstate work, additional public protection requirements, or an increasing number of exemptions from AMR.

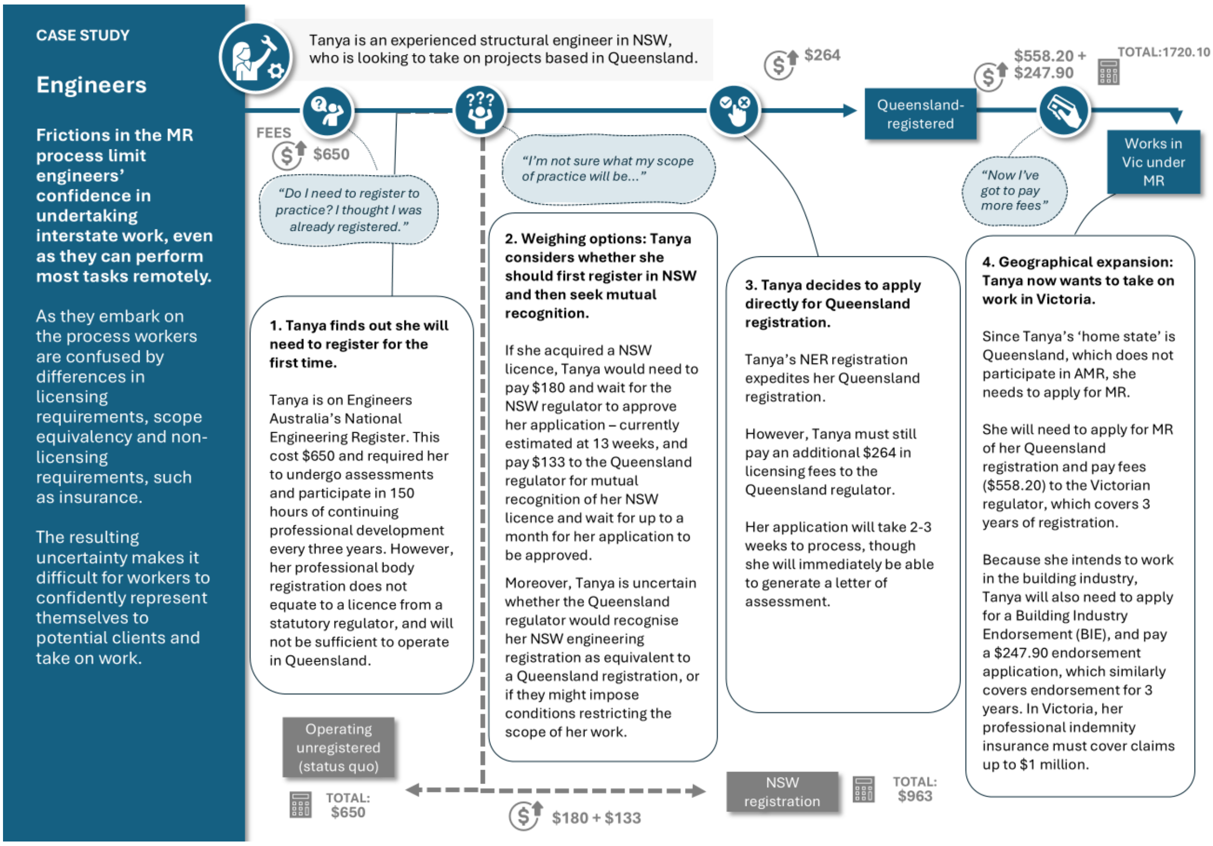
The Council considers that greater alignment between nationally recognised qualifications and state and territory licensing requirements would strengthen confidence in mutual recognition arrangements and reduce barriers to labour mobility. While mutual recognition can help workers move between jurisdictions, it cannot fully address differences in the standards used to determine who enters an occupation in the first place.

3.3.3 Application and renewal processes add administrative burden

While mutual recognition schemes enable workers to seek recognition in other jurisdictions, application and renewal processes can still be complex, costly and time consuming. Workers may be required to complete duplicative administrative requirements, pay multiple sets of fees or need to repeat probity checks they have already undertaken in their home jurisdiction. While AMR has streamlined these processes for many occupations, they remain significant for workers relying on MR.

Stakeholders identified registration fees, renewal requirements and duplicative application processes as common barriers to interstate mobility. For example, engineers seeking registration in multiple jurisdictions may incur substantial registration and renewal costs, despite demonstrating equivalent qualifications and professional standing. The journey map illustrates how continued registration across multiple jurisdictions can create financial and administrative burdens for workers.

Chart 4: Engineers case study



Under mutual recognition, workers and businesses must track renewal periods across multiple jurisdictions, imposing significant administrative burden. The Gaming Technologies Association (GTA) reported that while most aspects of AMR are working smoothly for gaming technicians, variations in licence renewal periods create avoidable administrative and financial burdens that are deterring businesses from using AMR. The GTA noted that gaming technician licences may be renewed every 10 years in Victoria, 5 years in Queensland, 3 years in the Australian Capital Territory and annually in New South Wales. They reported that these differences create avoidable compliance costs and administrative burden estimating that their members collectively spend hundreds of hours each year managing their licence renewals.

Workers may also be required to repeat background checks, identity verification processes and other probity requirements when seeking recognition in another jurisdiction. For example, stakeholders reported that bus drivers may need to satisfy different criminal history checks, medical assessments and passenger vehicle authority requirements depending on the jurisdiction. Delays in obtaining additional working with children checks can take up to 8 weeks.[52] Similar concerns were raised in the security industry, where workers may be required to travel interstate to undergo fingerprinting and police checks despite having already completed equivalent checks in their home jurisdiction.

Box 6: Security worker seeking interstate recognition

Steve is a licensed security guard living in Adelaide. To be licensed in South Australia, Steve has already met requirements including a fit and proper person assessment, police check, qualifications requirements (Certificate II in Security Operations), first aid training and having his fingerprints taken. To obtain his South Australian licence, Steve paid an application fee of $1,020 and waited 8–10 weeks for approval.

Steve has been offered a temporary role working security at a major event in Brisbane. Queensland offers a temporary interstate work permit for security officers. However, there is little public information available about this permit, and the Council understands that these are only issued for large-scale, government sanctioned events. As Queensland does not participate in AMR, Steve must proceed with an MR application. For his Queensland MR application, Steve must:

- fill out an 11-page paper-based mutual recognition application form
- agree to an additional national police check
- verify his identity with 100 points of certified identification
- provide 2 recent passport photos
- provide an appropriately witnessed statutory declaration
- submit the application form by mail or in-person
- pay an application fee of $536.85, including a $47.35 police check fee and a $113.30 fingerprinting fee.

After he submits his application, Steve must have his fingerprints taken in-person in Queensland, despite already having had his fingerprints taken in South Australia.

Given these administrative and financial hurdles, as well as the uncertainty regarding how their interstate licence would be recognised, Steve may decide against taking on the job in Brisbane because of the steps involved in having their application approved. As reported by GuardHERE Consulting, a security management consultancy:

"From the worker's perspective, the journey can feel less like recognition of an existing authority and more like navigating another licensing process under a different heading. […] For security businesses, labour hire providers and subcontractors, interstate deployments are often arranged within tight mobilisation timeframes. If workers are uncertain about the pathway, cost, timeframe or scope of recognition, employers may instead source local labour, leave shifts unfilled, or decide that interstate deployment is simply not commercially viable."[53]

The Council considers that duplicative application and renewal requirements can reduce the practical benefits of mutual recognition. While many of these requirements are intended to support public protection and regulatory oversight, stakeholders questioned whether the extent of duplication is proportionate to the risks being addressed. Where workers are required to repeat processes that have already been completed in another jurisdiction, mutual recognition can resemble a second licensing process rather than a mechanism for recognising authority to work in an occupation.

3.3.4 Licence classes, scope and terminology differ between jurisdictions

One of the most significant barriers to effective mutual recognition is the variation in licence classes, licence scope and terminology across jurisdictions. While nationally recognised qualifications and training frameworks have increased consistency in workforce capability, jurisdictions continue to regulate many occupations differently. These differences can include:

- licence classes, types and categories
- activities that require licensing
- distinctions between practitioners, supervisors and contractors
- activities authorised under a licence
- ‘endorsement’ required to undertake additional activities
- terminology and definitions used to describe activities and/or licence types.[54]

Mutual recognition schemes rely on the concept of licence equivalence. Under the MR Act, occupations are considered equivalent where the activities authorised under each licence are substantially the same.[55] When jurisdictions define occupations differently, establishing equivalency becomes complex and the effectiveness of mutual recognition is constrained.

Stakeholders consistently identified licence classes, scope and terminology differences as a major source of complexity. This was reported across a wide range of industries, including plumbing, building and construction, electrical work, engineering, private security, fire safety practitioners, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) work, among others. The Council observes that regulatory framework misalignment appears to be greater for occupations with a wide variety of activities and disciplines, such as engineers and electricians, as well as occupations that do not fall neatly into existing regulatory frameworks, such as HVAC work and fire safety systems.

Engineering: fragmented licence classes

Engineering registration schemes provide a clear example of how differences in licence categories and scope can limit mutual recognition.

Although most engineering registration schemes were largely developed around the same time, significant differences remain between jurisdictions. Registration categories, referred to as ‘areas of engineering,’ vary substantially. Queensland recognises 19 areas of engineering, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory recognise 5, and Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory recognise fewer. South Australia does not currently operate an engineering registration scheme.

Further differences exist regarding:

- whether engineering technologists and associates require registration in some jurisdictions
- the extent to which schemes include all industries or only the building industry
- additional assessment of knowledge of building laws, standards and codes in some jurisdictions

- extraterritorial application of registration schemes, with some schemes requiring registration for work undertaken both *in* and *for* the jurisdiction
- definitions of 'professional engineering services/work'.

Engineers Australia reported that these differences create confusion, increase compliance costs and make mutual recognition more difficult to apply consistently.

Table 5: Engineering registration schemes

Jurisdiction	Industries	Areas of engineering	Occupations covered	Building industry assessment	Extraterritorial reach
NSW	Building only – class 2, 3 and 9C buildings	6	Professional engineers	Not required	No
Vic	All industries and building	5	Professional engineers	Yes	Yes
Qld	All industries	19	Professional engineers	Not required	Yes
WA	Building only	4	Professional engineers, technologists, and associates	Yes	No
Tas	Building only	3	Professional engineers	Not required	No
ACT	All industries and building	5	Professional engineers	Yes	Yes
NT	Building only	3	Professional engineers	Not required	No
SA	*N/A – no scheme*	*N/A – no scheme*	*N/A – no scheme*	*N/A – no scheme*	*N/A – no scheme*

Source: Engineers Australia submission

Fire safety: different regulatory frameworks

Fire safety practitioners provide a further example of regulatory divergence. Depending on the jurisdiction, the installation of fire safety or protection systems can include building and construction work, electrical, plumbing, and emergency services. For example, workers in Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory are covered under plumbing regulations, those in New South Wales and Queensland are covered through building and construction regulations, and those in Tasmania under fire regulations. Licensing coverage, registration models, streams of practice and regulator responsibilities vary substantially between jurisdictions.

The Fire Industry Alliance reported that these differences create uncertainty and administrative complexity for workers and businesses operating across borders.

Table 6: Fire safety practitioner licensing schemes

Jurisdiction	Scheme	Activities covered	Streams	Principle regulator(s)	Notes
NSW	Accreditation	Design, certification, servicing, inspection for class 2, 3 and 9c buildings only	3: fire sprinkler, fire hydrant and hose reel, and fire detection and alarm systems	Fire Protection Association Australia and Building Commission NSW	Scheme will begin in February 2027
Vic	Licence	Design, construction, installation, replacement, repair, alteration, routine servicing, maintenance, testing, commissioning	1: water-based systems	Victorian Building and Plumbing Commission	N/A
Qld	Licence	Design, installation, maintenance, certification	5: passive, special hazards, water-based, portables, and electrical systems	Queensland Building and Construction Commission	N/A
WA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SA	Restricted plumbing licence	Installation, alteration, repair, maintenance	1: water-based systems	SA Consumer and Business Services	A separate licence is required to 'test and inspect' fire sprinklers
Tas	Permit	Installation, repair, servicing	2: fire protection systems, and portable fire protection equipment	Tasmanian Fire Service	N/A
ACT	Licence	Installation, replacement, augmentation, curtailing, maintenance, repair, alteration	1: fire sprinkler services	Access Canberra (Plumbing and Gas Inspectorate)	N/A
NT	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: NCC analysis of state and territory regulator websites

Electrical: many different licence classes and sub-classes

Electrical licensing frameworks are among the most fragmented occupational licensing systems in Australia. Although all jurisdictions distinguish between general and restricted electrical work, there are 116 different licence types nationally (Table 7). Licence classes, endorsements, terminology and definitions vary significantly between jurisdictions (Table 8).

Table 7: Number of electrical licence classes, by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Electrical licences	Restricted licences	Total licences
NSW	4	2	**6**
Vic	12	11	**23**
Qld	5	15	**20**
WA	4	8	**12**
SA	8	3	**11**
Tas	4	9	**13**
ACT	2	7	**9**
NT	4	18	**22**
Total	**43**	**73**	**116**

Source: Powering Skills Organisation Ltd., *State and Territory Licensing and Regulations Mapped to Training Products*, May 2026[56]

Table 8: Unrestricted electrical licence classes across jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Electrician (mechanic/ general)	Electrical fitter	Lineworker	Cable jointer	Electrical inspector	Instrumentation	DER work
NSW	✓ Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vic	✓ Yes	-	✓ Yes (Distribution, transmission, rail traction)	✓ Yes (Sub-class of line worker licence)	✓ Yes (G, M, H, V, RE)	-	-
Qld	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	-	-	-
WA	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	-	-	-	-	-
SA	✓ Yes	-	✓ Yes (Distribution, transmission, rail traction)	✓ Yes	-	✓ Yes	-
Tas	✓ Yes	-	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	-	-	-
ACT	✓ Yes	-	-	-	-	-	+
NT	✓ Yes	✓ Yes (mechanic and fitter)	✓ Yes (Distribution, transmission)	+	-	+	-

Source: NCC analysis of state and territory regulator websites. The ticks refer to where an occupation has a specific licence class in a state or territory, while the pluses refer to where an additional endorsement is required.

According to the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA):

"Mutual recognition schemes are not fit-for-purpose for electrical occupations. They rely on assumptions of equivalence that do not hold in practice and are not capable of addressing underlying differences in licensing systems."

Key terms, such as 'licensed electrical work,' 'electrical installation work' and 'restricted electrical work,' also have different definitions across the country, resulting in licences having different scopes of authorised work between jurisdictions.[57] These technical differences between jurisdictions can create additional compliance burdens for individuals and businesses. For example, a Victorian electrician working in South Australia under AMR must understand technical differences in the regulator definitions of electrical work between the jurisdictions, or risk non-compliance if they accidentally breach the scope of their Victorian licence in South Australia.

Impacts of misalignment

Differences in licence classes, licence scope and terminology create uncertainty for workers, businesses and regulators. Workers may be unsure what licence they will receive under mutual recognition or what activities they are authorised to undertake once recognised. Businesses face additional compliance costs when deploying workers interstate and may choose to subcontract work rather than navigate regulatory complexity. [58] Regulators must spend additional time assessing equivalence and determining whether licence conditions are required.

Stakeholders reported that these uncertainties can discourage workers and businesses from using mutual recognition arrangements, reducing labour mobility and limiting the practical benefits of the schemes.

As observed by Engineers Australia:

"Mutual recognition was intended to improve mobility but the inconsistent schemes that underpin it has instead created confusion, costly duplication and delays."[59]

AMCA reported that navigating jurisdictional differences in scopes of work significantly impacted the usefulness of mutual recognition:

"Scope-of-work equivalency is consistently the most difficult aspect for HVAC businesses to navigate. Even where a licence is technically recognised under MR or AMR, workers and employers face genuine uncertainty about whether specific tasks fall within the recognised scope in the destination jurisdiction. This uncertainty creates compliance risk and deters interstate deployment. A federally managed scope-of-work framework, or full national licensing, would resolve this by providing a single authoritative reference."[60]

Likewise, material differences in licence scope and classes between jurisdictions can create complexity for licensing regulators when attempting to determine equivalence. Where differences exist, licensing regulators are likely to be cautious in how they recognise interstate licences, such as by imposing conditions on an interstate worker's licence to achieve equivalence (section 3.4.2). When a worker operates interstate under AMR they are constrained by the requirement to only undertake activities they are authorised to carry on in their home state, especially where licensed work in another jurisdiction is unlicensed in their home jurisdiction (see box 7).

Box 7: Licence class and scope misalignment impacting interstate mobility for electrical engineers

Consider an electrical engineer who lives and works in Victoria. They are registered in their home state and want to design a solar or wind farm in the Australian Capital Territory. Under AMR, they can perform this work without needing to re-register, be reassessed or pay registration fees to the Australian Capital Territory regulator. However, if they want to do the same work in Queensland, they must apply for MR, which involves paying additional registration fees to the Queensland regulator and an assessment of licence equivalency from the Queensland regulator, because Queensland does not participate in the AMR scheme. Adding further complexity, in New South Wales the same electrical engineer would not need to be registered, unless they were designing the electrical system for a class 2, 3 or 9C building.

An electrical engineer licensed in New South Wales could use mutual recognition to work in Victoria, Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territory. However, this engineer would be restricted to *only* working on class 2, 3 and 9C buildings under AMR or MR, as their New South Wales registration technically only covers work on these building classes. This restriction arises despite the same engineer being able to work on all building classes and structures in New South Wales.[61]

The engineering registration schemes in Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory do not cover electrical engineers, and South Australia has no engineering registration scheme. As such, an electrical engineer from these jurisdictions must first register in another state or territory. Following this, they will be unable to use AMR to work in further jurisdictions due to the "home state" restriction, meaning they must apply for MR and pay registration fees if they wish to work in a third jurisdiction.

Conversely, stakeholders reported that mutual recognition works more effectively where licence classes, scopes and terminology are aligned. Engineers Australia highlighted that AMR utilisation rates are significantly higher between Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory compared to other jurisdictions, reflecting that these jurisdictions have adopted similar registration schemes with aligned areas of engineering and scope.[62] Occupations with nationally consistent licensing frameworks that contain few or no licence classes, such as architects and gaming technicians, also appear to encounter fewer problems with regards to mutual recognition barriers.

Implications for harmonisation

Stakeholders consistently supported greater alignment of licence classes, scope and terminology. The Council considers this to be one of the most significant opportunities to improve the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes. Greater consistency would reduce uncertainty, simplify equivalence assessments and improve labour mobility outcomes.

Most stakeholders viewed greater alignment of licence classes, licence scope, competency requirements and regulatory approaches as essential to the long-term effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes.[63] Stakeholders argued that without greater consistency between jurisdictions, MR and AMR will continue to be constrained by uncertainty, administrative complexity and limited portability of licences, reducing their capacity to support workforce mobility.

The National Registration Framework for Building Practitioners (NRF) demonstrates that governments can reach agreement on nationally consistent registration frameworks. However, implementation has been uneven and stakeholders reported that many jurisdictions have not fully adopted the framework. This experience highlights the importance of ongoing oversight, clear accountability and sustained coordination if national frameworks are to achieve their intended outcomes.

Box 8: Implementation of the National Registration Framework for Building Practitioners

The National Registration Framework for Building Practitioners (the NRF), published in December 2021 by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB), provides a nationally agreed model framework for consistent building practitioner registration requirements.

The NRF was developed to implement recommendations 1 and 2 of Peter Shergold and Bronwyn Weir's *Building Confidence* Report, which recommend a nationally consistent approach to the registration of certain categories of building practitioners, as well as to facilitate the effective operation of AMR.

The NRF sets out competency, experience, insurance, fit-and-proper person requirements and consistent naming conventions for the following disciplines:

- Design: architects, building designers, engineers, plumbing and fire systems designers, and energy efficiency and disability access consultants
- Construction: builders, fire systems installers, plumbers
- Compliance: building surveyors
- Project coordination: project managers

Despite national agreement on registration requirements for these occupations, the implementation of the NRF at the state- and territory-level has stalled. While there has been some harmonisation of terminology, and licensing coverage is more consistent across jurisdictions, registration requirements for building practitioners remain inconsistent across jurisdictions. Master Plumbers and the Fire Industry Alliance both concluded that despite their occupations' inclusion on the NRF, this has not meaningfully driven harmonisation of licence classes, scopes of work, and entry requirements.

Stakeholders raised governance and oversight issues as a barrier inhibiting the full implementation of the NRF. It is the responsibility of states and territories to implement the NRF, and there is relatively limited implementation oversight provided by ABCB, Building Ministers' Meeting, or National Cabinet. Weir's examination of the reasons behind why implementation of the NRF has stalled concluded that:

"[There is] a lack of transparency and accountability arising from the absence of any obligation for states/territories to report progress on recommendation implementation. As a result, there is little pressure to implement all recommendations and reasons for jurisdictions acting on some recommendations but not others are unclear." [64]

The Council considers that there are useful lessons from the implementation of the NRF that can guide future harmonisation efforts. The Council notes the success of the ABCB in developing the national framework and providing a mechanism for disagreements between the states and territories to be resolved. The fragmented implementation of the scheme highlights the need for central oversight of jurisdictions' implementation efforts, transparent reporting, and incentives for state and territory governments to harmonise with the national framework.

3.3.5 Some occupations are not licensed consistently across jurisdictions

Some occupations are licensed in certain jurisdictions but not others. Where an occupation is not regulated in a worker's home jurisdiction, there is no licence that can be recognised under MR or relied on under AMR. Unlike other forms of regulatory misalignment, inconsistent regulatory coverage presents a fundamental limitation to mutual recognition schemes.

Examples of occupations that are not licensed consistently across Australia include:

- building project managers – only licensed in Victoria and Queensland
- electrical linespersons – only licensed in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory
- motor vehicle repairers – only licensed in New South Wales and Queensland
- electrical engineers – only licensed in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory
- glazing – only licensed in New South Wales (for domestic buildings only), Victoria, Queensland and South Australia
- medical gas work – licensed in all jurisdictions except Western Australia and the Northern Territory
- fire safety practitioners – licensed in all jurisdictions except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Workers from jurisdictions that do not licence their occupation face 2 disadvantages. First, they cannot rely on MR or AMR when seeking to work in a jurisdiction where licensing applies and must instead apply for a local licence. Second, once they obtain a licence elsewhere, they are still unable to use AMR because the scheme requires a worker's licence to be issued in their home state or territory.

The home state requirement was intended to limit the scope of jurisdiction hopping (as discussed in section 3.5). However, the home state requirement has created significant mobility barriers and costs, in the form of repeated application processes and fees, for individuals from jurisdictions that do not have a licensing scheme for their occupation. These impacts are explored in box 9.

Box 9: How inconsistent licensing coverage limits engineer mobility

‘Sarah’ is a professional engineer employed by a consultancy business based in South Australia, where there is currently no registration scheme for engineers.

She works on building projects in New South Wales, so she holds an engineering registration in New South Wales. New South Wales engineering registration is only required for Class 2, 3 and 9c buildings, as work on other building classes does not require registration. A new one-year professional engineering registration in New South Wales has a $704 application fee, and the average processing time is 13 weeks.

The South Australian business is starting to provide services to Victoria and wants Sarah to work on Victorian projects remotely from the South Australia office. As Victoria’s registration scheme covers engineering work provided ‘for’ Victoria, Sarah must register as an engineer in Victoria despite being located in South Australia. Furthermore, Sarah cannot seek to use AMR to deliver her engineering services to Victoria, because her ‘first’ registration is for New South Wales, which is not her ‘home State.’ The same issues would arise if Sarah wanted to provide engineering services for Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

Further, supposing that South Australia eventually introduces engineering registration, Sarah will not be able to utilise AMR to become registered in South Australia even if she holds registration in New South Wales and Victoria, because neither is her ‘home State’.

Because Sarah’s home jurisdiction doesn’t require engineers to be registered, she is unable to use AMR (which is free). Instead, Sarah is forced to using MR, meaning she must pay annual registration fees in both New South Wales and Victoria. The MR application fee for Victoria is $558. If Sarah wants to take on work in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, she must apply for mutual recognition with the local regulator in each jurisdiction, paying an additional $273 and $549 upon application respectively.

Stakeholders argued that inconsistent regulatory coverage significantly limits the effectiveness of mutual recognition arrangements. As the Design Institute of Australia noted, mutual recognition delivers limited benefits where occupations are licensed inconsistently across jurisdictions because there is often no licence available for recognition in the worker’s home jurisdiction.

The Productivity Commission recommended in 2025 that governments review occupations that are licensed in some jurisdictions but not others. The Council supports the view that inconsistent regulatory coverage warrants further examination. Depending on the occupation and supporting evidence regarding safety, quality and consumer protection outcomes, there may be value in either extending licensing to remaining jurisdictions or reassessing whether licensing remains necessary. The Council considers that occupations regulated in only a small number of jurisdictions should be reviewed as part of a broader process of regulatory alignment.

Several stakeholders suggested reviewing the operation of the AMR home state requirement where a worker's home jurisdiction does not regulate the occupation. In these circumstances, workers can face repeated registration processes and additional costs despite already holding a licence elsewhere. Stakeholders argued that greater flexibility may improve labour mobility while maintaining existing safeguards against jurisdiction hopping.

Consult Australia estimated that reforms of this nature, combined with Queensland adopting AMR for engineers, could generate substantial savings for professional engineers working across multiple jurisdictions, although the Council has not independently verified these estimates.

In the engineer case study, the home state amendments would help Sarah to save $1,380 in MR application fees. While amending the ‘home state’ requirement may slightly increase the risk of jurisdiction hopping, the Council expects that these impacts would be minimal, as only individuals from jurisdictions without a registration scheme for their occupation would benefit.

3.3.6 Varying enforcement and compliance frameworks can undermine mutual recognition

Occupational licences operate within broader regulatory frameworks that determine compliance obligations, certificate requirements and statutory responsibilities. Even where occupations are recognised under mutual recognition schemes, differences in these broader frameworks can limit the ability of interstate workers to perform all aspects of their role.

In some jurisdictions, regulatory responsibility is concentrated within a single regulator. In others, responsibility is distributed across multiple agencies or statutory bodies. This can lead to added complexities for workers in understanding their obligations, particularly where obligations are spread across multiple licensing regulators or where compliance expectations differ between jurisdictions.

Stakeholders reported that licence enforcement and compliance approaches differ considerably between jurisdictions. These differences can include:

- the numbers of licensing regulators involved in the regulation of activities
- different levels of scrutiny and stringency, including the number of disciplinary actions undertaken
- audit, inspection and certification requirements
- regulatory resources and capabilities to conduct compliance activities
- technology systems used to administer licensing functions and capabilities (for example, manual or digital lodgement)
- differences in compliance and disciplinary action reporting and transparency practices.

For example, electrical occupation stakeholders reported starkly different approaches to electrical safety regulation. In Queensland, a single regulator (the Electrical Safety Office) is responsible for electrical safety, including developing and enforcing standards. Statistics on fatalities, serious incidents and compliance activities are published quarterly. For example, Queensland issued 385 improvement notices, 63 infringement notices and 21 electrical safety protection notices in Q1 2025–26.[65] In New South Wales, responsibilities for electrical licensing and compliance are spread across multiple licensing regulators. Stakeholders reported difficulty obtaining comparable compliance statistics.

These differences can create complexity for workers and businesses, particularly where workers are recognised under MR or AMR but are unable to perform all aspects of their role in another jurisdiction.

Different statutory functions can limit the effectiveness of mutual recognition

A recurring concern raised by stakeholders was that interstate workers may be authorised to perform work under MR or AMR but remain unable to exercise key statutory functions associated with that work. These issues are particularly prevalent for AMR, where interstate workers are not granted a local licence.

For example, engineers and architects can operate in New South Wales under AMR without needing to register as in New South Wales. However, they are generally unable to perform certain compliance checks, including lodging designs and making compliance certificates for class 2, 3 and 9c buildings. To do so, they must register under New South Wales's Design and Building Practitioners scheme, negating the benefits of AMR.[66] As one Tasmanian-based professional engineer noted:

"Automatic Mutual Recognition is largely useless, as it gets you registered as an AMR operator, however in most cases does not actually permit you to sign [the] design statements, so is of no practical value."[67]

A related problem can arise where the level of statutory responsibility differs between jurisdictions for the same occupation. While the substantive work of a practitioner can remain the same, the role an individual serves in the local regulatory framework can be substantially different. In some jurisdictions, the same licensed practitioner might be granted greater responsibility and independence, while in turn being expected to demonstrate greater competence and meet high entry requirements.

For example, building surveyors undertake broadly similar functions across Australia in certifying compliance with the National Construction Code and other standards. However, Victorian legislation grants building surveyors greater discretion and statutory responsibility than equivalent practitioners in some other jurisdictions, such as Western Australia. Victorian building surveyors are responsible for issuing building permits, assessing compliance with broader building and planning legislation, and making orders regarding non-compliance. In Western Australia, these roles are performed by local councils.[68] Entry requirements are accordingly higher in Victoria compared to Western Australia, requiring only an Advanced Diploma rather than a post-graduate degree.

Similarly, plumbing regulation operates under different compliance models. In Victoria, licensed plumbers operate under a self-certification model and are required to lodge compliance certificates and assume responsibility for rectifying non-compliant work. In other jurisdictions, such as New South Wales, greater compliance responsibility is assumed by the regulator and local councils for plumbing work.[69] As such, a plumbing licence in Victoria is only granted after an individual passes a theoretical exam run by the regulator.

The Council acknowledges that these forms of regulatory divergence may be more difficult to address than differences in licence terminology or categories. They often reflect broader policy choices about how governments allocate regulatory responsibilities and manage compliance risks. Nevertheless, where differences in statutory functions create barriers to interstate practice, there may be value in jurisdictions working towards greater alignment or developing supplementary arrangements that allow interstate workers to perform essential regulatory functions.

The Council considers that broader regulatory frameworks are an often-overlooked source of friction within mutual recognition schemes. Even where licences are recognised, workers may still encounter barriers that limit their ability to fully practise their profession across jurisdictions.

3.3.7 Workers and businesses may need to comply with multiple sets of continuing professional development requirements

Continuing professional development (CPD) requirements are intended to ensure that licensed workers maintain their skills and competency over time. However, CPD requirements are another area in which licensing frameworks differ between jurisdictions. While the MR Act allows local workers to have their licences recognised across borders, it does not prevent registration authorities applying their own CPD requirements on interstate workers operating under mutual recognition.

As a result, workers and businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions may need to comply with and keep track of several CPD frameworks simultaneously. Stakeholders identified challenges arising from these differences, including:

- **Inconsistent CPD requirements**: not all states and territories consistently require CPD for specific occupations. For example, CPD for real estate agents is required in most states and territories, except for Victoria (to begin in 2027), South Australia, and the Northern Territory.[70]
- **Differing CPD policies**: the number of hours of CPD, prescribed topics, limits for activities, and delivery requirements differ between jurisdictions. Workers may need to complete additional CPD to meet jurisdiction-specific requirements or prescribed topics, even after they complete sufficient CPD for their home state registration.
- **CPD requirements while operating under AMR**: some jurisdictions exempt workers operating under AMR from local CPD requirements (even where workers operating under MR are required to complete CPD), while others do not.
- **Different reporting and renewal periods**: the length of an occupational licence and the date at which a licence expires and needs to be renewed can differ between states. Workers may need to carefully track when they complete CPD over several years to ensure they are compliant across multiple jurisdictions, even where policies are aligned. For example, architects in most states and territories must undertake 20 hours of CPD a year, with at least 10 hours of formal learning. However, the CPD reporting periods differ between jurisdictions: Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia’s CPD years end on 30 June, while Queensland and Tasmania’s CPD years end on 31 March, and the New South Wales CPD year is tied to the date of registration renewal.[71]
- **Different administrative systems**: the process for providing evidence of CPD completion is tied to the registration renewal process, which differs between jurisdictions. Workers may need to upload evidence of CPD completion in multiple forms and track how their CPD maps onto different classification structures across jurisdictions.

Although these requirements are typically designed to achieve similar competency outcomes, stakeholders reported that they often create unnecessary administrative complexity for workers registered in multiple jurisdictions.

Box 10: Inconsistent continuing professional development rules for engineers

The experience of an electrical engineer registered in both New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory demonstrates how different CPD requirements between jurisdictions can create friction and unnecessary burden for workers.

New South Wales requires engineers to complete 50 hours of CPD per year, while the Australian Capital Territory requires 150 hours over 3 years. Although these requirements are broadly equivalent over time, each jurisdiction prescribes different mandatory subject areas. The Australian Capital Territory requires 10 hours of training in sustainability principles and practices, while New South Wales mandates 6 hours of risk and business management skills training each year. As a result, engineers operating across both jurisdictions may need to undertake additional training to satisfy multiple regulatory requirements. This requires time and financial resources.[72]

Box 11: Duplicative continuing professional development requirements for surveyors

Matt is a Queensland-based Registered Surveyor with a Cadastral Endorsement who also operates in New South Wales and Victoria under mutual recognition. As such, Matt is required to comply with both New South Wales and Victoria's CPD frameworks. While New South Wales and Victoria both require 15 CPD points per year, New South Wales operates on a financial-year cycle and Victoria operates on a calendar-year cycle.[73]

Consequently, Matt must carefully time his CPD sessions to ensure he completes 15 CPD points within both the calendar and financial year. He must also submit his CPD information to the New South Wales regulator in June and the Victorian regulator in December. For every CPD session Matt attends in Queensland, he has the burden of manually mapping the CPD content to different jurisdictional CPD policies operating on separate cycles with completely different rules, activity limits, and definitions.

Surveyors Australia observed that this creates duplicative administrative effort and represents a severe and unnecessary burden on small businesses.

Stakeholders broadly supported greater consistency in CPD requirements across jurisdictions. This included alignment of CPD hours, prescribed learning topics (where appropriate), classification of activities and reporting periods. Some stakeholders, such as Master Electricians and Powering Skills Organisation, supported national CPD frameworks as a means of improving workers' competency and training in jurisdictions that have not introduced CPD requirements.[74]

However, beyond national agreement on CPD requirements, reducing administrative burden for workers will require practical alignment of reporting years, prescribed topics, and other administrative matters. As the Association of Consulting Architects warned:

"[A]s demonstrated by the experience of architects, friction can still arise when a national CPD framework is in place due to differing registration renewal timelines and processes, underscoring the need for alignment of administrative processes and practical requirements as well."[75]

The Council also identified examples of regulatory cooperation that reduce compliance burdens such as some CPD exemptions and reciprocity approaches that are in place. For example, Victorian engineers and architects are exempted from local CPD requirements if they have fulfilled CPD requirements for another jurisdiction.[76] Similarly, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have a reciprocal CPD framework, enabling CPD completed in either jurisdiction to be recognised by both licensing regulators.[77] These examples demonstrate that many of the barriers associated with CPD can be reduced through regulator coordination and reciprocity arrangements.

The Council considers that differences in CPD requirements are rarely, in themselves, a significant barrier to labour mobility. However, when combined with other regulatory differences, they contribute to the cumulative compliance burden faced by workers and businesses operating across jurisdictions. Greater consistency in CPD requirements, reporting periods and reciprocity arrangements would help reduce this burden while maintaining professional competency standards.

3.3.8 Public protection and local law requirements add complexity

In addition to occupational licensing requirements, workers operating across state and territory borders may be required to comply with a range of public protection, fit-and-proper person, vulnerable person character tests and other local law requirements. These requirements often operate independently of mutual recognition schemes and can vary significantly between jurisdictions.

The MR Act defines a public protection requirement as a requirement designed to protect the public, clients, customers or others and include: insurance, fidelity funds, trust accounts, and minimum financial requirements. Vulnerable person character tests or a fit or proper person test determine whether a person may carry on an activity in relation to children, young people or vulnerable people.[78] Examples include:

- insurance requirements
- trust account obligations
- financial probity requirements
- police checks and worker screening requirements
- working with children checks
- medical assessments and other suitability tests.

While these local law requirements are often intended to address public protection objectives, they are not applied consistently across jurisdictions and are not always recognised across borders.

Stakeholders reported that these differences can create additional costs, delays and uncertainty for workers and businesses seeking to operate interstate. For example, insurance requirements for electrical contractors vary significantly between jurisdictions, ranging from no specific licensing-related insurance requirements in some jurisdictions through to mandatory public liability and consumer protection insurance arrangements in others.[79]

Similarly, stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of mutual recognition of worker screening requirements, including medical testing, working with children checks, police checks, and fingerprinting. Several stakeholders reported that workers are often required to repeat checks that have already been completed in another jurisdiction, creating additional administrative burden without necessarily delivering additional safety benefits.

The MBA noted that local law requirements relating to insurance, warranty requirements, financial probity and solvency requirements often triggered reassessment. The New South Wales Small Business Commissioner noted that these additional compliance steps are especially burdensome for small businesses operating across state borders. AMCA suggested the combination of local law requirements, notification requirements and uncertainty around scope of work makes interstate work comparable to a full licence application, even where AMR is available.[80]

The MBA provided the example of a licensed builder hoping to work across New South Wales and Queensland to illustrate the burden added by local law requirements:

"A Queensland-licensed builder seeking to work on a residential project in NSW faces: application processing times of four to eight weeks under traditional MR; a requirement to meet NSW financial probity thresholds, which may differ from Queensland requirements; NSW home warranty insurance obligations, which require engagement with an insurer and may involve additional financial disclosure; and a requirement to register with NSW Fair Trading as an entity, not just as an individual. The practical effect is that short-term project work in NSW is commercially unviable for a sole trader or small business."[81]

The Council considers that public protection requirements should be aligned and mutually recognised wherever possible, while preserving jurisdiction-specific requirements that are supported by a clear policy rationale or address genuine local risks. The Council also acknowledges that mutual recognition is likely to depend on jurisdictions having confidence that equivalent checks, assurance and safeguards are being applied consistently across borders. Therefore, as with other areas of regulatory misalignment, harmonising local law requirements across jurisdictions would help to remove administrative burden for workers and businesses operating across state borders and improve the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes.

Finding 2: Improving alignment of jurisdictional requirements will support more widespread implementation of the schemes.

2.1 There are significant variations in the implementation and alignment of current mutual recognition schemes across jurisdictions, and among occupations, which materially undermine the effectiveness of these schemes.

2.2 Most significantly, Queensland does not participate in AMR at all. In its response to the 2025 Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into opportunities to improve productivity of the construction industry, the Queensland Government agreed to progress its participation in the AMR scheme. The Council supports the Queensland Government's commitment to progressing participation in AMR.

Continued on next page

Finding 2: Improving alignment of jurisdictional requirements will support more widespread implementation of the schemes. (continued)

2.3 Jurisdictions that do participate in AMR have exempted numerous occupations from its operation, with an estimated 158 exemptions across jurisdictions. Common examples include security, building and plumbing. Exemptions are permitted where necessary to guard against significant risk to consumers, the environment, animal welfare, or the health and safety of workers or the public. However, it is not obvious that the benefits of these exemptions have been assessed against their costs. Taking up the opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements (see finding 4) should reduce or eliminate the need to rely on some or all of these exemptions.

2.4 Differences between jurisdictions in the categorisation of activities covered by particular licences, and labels given to these categories and activities, gives rise to unnecessary complexity for workers, employees and those administering the schemes and creates uncertainty. This complexity and uncertainty increases costs disproportionately to any perceived or actual impact on risk, deters workers and businesses from using the schemes and results in delays in commencing work. Further, as identified in finding 4, these kinds of differences can be readily addressed, particularly where occupations are underpinned by, and have as their starting point, already nationally endorsed qualification competencies and standards. Similar observations apply in connection with differences in licence conditions and ongoing requirements, such as continuing education.

2.5 Ministerial declarations of equivalence, which formally recognise that certain licences are equivalent and are directed at removing the complexity and uncertainty of jurisdictional differences, have become out of date and do not perform their intended function. Most ministerial declarations currently in force were developed between 2007 and 2015 and have not been reviewed for more than a decade, despite significant changes to licensing frameworks and in some cases, to the scope of occupations over that period. Providing a register that can be easily and readily updated and expanded without ministerial decisions would improve the timeliness, flexibility and effectiveness of capturing this information.

2.6 Other differences that can give rise to misalignment of the current mutual recognition schemes include worker screening requirements (medical testing, working with children checks, police checks and fingerprinting) and local law requirements (codes of conduct, insurance requirements, financial tests and trust account frameworks). Requiring worker screening or testing to be done in multiple jurisdictions imposes additional costs on workers and businesses. Multiple different state-based requirements are unlikely to lead to better outcomes than harmonised national screening, testing regimes or national applicability of jurisdictional attainment.

2.7 Greater alignment between state and territory occupational licensing requirements and nationally recognised competency frameworks would enhance the effectiveness of mutual recognition schemes and improve labour mobility. Jobs and Skills Councils play an important role in this process through the development and maintenance of national training packages.

3.4 Practical barriers to labour mobility

Building on section 3.3, this section examines how regulatory misalignment and inconsistent implementation translate into practical barriers to labour mobility. While mutual recognition provides a formal pathway for interstate work, too often mobility is constrained by exemptions, administrative complexity, delays, and uncertainty about requirements and scope of practice. This section focuses on the lived experience of the system, highlighting how structural issues manifest in decisions about whether to undertake work across jurisdictions.

3.4.1 AMR exemptions result in fragmented coverage

AMR was intended to provide a broad and nationally consistent pathway for interstate work. However, the scheme's coverage has been reduced by Queensland's non-participation and the use of occupational exemptions across participating jurisdictions. Stakeholders consistently identified these exclusions as a significant barrier to labour mobility.

Queensland

Queensland’s non-participation creates a structural gap in what was intended to operate as a national framework. Stakeholders emphasised that this limits the ability of workers and businesses to move seamlessly across state borders, particularly along the eastern seaboard where cross-jurisdictional labour flows are more common. The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) described Queensland’s position as leaving “a large gap in the scheme”, constraining access to a significant portion of the national labour market.[82] In 2025, the Queensland Government agreed to progress its participation in the AMR scheme. The Council supports the Queensland Government’s commitment to progressing participation in AMR.

Occupational exemptions

In addition to Queensland’s non-participation, many occupations have been exempted from AMR. Occupations exempted across multiple jurisdictions include teaching and parts of the construction sector (Appendix E provides a list of all occupational exemptions). While exemptions were intended to be temporary, specifically for a maximum period of 5 years, many have been renewed.

Table 9: Occupations subject to AMR exemptions by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Occupations subject to AMR exemptions
NSW	64
Vic	18
Qld	N/A
WA	27
SA	8
Tas	9
ACT	29
NT	3
Total	**158**

Note: the number of occupations is not directly comparable between jurisdictions due to differences in licencing terminology, classes, and language used in ministerial declarations.

Evidence provided to the Council suggests that exemptions can be particularly disruptive in sectors that rely on mobile or project-based workforces. Construction projects, for example, commonly require multiple licensed occupations to work together (including builders, electricians, plumbers, surveyors and other licensed workers). Where some occupations can utilise AMR but others are exempt, businesses are required to navigate different regulatory pathways for members of the same project team, reducing predictability and increasing administrative burden.

Stakeholders questioned whether broad occupational exclusions remain justified in all cases and emphasised the importance of ensuring regulatory responses are proportionate to risk. The ASBFEO described AMR as a "fragmented patchwork of exemptions, carve-outs, and jurisdiction-specific requirements, creating confusion and real costs for workers and small businesses".[83] Industry evidence reinforced these concerns. The MBA reported that exemptions and inconsistent licensing requirements continue to hinder mobility, particularly for longer term and project-based work.[84] The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) observed that AMR is constrained by "uneven implementation, partial coverage, and ongoing inconsistencies."[85]

Exemptions often reflect underlying regulatory divergence

The Council considers that exemptions are often a symptom of broader regulatory divergence rather than the underlying problem itself. Where jurisdictions have different licence classes, qualification requirements, scope of work, worker screening arrangements or regulatory frameworks, governments may conclude that automatic recognition is inappropriate.

In many cases, the risks identified by states and territories do not relate to regulatory risks, but rather system misalignment between states and territories. As discussed in section 3.3, these differences can include incompatible worker screening frameworks, inconsistent licence classes and different regulatory obligations.

The Council also notes that South Australia and the Northern Territory have declared relatively few AMR exemptions and that, aside from teaching, these exemptions do not generally apply to occupations with large workforces. The Council is not aware of evidence suggesting that broader implementation of AMR has resulted in significant adverse outcomes; including for occupations such as private security workers and builders that are subject to exemptions in several other jurisdictions.

Oversight of AMR exemptions

AMR exemptions were intended to be limited and subject to periodic review. However, many exemptions have now been renewed despite the scheme operating for more than 5 years.

While the MR Act requires exemptions be justified by significant risks relating to consumer protection, public safety, worker safety, animal welfare or the environment, there is currently no formal mechanism to review whether exemptions remain justified over time.

The Productivity Commission has observed that existing safeguards may not be sufficient to prevent the overuse of AMR exemptions. Stakeholders similarly argued that exemptions should be evidence-based, proportionate to risk and subject to periodic review. The MBA supported greater oversight to ensure that exemptions are gradually removed, where appropriate:

“The exemption framework (Part 3A, Division 2) provides inadequate constraints on jurisdictions' ability to exempt occupations from AMR. The Act should require that exemptions be supported by documented, publicly available evidence of proportionate safety or consumer protection risk, subject to periodic independent review.”[86]

Taken together, Queensland's non-participation and the use of occupational exemptions have significantly reduced the coverage and effectiveness of AMR. While exemptions may be justified in some circumstances, the Council considers that stronger oversight and review of exemptions, supported by evidence and reviewed regularly, would improve accountability. The Council also supports the phased removal of exemptions where risks can be appropriately managed. The Council also considers that progress in aligning licensing requirements, licence classes and scopes, and worker screening systems will likely reduce the need for AMR exemptions over time.

3.4.2 Assessments of licence equivalence can be uncertain and inconsistent

Mutual recognition relies on licensing regulators being able to determine whether an interstate licence is equivalent to a local licence. When licence equivalence is clear and well understood, workers can move between jurisdictions with confidence and licensing regulators can process applications consistently. However, stakeholders reported that assessments of licence equivalence are often difficult, uncertain and inconsistent.

The Council found that uncertainty regarding licence equivalence can create practical barriers to labour mobility. Workers and businesses may be uncertain whether a licence will be recognised, what licence will be granted, or whether restrictions or conditions will apply. Licensing regulators may also adopt a more cautious approach where equivalence is unclear.

Outdated equivalence frameworks can create uncertainty and licence uplift

Ministerial declarations of equivalence are a central feature of the mutual recognition framework. They specify which licences should be treated as equivalent across jurisdictions and provide certainty for workers, employers and regulators. There are currently nine ministerial declarations in force, including 4 multilateral declarations cover 45 occupations including building, electrical, plumbing and various service trades.[87] Appendix G contains a list of current ministerial declarations.

Stakeholders consistently raised concerns that the declarations have not kept pace with changes in licensing systems. Of the 45 occupations covered, the equivalence table for 11 occupations have not been updated since 2015, while the remaining 34 have not been reviewed since 2009.

Where licensing frameworks evolve but declarations are not updated, licensing regulators remain required to grant licences in accordance with existing declarations even where they believe the licences are no longer genuinely equivalent. Regulators are also limited in their ability to impose conditions that are inconsistent with the declared equivalence. One consequence of outdated declarations is the potential for “licence uplift”. Licence uplift occurs where a worker uses mutual recognition sequentially to obtain a licence with a broader scope of work than their original licence would otherwise permit.

Box 12: Tribunal case study of licence uplift

In the *Dimitrijevich and Construction Occupations Registrar* (ACT) case, the applicant, Stefan Dimitrijevich, held a Queensland Builder – Open Site Supervisor licence and sought a Builders Class A licence in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) through mutual recognition. These 2 licences were deemed equivalent in an in-force ministerial declaration.[88]

The Construction Occupations Registrar ACT refused the application, on the basis that granting an unrestricted building licence would result in a substantial uplift in capability because:

- the scopes of work permitted by the Queensland and ACT licence differed substantially, with the Queensland site supervisor licence not permitting the applicant to undertake building work
- the ACT ‘Class A’ licence required tertiary qualifications and experience that significantly exceeded the requirements of the Queensland ‘site supervisor’ licence.

However, the Tribunal determined that the Registrar was required to grant the licence because the ministerial declaration remained in force and that they had incorrectly refused the MR application.

The applicant, Dimitrijevich also applied for deemed-equivalent building licences to his Queensland licence in New South Wales and South Australia, following which both state licensing regulators sought to impose additional conditions on his licence to restrict the scope of work he can perform in their jurisdiction. The Tribunal held that conditions inconsistent with the declarations could not be imposed. That is, licensing regulators cannot impose additional conditions to achieve equivalence, where these conditions are not imposed by the ministerial declaration.[89]

Box 12 illustrates how outdated equivalence declarations can compel licensing regulators to recognise licences that no longer align with contemporary licensing frameworks. It also demonstrates that regulators cannot use licence conditions to address perceived differences where a ministerial declaration remains in force.

Box 13: Harmonisation of electrical worker licensing in the Northern Territory

Prior to 1 July 2024, electrical workers and contractors in the Northern Territory were licensed under the *Electrical Workers and Contractors Licensing Act 1978* (NT). On 1 July 2024, the *Electrical Safety Act 2022* (NT) and *Electrical Safety Regulations 2024* (NT) commenced, replacing the former licensing framework. One of the objectives of the reforms was to introduce new licence classes and endorsements that more closely align with those used in other Australian jurisdictions.

The new framework establishes a more contemporary licensing structure, including:

- unrestricted electrical work licences
- restricted electrical work licences
- electrical contractor licences
- in-house electrical licences.

Greater alignment reduces the likelihood that a worker can obtain a licence in the Northern Territory and subsequently use MR to obtain a licence with a materially broader scope of work elsewhere. Accordingly, harmonisation of licensing frameworks provides one of the most effective safeguards against licence uplift.

Limited evidence of licence uplift

Stakeholders provided examples where mutual recognition was perceived to facilitate licence uplift, particularly in building and electrical occupations. However, evidence regarding the prevalence of licence uplift remains limited.

Data from the Australian Capital Territory Government (ACT) indicated that only 8% of builders who obtained an ACT building licence through mutual recognition subsequently worked on building projects in the ACT.[90] While this does not demonstrate licence uplift in itself, particularly given the ACT's broader regional labour market and the high level of cross-border commuting, it is consistent with concerns that some applicants are seeking ACT licences primarily to access a broader scope of work in their home jurisdiction. The ACT Government identified outdated equivalence declarations, which map lower-level licences in some jurisdictions to the ACT Class A Builder licence, as a contributing factor.

The Northern Territory Government reported that approximately 75% of new electrical worker licences in 2025 were issued under mutual recognition pathways.[91] This statistic demonstrates the significant role that mutual recognition plays in supplying the Northern Territory's electrical workforce. However, the data alone does not establish whether applicants were engaging in jurisdiction hopping or licence uplift, as high use of MR may also reflect the Territory's reliance on interstate labour and transient workforces (with ABS data confirming that the Northern Territory has one of Australia's highest population turnover rates[92]).

The Council considers that licence uplift is most likely to occur where there are substantial differences in licence scope, qualification requirements or competency expectations between jurisdictions. Where licensing frameworks are well aligned, opportunities for licence uplift are significantly reduced.

The evidence suggests that licence uplift is not a systemic failure of mutual recognition arrangements. Rather, it reflects situations where equivalence frameworks have not kept pace with changes in licensing systems.

Licensing regulators tend to lean towards constraining scope when licences are not covered by equivalence declarations

The challenge of determining licence equivalence and scope is particularly acute where a licence is not covered by a ministerial declaration of equivalence. In these circumstances, licensing regulators must determine whether the activities authorised by an interstate licence are "substantially the same" as those authorised by a local licence. This assessment can be complex where jurisdictions use different licence classes, terminology, scopes or work or regulatory frameworks. As a result, licensing regulators may adopt a more conservative and cautious approach to recognition.

No nationally consistent guidance exists for assessing licence equivalence. As a result, regulators may adopt different approaches. Some rely on rigid comparisons, while others assess the underlying competencies and scopes of work.

As the Victorian Cross Border Commissioner noted: "Support provided by registration authorities varies significantly. Some regulators provide practical guidance and constructive assistance, while others apply a more conservative or procedural approach that limits mobility".[93]

Stakeholders reported that where equivalence is unclear, regulators often adopt a cautious approach to recognition. This can reflect concerns regarding consumer protection, uncertainty about the rigour of another jurisdiction's licensing system, or concerns that interstate workers may not understand local requirements.

As Master Builders Australia noted:

"When equivalence is unclear, the default tends to be caution, with either the worker seeking an additional licence or the employer declining to deploy them interstate."[94]

Such caution can create practical barriers to labour mobility. Workers and businesses may be unable to determine whether mutual recognition is available, what licence will be granted, or what restrictions may apply until an application is formally lodged. In some cases, this uncertainty can discourage businesses from deploying interstate workers or discourage interstate workers from seeking mutual recognition altogether.[95]

Workers may be worried they may inadvertently perform work outside their permitted scope, exposing themselves and others to compliance, safety and legal risks. For instance, the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) submitted that workers relying on AMR may be exposed to professional risk and risk of prosecution for infringement of the licensing scheme due to performance of unlicensed work, even where there is no intention to breach licensing requirements.[96]

The MR Act provides for equivalence decisions to be reviewed by the Administrative Review Tribunal, which can make its own determination regarding equivalence. In recent years, the Administrative Review Tribunal (or its predecessor) has overturned several regulator decisions relating to equivalence and licence conditions. However, many workers are unaware of this review mechanism and the time and cost associated with pursuing a review may act as a deterrent.

Box 14: Inconsistent recognition of equivalent licences

Stakeholders reported that equivalent interstate licences are not always recognised consistently, creating uncertainty for workers seeking to move between jurisdictions.

The Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heating (AIRAH) reported that one air conditioning and refrigeration technician holding a New South Wales licence applied for mutual recognition in Queensland and was granted both an equivalent air conditioning and refrigeration licence and an additional plumbing licence class. However, AIRAH reported that other technicians holding the same New South Wales licence were only given the air conditioning and refrigeration licence.

AIRAH also identified differences in recognition outcomes between jurisdictions. One member was able to obtain a New South Wales licence on the basis of their Queensland licence, while another reported being required to complete an examination in Victoria.

These examples suggest that workers holding similar licences and qualifications can receive different outcomes depending on the jurisdiction in which they apply and the approach taken by the regulator. Stakeholders argued that this creates uncertainty regarding whether a licence will be recognised and what additional requirements may apply.

Improving equivalence frameworks

Stakeholders consistently identified greater clarity and consistency in licence equivalence arrangements as an opportunity to improve the operation of mutual recognition schemes.

There was broad support for updating the existing ministerial declarations of equivalence framework and expanding declarations to cover additional occupations. The Council considers updating licence equivalency to be a relatively low-cost but high-impact reform, which would benefit workers, employers and licensing regulators while improving the integrity of the scheme. Clear and current licence equivalence mapping would provide a range of benefits, including:

- providing greater certainty for workers and businesses by clarifying which licence they are entitled to receive in another jurisdiction and any conditions they may apply
- reducing administrative burden on licensing regulators by minimising the need for case-by-case equivalence assessments
- improve consistency of licensing outcomes across jurisdictions
- reduce opportunities for licence uplift arising from gaps or outdated declarations.

Improving the currency of declarations, or replacing them with a flexible alternative system, could support consistent decision-making and limit opportunities for regulatory arbitrage. State and territory governments have noted that updating or rescinding declarations is challenging. Multilateral declarations often cover many occupations, meaning that changes to one equivalence may have unintended consequences for others. Achieving agreement across jurisdictions can also be slow, given differing regulatory priorities.

The Council considers that stronger institutional arrangements could support more consistent equivalence assessments. Potential functions could include maintaining and periodically reviewing equivalence mappings, developing national guidance for licensing regulators, facilitating information sharing between jurisdictions and promoting nationally consistent approaches to equivalence assessment. The Council urges that any reforms to equivalence frameworks should seek to improve accuracy and responsiveness while maintaining legal certainty and consistency for workers, businesses and licensing regulators.

As GuardHERE Consulting submitted:

“The Commonwealth, states and territories should develop a nationally consistent licence equivalency framework identifying comparable licence categories across jurisdictions. Clear guidance on equivalent licence classes would reduce uncertainty for workers, employers and regulators.”[97]

Stakeholders also noted that ministerial declarations cannot resolve all equivalence issues. New occupations emerge, licensing frameworks evolve over time, and not all licences will be covered by declarations. As a result, licensing regulators will continue to require guidance and support when determining equivalence in circumstances where no declaration applies.

Ultimately, the Council considers that uncertainty regarding licence equivalence is another consequence of broader regulatory divergence and fragmented governance arrangements. While the MR Act establishes the principle of equivalence, there is currently no institution or mechanism responsible for ensuring equivalence frameworks remain current or for supporting regulators to apply them consistently across occupations and jurisdictions over time. Harmonisation of licensing frameworks remains the most effective means of reducing uncertainty and improving mutual recognition schemes.

3.4.3 Data collection, storage and sharing is fragmented and inconsistent

The effective operation of mutual recognition schemes relies on licensing regulators being able to process applications efficiently, maintain accurate records and share information across jurisdictions in a timely manner. Stakeholders consistently reported that the technology infrastructure supporting occupational licensing and mutual recognition is fragmented, outdated and poorly integrated.

These limitations increase administrative burden for licensing regulators, increase the risk of human error and make it more difficult to monitor compliance and exchange information between licensing regulators. They can also affect the experience of workers and businesses, particularly where system limitations result in processing delays, repeated requests for information, or uncertainties regarding licence status.

Many licensing regulators are relying on legacy systems

Technological capability varies significantly between licensing regulators. While some licensing regulators have invested in modern digital systems, others continue to rely on legacy platforms that pre-date MR and AMR.

Stakeholders have reported that many systems have been adapted to accommodate mutual recognition rather than designed to support it.[98] As a result, regulators often rely on manual workarounds, separate registers and duplicate data entry processes.

For example, the Western Australian Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (DLGIRS), which regulates most occupations subject to MR and AMR in Western Australia, reported that:

“Legacy systems […] operate across the public sector. These systems were not designed with mutual recognition or [Automatic Deemed Registration] in mind, and significant redevelopment is required to ensure they can support modern regulatory needs while maintaining consumer protection.” [99]

The Review found considerable variation in the systems used to administer MR and AMR across jurisdictions. Traditional MR applications are generally integrated into broader licensing management systems. However, AMR has often required the development of additional systems and processes, and levels of integration vary considerably. For example, the Northern Territory operates 2 separate public licence registers on different systems, one for local licence holders and individuals operating under MR, and another for individuals operating under AMR.

Information sharing between licensing regulators is inconsistent

Stakeholders consistently identified systemic gaps in information sharing between licensing regulators as one of the most significant challenges affecting the effectiveness of MR and AMR.

Effective mutual recognition depends on licensing regulators having timely access to information regarding licence status, disciplinary action, licence conditions and eligibility to participate in the schemes.

To support information sharing, during the implementation of the AMR scheme, a series of collaboration channels were established, including dedicated communities in the GovTEAMS platform. GovTEAMS is a digital collaboration service built for government that allows secure and restricted access by licensing regulators to support the sharing of information regarding MR or AMR participants across jurisdictions.

While several information-sharing mechanisms have been developed, regulators reported that information exchange remains inconsistent and often relies on manual processes, email communication and regulator-specific platforms.

The Council understands that while some licensing regulators use GOVTEAMS extensively, others reported it was not fit for purpose as it cannot be integrated with many of their normal business systems. For instance, SafeWork NSW reported that they typically created a GOVTEAMS item *and* sent emails to counterpart licensing regulators when processing a mutual recognition request.[100]

Western Australia LGIRS reported that its systems were unable to identify when work was undertaken by a person whose interstate licence had been suspended and did not generate automatic alerts when disciplinary investigations commenced involving an ADR participant.[101]

The Review had insufficient evidence to determine how frequently these compliance gaps occur in practice or whether they have resulted in systemic safety risks. Nonetheless, they were consistently raised by licensing regulators and industry stakeholders and appear to influence regulator confidence in the operation of mutual recognition schemes. Improving information sharing between jurisdictions would support more effective administration, compliance monitoring and regulatory oversight.

National licensing register

Stakeholders expressed strong support for a centralised and uniform national licensing register to improve transparency, information sharing and scheme integrity. A national register could better support licensing regulators while administering mutual recognition schemes and provide industry and members of the public with a single location to confirm a workers’ licence details.

Currently, licensing information is maintained through a range of jurisdictional and industry-based registers that vary significantly in functionality and the information they contain. The absence of a single source of truth makes it more difficult for regulators, business and consumers to verify licence status and regulatory history.[102]

For example, there are 10 separate state-based registers for engineers, in addition to the industry-run National Engineering Register. As reported by a joint submission of engineering bodies:

“Consumers are faced by incredible complexity should they wish to determine the competency of registered engineers under the current system. The existence of multiple state-based public registers makes it difficult for businesses and the public to easily verify credentials and assess capability, thereby reducing transparency and confidence in the market.”[103]

Stakeholders argued that a comprehensive national licensing register could:

- improve visibility of licence status and conditions
- support information sharing between regulators
- reduce duplication in licensing administration
- improve transparency for businesses and consumers
- strengthen confidence in mutual recognition arrangements.

Other stakeholders proposed amending the MR Act to introduce a duty to notify other jurisdictions when someone has their licence cancelled or suspended. Several stakeholders supported an application programming interface (API) approach that would allow integration with existing state and territory regulator systems, noting that this may be more cost-effective than requiring all regulators to adopt a single software platform.

The Council considers that a national licensing register has the potential to improve the operation of mutual recognition schemes by facilitating more consistent and frequent information sharing across jurisdictions. However, implementation would need to address privacy, governance, system integration and ongoing maintenance considerations.

3.4.4 Application processes and fees can deter use of the schemes

A core objective of mutual recognition schemes is to enable workers to move across borders with minimal administrative burden. While the MR Act establishes pathways for interstate mobility, stakeholders reported that processing times, administrative requirements and licensing costs can reduce the practical benefits of these arrangements.

Under the MR Act, licensing regulators are generally required to grant a MR application within one month of receiving a valid notice. Within that month, licensing regulators may postpone or refuse the grant of the registration.

Workers who have applied for an MR application are entitled to commence work in the second state while their application is being processed, under the interim deemed registration provisions of the MR Act.

However, stakeholders reported that many workers choose not to rely on these provisions due to uncertainty regarding licence conditions, insurance requirements and other jurisdiction-specific obligations.

Processing times can create barriers

Data reviewed by the Council indicate that processing times from lodgement to finalisation vary considerably across licensing regulators and occupations. Some applications are processed within days of lodgement. For example, estate agent mutual recognition notifications in Victoria were processed in around 8 days on average in 2025. In contrast, average processing times for some occupations exceeded one month. Conveyancer mutual recognition applications in New South Wales, for example, took approximately 35 days on average to process during 2025.

Several licensing regulators reported that, in resource constrained environments, mutual recognition applications are prioritised to ensure compliance with statutory timeframes. While this supports labour mobility objectives, it may have flow-on impacts for other activities as this can delay the processing and finalisation of local applications. The Australian Capital Territory Auditor General found that construction occupation licence applications submitted under mutual recognition were processed in an average of 14 calendar days, compared with 59 calendar days for other new licence applications.[104]

Stakeholders also noted that the outdated information technology systems can contribute to processing delays, particularly where applications require manual assessment or information must be exchanged between licensing regulators. As discussed in section 3.4.3, technology limitations continue to affect the efficiency of scheme administration.

Stakeholders reported that uncertainty regarding eligibility pathways, licence requirements and recognition outcomes can create delays even where formal processing requirements are relatively limited. In Western Australia, the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety reported receiving 696 mutual recognition-related enquiries during 2025. Many enquiries related to which pathway applied in specific circumstances, including whether workers should use traditional, automatic mutual recognition or another licensing process. This suggests that complexity and uncertainty may discourage workers from pursuing interstate opportunities even when they are eligible to do so.

Maintaining multiple registrations is costly

Stakeholder also identified licensing fees and registration requirements as a practical barrier to labour mobility, particularly for occupations requiring registration in multiple jurisdictions and occupations exempted from AMR.

Applications fees, registration periods and renewal requirements vary significantly between jurisdictions. Workers and businesses operating nationally may therefore be required to maintain multiple registrations with different renewal dates, administrative requirements and associated costs.

Table 10 illustrates the variation in registration fees and licence periods for 2 highly mobile professions – electricians and engineers.

Table 10: Application fees and licence lengths for electrical workers and engineers

Jurisdiction	Electrical workers Licence length (years)	Electrical workers Application fee ($)	Engineers Licence length (years)	Engineers Application fee ($)
NSW	1, 3 or 5 years	$772 (3 years)	1, 3 or 5 years	$1,585 (3 years)
Vic	5 years	$459	3 years	$558
Qld	5 years	$94	1 year	$133
WA	5 years	$209	3 years	$746
SA	3 years	$464	N/A	N/A
Tas	3 years	$401	1 or 3 years	$1,233 (3 years)
ACT	3 years	$287	3 years	$342
NT	5 years	$507	2, 3 or 4 years	$1,833 (3 years)

Source: NCC analysis of regulator websites, April 2026 (includes registration fees and licence term fees).

For electrical workers, application fees range from less than $100 to more than $500 depending on the jurisdiction. For engineers, the differences are even more substantial. Registration fees can exceed $2,600 in some jurisdictions for longer registration periods, while other jurisdictions charge significantly lower fees.

These costs become particularly significant for businesses employing large mobile workforces and for professionals seeking to maintain registration across multiple jurisdictions. Differences in registration periods can further increase administrative burden by requiring workers and businesses to track multiple renewal cycles and compliance obligations.

Collectively, delays, administrative complexity and licensing costs reduce the practical benefits of mutual recognition arrangements. While none of these factors may individually prevent labour mobility, stakeholders consistently reported that their cumulative effect can discourage workers and businesses from pursuing interstate opportunities, particularly for short-term, project-based or time-sensitive work.

The Council considers that AMR has provides significant benefits for workers and businesses, as no application fee is charged for AMR notifications. The experience of occupations that operate under AMR suggests that broader participation in the scheme, together with the progressive removal of exemptions where appropriate, would further improve labour mobility outcomes.

3.4.5 Notification requirements are inconsistent

Under the MR Act, states and territories may require workers to notify the relevant regulator before carrying on an occupation under AMR. Notifications are intended to be simple, low-cost administrative requirements such as filling out a short form. Jurisdictions cannot charge fees and requirements must be limited to what is reasonably necessary.

Despite these safeguards, stakeholders reported that notification requirements vary between jurisdictions and can create uncertainty and administrative burden for workers and businesses operating across borders. In some cases, notifications create disproportionate barriers, especially for short-term or urgent work.

Notification requirements vary in terms of:

- whether notification is required
- the information that must be provided
- how notifications are lodged and processed
- whether regulators provide confirmation before work commences.

For electrical occupations, workers and businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions must navigate multiple notification systems and requirements (see table 11).

Table 11: Electrical licensing notification requirements by home jurisdiction and second jurisdiction

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
NSW	N/A	N	A	MR	N	N	MR	N
Vic	A	N/A	A	MR	N	N	MR	N
Qld	A	N / MR	N/A	MR	MR	MR	MR	MR
WA	MR	N	A	N/A	N	N	MR	N
SA	MR	N	A	MR	N/A	N	MR	N
Tas	MR	N	A	MR	N	N/A	MR	N
ACT	A	N	A	MR	N	N	N/A	N
NT	MR	N	A	MR	N	N	MR	N/A

Source: initial submission from Master Electricians Australia, NCC analysis of regulator websites

A = Automatically recognised (no notification required)

N = Notification required

MR = Application required under mutual recognition

A licensed Victorian electrician can undertake work in New South Wales and Queensland without notification, but must notify regulators before undertaking equivalent work in the Northern Territory, South Australia or Tasmania. Notification processes also differ between these jurisdictions. South Australia and Tasmania have an online web-based form, whereas the Northern Territory requires workers to complete and submit a multi-page form by email. As a result, workers undertaking substantially similar activities can face markedly different administrative requirements depending on the jurisdictions involved. Stakeholders argued that these differences create uncertainty and increase compliance costs without always producing clear regulatory benefits.

Some stakeholders also asked whether notification requirements were proportionate for short work periods, for instance in cases where an engineer from one state should be required to notify the local regulator to do one day of work in another jurisdiction.[105] The Australian Refrigeration Council (ARC) reported that notification requirements prevent them from undertaking urgent work:

“Notification requirements mean that workers cannot accept same-day or next-day jobs, employers cannot deploy staff immediately to meet urgent demand, and any delay in acknowledgement effectively blocks work. For urgent RAC jobs (breakdowns, supermarket refrigeration failures, hospital cooling issues), even a 24–48-hour delay makes AMR unusable.”[106]

The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, identified improvements to the notification process system as one practical area for harmonisation.[107] The Western Australia Small Business Development Corporation concluded that ‘notifications should be digital, simple, and proportionate to risk.’ [108]

The Council supports the suggestion made by several stakeholders that a national digital notification system would help to reduce administrative burden, particularly for businesses that operate across multiple jurisdictions. For example, the Australian Refrigeration Council noted that:

“Notification requirements can impose a barrier when they are duplicative, inconsistent between jurisdictions, or not integrated with real-time verification of scope and conditions. Where notifications are retained for high-risk work, they should be simplified through interoperable digital processes that allow secure verification and automated confirmation of current licence status and any conditions, while preserving regulator visibility. A streamlined approach should include clear guidance on when notification is required and what evidence must be provided.”[109]

3.4.6 Information available to workers is fragmented, complex and hard to navigate

Access to clear and reliable information is essential to the effective operation of mutual recognition schemes. Workers and businesses need to understand whether they are eligible to work in another jurisdiction, which pathway applies to them, what conditions or notification requirements must be satisfied, and what activities they are authorised to undertake.

Stakeholders consistently reported that information relating to mutual recognition is fragmented, inconsistent and difficult to navigate. Information is spread across multiple government agencies, licensing regulators and jurisdictions, and the quality, detail and currency of information varies significantly between occupations. As a result, workers and businesses can often experience difficulty determining whether mutual recognition or automatic mutual recognition applies in their circumstances and what obligations they must comply with before commencing interstate work.

Stakeholders reported that understanding obligations across multiple jurisdictions often requires substantial administrative effort including time and dedicated compliance resources. Differences in terminology, licence classes and scopes, between jurisdictions can create significant confusion. Multiple stakeholders reported that information available is often highly technical, uses jurisdiction-specific terminology, and is often difficult to understand. Workers and businesses also reported difficulties in determining which local requirements apply, such as insurance, trust accounts and the scope of work covered by their interstate registration.

The quality of information about mutual recognition also varies significantly by occupation and jurisdiction. Stakeholders from smaller industries, including the fire industry, second-hand automative industry, and refrigeration and air-conditioning industry, reported particularly difficulties obtaining clear information tailored to their occupations.

Several stakeholders expressed frustration with the fragmentation and quality of information on mutual recognition across the country, noting the considerable administrative burden this was imposing on workers and businesses. The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) noted that:

“Information is fragmented across jurisdictions and not easily accessible, requiring direct engagement with regulators and limiting transparency. […] workers are not always aware that mutual recognition schemes between the states exist or how/where to apply.”[110]

Similarly, the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA) observed:

“There is no single practical source of truth that explains, in task-based terms, what an interstate technician can do immediately in another jurisdiction, what requires notification, what requires a second application, and what falls outside mutual recognition.”[111]

Many industry stakeholders reported needing to contact licensing regulators directly for clarification regarding eligibility, licence equivalence or notification requirements, with licensing regulators not always able to provide clear answers. Stakeholders also identified examples where industry bodies, businesses, registered training organisations (RTOs), and even private individuals had developed their own unofficial guidance material to map licence equivalence across jurisdictions to assist workers in navigating the schemes.

In addition to costs, there is a risk that workers and businesses might inadvertently fail to comply with rules they did not understand or knew existed. The costs and risks of non-compliance are heightened for individual workers and small businesses who cannot afford dedicated compliance functions. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects noted that larger firms are generally better placed to manage registration and compliance obligations across jurisdictions than smaller practices.[112]

Stakeholders also raised concerns that workers and businesses may inadvertently fail to comply with requirements that they were unaware of or did not fully understand. This can create uncertainty and increase perceptions of regulatory risk when considering interstate work opportunities.

Uncertainty itself can be a barrier to labour mobility. Under AMR, responsibility largely rests with workers and businesses to determine whether they are eligible to perform work in a second jurisdiction and what requirements apply. Stakeholders reported that many workers and employers would prefer clear, written confirmation that they have satisfied all requirements before undertaking interstate work. In the absence of this certainty, some may choose not to proceed with interstate opportunities, particularly where the consequences of non-compliance are perceived to be significant.

The Council considers that there would be significant benefits in developing a centralised information source to improve access to mutual recognition guidance. A single national guidance portal would provide a clear entry point for practitioners, employers and regulators and answer practical questions regarding registration, mutual recognition pathways, notification requirements, conduct obligations and compliance responsibilities. Many stakeholders consulted throughout this Review supported a single digital portal, which could complement a national register and digital licence.

The Council notes that some jurisdictions, including South Australia and Tasmania, have developed centralised webpages that clearly outlines key information about AMR for the public. For example, the AMR webpage on the Consumer, Building and Occupational Services Tasmania site contains:

- a clear table of which licences are eligible for AMR in Tasmania
- advice for workers and businesses about the AMR process
- occupation-specific factsheets that outline conduct and technical requirements in Tasmania
- information about consumer protection requirements that MR/AMR workers must adhere to in Tasmania, including CPD, insurance, trust account, identification and other requirements
- links to the online portal for AMR notifications and MR applications.

The Council considers that clearer, more accessible and more consistent information would improve confidence in mutual recognition arrangements while reducing uncertainty and administrative burden for workers and employers. However, information improvements should complement, rather than substitute, broader efforts to address the underlying regulatory inconsistencies that create complexity in the first place.

3.4.7 Implications for mutual recognition

While Australia's mutual recognition schemes are intended to facilitate labour mobility, their effectiveness is constrained by a range of practical barriers. These barriers arise from the combined effects of occupational exemptions, uncertainty regarding licence equivalence, fragmented technology systems, inconsistent notification requirements and difficulties accessing clear information. Together, these issues reduce usability and effectiveness of the schemes in practice.

A recurring theme throughout this Review is that formal eligibility to work interstate does not necessarily translate into practical mobility. Workers and businesses often face uncertainty regarding whether they are entitled to work in another jurisdiction, what activities they are authorised to undertake, which regulatory pathway applies, and what additional requirements they must satisfy. These uncertainties can delay or discourage interstate work, particularly where opportunities are short-term, project-based, urgent or intermittent in nature.

Many of the barriers identified by stakeholders are administrative rather than risk-based. Differences in processes, systems, notification requirements and information provision frequently impose additional complexity without a clear connection to differing levels of risk. As a result, workers and businesses may face compliance costs and administrative burdens that are disproportionate to the risks being managed.

The cumulative effect of these barriers can be significant. Stakeholders reported that uncertainty, delays and administrative costs often influence decisions about whether to seek mutual recognition, use AMR, or deploy workers across state and territory borders. In some cases, businesses reporting that subcontracting work locally or limiting operations to particular jurisdictions was more practical than navigating the mutual recognition framework.

More broadly, many of the practical barriers identified in this chapter are symptoms of underlying regulatory fragmentation. Addressing these barriers will therefore require more than administrative improvements alone. It will require a coordinated approach to reducing unnecessary regulatory variation, improving clarity and transparency, and streamlining the systems and institutions that support labour mobility across Australia.

Finding 3: Better information can improve the likelihood that a jurisdiction fully adopts the mutual recognition schemes and reduces the costs to workers and businesses seeking to utilise the schemes.

3.1 Effective communication between licensing regulators is undermined by poor information collection, sharing and updating. Relevant information regarding use of the schemes, licence status, disciplinary actions and the differences (and equivalence) of requirements between jurisdictions is not always shared among regulators. Timely sharing of this information would assist with the effective adoption and operation of the schemes, and minimisation of harm.

3.2 Licensing regulators are obliged under the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth) (MR Act) to exchange relevant information relating to a particular licensee with other regulators if they know the licensee is using MR in the other regulator's jurisdiction. The MR Act also requires licensing regulators, once notified, to share any information reasonably required about a person in connection with AMR in a second state or with actual or possible disciplinary action against the person. However, there is no centralised register or other system updated in real time that captures or enables sharing of such information.

3.3 While the requirement to provide notification under AMR is sensible, the difficulty in understanding when and if notification is required, and differences in notification processes between jurisdictions, increase costs to workers and limit the uptake of AMR.

3.4 Licensing regulators, employers and workers face uncertainty when attempting to determine the equivalence of licences under the MR scheme. Where licences are not covered by a ministerial declaration of equivalence, licensing regulators must determine whether the activities authorised by an interstate licence are "substantially the same" as those authorised by a local licence. This assessment can be complex where licence classes, terminology and scopes of work vary between jurisdictions.

3.5 A commitment by state-based licensing regulators to regularly review differences between jurisdictions and adopt a common assessment framework for retaining differences as a consequence of safety, consumer protection or specific necessary state requirements would facilitate more consistency at the outset, making it easier for AMR to be fully adopted.

3.6 Licence types and scope could be mapped to nationally accepted qualifications or training, with a standardised set of categorisation, functions, eligibility, notification requirements and local obligations. This would enable workers and businesses to more readily assess requirements and would reduce their costs and downtime. These requirements could be captured on a website outlining state-based differences.

Continued on next page

Finding 3: Better information can improve the likelihood that a jurisdiction fully adopts the mutual recognition schemes and reduces the costs to workers and businesses seeking to utilise the schemes. (continued)

3.7 The collection and updating of information is fragmented and relies heavily on manual processes and systems. Digital licences, registration and automated updating systems would improve the availability of information and likely reduce the cost of administration and maintenance. State licensing regulators play an important role in collecting and sharing this information, which is particularly important for cross-border communities. Clear accountability for this function, including through a single centralised body to coordinate information sharing, would provide further benefits.

3.8 The ease with which licensees can work in another jurisdiction depends not only on the availability of a licence but also on the capacity to discover and comply with licence and non-licence obligations specified under state or territory laws. Information about these obligations can be difficult to obtain in some jurisdictions. These additional requirements can impose substantial costs on workers and/or their employers. This is made worse if they must meet multiple state requirements.

3.5 Risks to safety, quality and consumer protection

The Council was asked to consider the extent to which current mutual recognition schemes have managed worker safety and consumer protection risks.

Stakeholders raised a range of concerns about the potential risks associated with mutual recognition arrangements. These concerns include jurisdiction hopping, licence uplift, differences in training quality, gaps in local knowledge, inconsistent regulatory oversight, and limitations in information sharing between licensing regulators.

This section examines the risks that stakeholders identified and the evidence regarding whether those risks are realised in practice. It considers whether existing safeguards in the MR Act are sufficient to manage these risks. It also considers whether stronger regulatory alignment, governance and information-sharing arrangements could better address safety and consumer protection concerns.

3.5.1 There is limited evidence of jurisdiction hopping impacting safety and quality outcomes

Stakeholders frequently raised concerns about "jurisdiction hopping" or "jurisdiction shopping", whereby workers obtain a licence in one state with less stringent requirements and then rely on mutual recognition arrangements to work in another jurisdiction that has more stringent licensing requirements. Some stakeholders argued that workers may seek registration in jurisdictions with lower entry requirements, lower fees, faster processing times or more flexible approaches to recognising qualifications.

Concerns about jurisdiction hopping are longstanding and date back to when the scheme was first established.[113] When the MR Act was developed, jurisdiction hopping was seen as a beneficial feature of the scheme that could incentivise states and territories to reassess unnecessarily restrictive licensing requirements, provided no jurisdiction lowers standards to an unacceptable level.[114]

A range of stakeholders reported that workers were using mutual recognition pathways to become registered more quickly, cheaply or easily. Concerns about jurisdiction hopping were raised for occupations including teachers (box 15), electricians, conveyancers, fire safety system installers and mine workers.

Box 15: One-year teaching degrees

Jurisdiction hopping often arise in situations where there is no clear consensus regarding what constitutes an appropriate regulatory standard. In 2024, Western Australia introduced arrangements allowing registration of teachers who had completed a one-year Graduate Diploma of Education, deviating from the nationally agreed standards that require a minimum 2-year postgraduate degree for new teachers.

In response, Victoria amended its policies to restrict employment opportunities for teachers holding a one-year qualification, while New South Wales only grants provisional accreditation to interstate teachers who have only completed a one-year Graduate Diploma. The differing approaches reflect different approaches to balancing workforce shortages and qualification standards.

Available data supports some of the jurisdiction-hopping pathways identified by stakeholders. For example, the HIA reported that building surveyors and supervisors often obtain a licence in Western Australia or Queensland before seeking mutual recognition in states with more stringent experience and qualification requirements.[115] Victorian data indicates that approximately 60% of all new building surveyor registrations in 2024–25 originated through mutual recognition from Western Australia, more than double the number registered locally.[116]

Similarly, the Real Estate Institute of Australia reported that real estate agents from the Australian Capital Territory choose to maintain New South Wales licences due to lower licensing fees ($549 per annum vs $1,082).[117] Approximately 24% of real estate agents working in the Australian Capital Territory are operating under AMR with a New South Wales issued licence.

At the same time, stakeholders from other sectors reported that jurisdiction hopping was not common or had limited practical impact on safety and quality outcomes. For example, both the Australian Refrigeration Council and the Council of Reciprocating Surveyors Boards of Australia and New Zealand (CRBANZ) advised that nationally consistent entry requirements substantially reduced incentives for jurisdiction hopping. Engineering bodies similarly reported no evidence of widespread jurisdiction hopping or reduced safety outcomes arising from mutual recognition.[118]

Crucially, the Review found limited evidence that jurisdiction hopping has resulted in widespread or systemic reductions in safety, quality or consumer protection outcomes. The introduction of AMR does not appear to have increased the prevalence of jurisdiction hopping, as the "home state" eligibility requirement for AMR restricts workers from choosing where they obtain a licence.

Few stakeholders identified examples where jurisdiction hopping directly affected safety and quality outcomes for consumers and workers. At most, some stakeholders highlighted cases where workers had used mutual recognition to avoid higher entry requirements in certain states and claimed this was undermining regulatory outcomes in those states.

Similarly, longstanding concerns that mutual recognition would create a "race to the bottom", where jurisdictions would reduce their licensing requirements to match the least stringent jurisdiction, do not appear to have occurred in practice (nor has the regulatory competition originally envisaged materialised). There is little evidence to suggest that occupational licensing regulations have become less stringent over time. In some industries, however, such as building and construction, licensing requirements have become more stringent across jurisdictions.[119]

The Productivity Commission, in their submission to this Review, noted that:

"If any jurisdiction set its standards in a way that was too lax, putting workers or consumers at serious risk, then mutual recognition could be risky. However, the Building a Skilled and Adaptable workforce inquiry [published by the Productivity Commission in 2025] was unable to uncover an example of a jurisdiction where standards were too lax. On the contrary, the comparisons made across jurisdictions suggested that several jurisdictions have set their occupational licensing standards at too restrictive a level, without any major safety benefits."[120]

In the Council's view, jurisdiction hopping is primarily a consequence of differences between licensing frameworks rather than of mutual recognition. As discussed in section 3.3, states and territories continue to apply different qualification requirements, experience requirements, examinations, licence classes and regulatory models. Where these differences exist, workers have incentives to seek registration through the pathway they perceive as the quickest, cheapest or least restrictive.

The Council considers that the risks arising from jurisdiction hopping depend heavily on the nature of the differences between jurisdictions. Where differences are relatively minor, such as modest variations in experience requirements or additional examinations, the risk of poorer outcomes appears low. Likewise, jurisdiction hopping driven by fee differences is unlikely to affect safety or consumer protection outcomes, although it may have implications for regulator funding models.

The most effective way to address potential risks arising from jurisdiction hopping is to further progress national harmonisation of licence classes, types, and entry requirements (see finding 2). However, where national harmonisation has not been, or cannot be, achieved, the following actions could be considered:

- Improving data collection on mutual recognition to evaluate the impact of jurisdiction hopping and monitor trends in application pathways. This includes:
  - data on MR applications, broken down by initial jurisdiction
  - disciplinary history of licence holders, broken by whether the individual is operating under a local licence, MR or AMR
  - information about the qualifications and experience of licence holders.
- Improving communication about licence holders (potentially supported by the development of a national licensing register).
- Strengthening regulator cooperation where patterns of jurisdiction hopping are identified, such as unusually high numbers of MR applicants from a particular jurisdiction, to address underlying issues and escalate them as required.
- Updating ministerial declarations of equivalence on a regular basis.
- Where licensing regulators identify elevated risks relating to the competency of interstate workers, targeted compliance and audit activities should be increased. This could include inspecting their work more frequently than that of local workers, as some licensing regulators already do.

3.5.2 Genuine local knowledge requirements present risks, but these are manageable

Stakeholders expressed concern that in some industries, interstate workers operating under MR or AMR may not have sufficient knowledge of local laws, regulatory requirements or operating practices, even where they meet the licensing requirements for an occupation. These concerns were most pronounced in occupations where legislation, regulatory frameworks or local operating conditions differ significantly between jurisdictions.

For example, stakeholders from the property, surveying and conveyancing sectors highlighted substantial differences in state and territory legislation governing matters such as disclosure requirements, insurance requirements, contract terms and legislated timeframes.[121] Stakeholders noted that an understanding of jurisdiction-specific property and tenancy laws is critical to consumer protection in these industries and that a lack of familiarity could adversely affect consumers despite the worker holding a valid licence. As such, there was significant concern about qualified interstate workers operating through mutual recognition without sufficient local legislative knowledge.[122]

Concerns about interstate operators lacking knowledge of local requirements and regulatory systems were raised by across a range of stakeholders including electricians, engineers, conveyancers and architects. Concerns were also raised about occupations where competence is tied to location-specific knowledge regarding geography, conditions or hazards. For example, the Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria noted that "Our experience indicates that surveyors operating under AMR often do not have a sufficient understanding of jurisdiction-specific legislative, cadastral, and regulatory requirements, which has led to practical challenges in compliance and delivery."[123] Western Australia has exempted marine pilots from AMR, citing the importance of local knowledge obtained through port-specific training and experience.[124]

The consequences of practitioners operating across jurisdictions without sufficient familiarity with local requirements can be significant, as illustrated by the case study in box 16.

Box 16: New South Wales real estate agent operating in Western Australia under Automatic Mutual Recognition

A real estate agent licensed in New South Wales was involved in a property sale in regional Western Australia while operating under AMR. Due to a lack of familiarity with Western Australia's property legislation, the agent failed to amend a standard selling agency agreement clause relating to exclusive periods. While appropriate in New South Wales, this clause was not valid in Western Australia. The incident resulted in the agent losing half of the commission payable on the sale, leading to the agency absorbing a loss of approximately $300,000.[125]

The Council accepts that insufficient knowledge of local laws, processes and requirements may create risks and result in poorer outcomes for consumers in some occupations. However, the evidence gathered through the Review suggests these concerns are occupation-dependent and do not appear to represent a systemic issue across most occupations covered by mutual recognition.

For most occupations, the Council believes that interstate workers can quickly become familiar with local requirements. They appear capable of adapting through professional practice, employer support, regulator guidance and readily available information. Guidance and online resources can help explain local requirements.

VET courses should also cover licensing frameworks and regulatory requirements in different jurisdictions, which the Council understands is already the case for some occupations. As observed by Gow, Phillimore and Hampson: “[N]ationally consistent training and accreditation schemes and the ready access to on-line information have significantly reduced the likelihood of a registered person not being aware of any differing requirements.”[126]

The Council understands that the risks of insufficient local knowledge may be higher for some occupations, meriting a stronger policy response to improve interstate workers’ awareness of jurisdiction-specific requirements. These risks appear to be most significant where:

- legislation and regulatory requirements differ materially between jurisdictions
- competence is dependent on detailed local knowledge
- errors may have significant legal, financial or safety consequences.

Several stakeholders supported mandating interstate workers to complete jurisdiction-specific education before operating under AMR.[127] These “bridging modules” could cover differences in legislation, regulatory requirements and processes between states and territories, and be delivered by RTOs or industry groups.

One example is Tasmania’s bridging module requirement for interstate real estate agents. Under this model, interstate real estate agents must complete CPD on Tasmanian property legislation and trust account requirements within their first 12 to 24 months of operating in the state.[128] The Council believes mandatory requirements should only be introduced when there are genuine interstate differences and the consequences of insufficient local knowledge are significant.

3.5.3 Does Automatic Mutual Recognition present particular risks?

Unlike traditional MR, AMR enables eligible workers to work interstate using their home-state licence, without applying for a separate licence in the host jurisdiction. While this supports faster and more flexible labour mobility in time critical situations, regulators are generally less involved before work begins. This reduces opportunities for regulators to verify equivalence, assess competence or impose conditions before work commences. As a result, licensing regulators rely more heavily on pre-existing licensing decisions, notification arrangements and post-entry regulatory oversight.

Some stakeholders raised concerns about reduced accountability and effective supervision of workers, particularly where work is undertaken remotely or across jurisdictional boundaries.

For example, the Land Surveyors Board of Western Australia noted instances where land surveyors using AMR are not physically present in Western Australia and did not personally undertake cadastral surveying work. Instead, these practitioners remotely supervised unlicensed individuals who carried out surveying activities. Similarly, the Office of Surveyor General Tasmania suggested that without sufficient knowledge, boundary identification and marking may be incorrect and local legislative requirements may not have been met. Such errors may have significant legal and financial implications despite not involving any deficiency in an individual's qualifications.

The Council acknowledges that AMR is a different regulatory model from traditional mutual recognition. By reducing regulatory involvement at the point of entry, AMR places greater reliance on workers understanding their obligations, licensing regulators sharing information effectively and licensing frameworks remaining sufficiently aligned across jurisdictions. However, evidence gathered through the Review does not suggest that deemed recognition is creating widespread safety or consumer protection risks.

The Council also notes that, regardless of entitlement to work under AMR, interstate workers may still be required to satisfy local professional indemnity insurance requirements, fidelity fund membership arrangements, or other insurance and public protection requirements before commencing practice. Regulators generally retain a range of powers after a worker begins operating, including powers relating to compliance, monitoring, disciplinary action and, in some circumstances, imposing conditions on AMR licences to ensure a worker's home licence is genuinely equivalent (once regulators receive notification). These safeguards provide important protections where concerns arise about an interstate worker's conduct or competency.

3.5.4 Vocational Educational and Training integrity issues impact mutual recognition

Mutual recognition increases the importance of nationally recognised qualifications because licensing decisions made in one jurisdiction may be relied on in another. However, the Council heard from some stakeholders that some qualifications issued by RTOs in some jurisdictions may provide a lower level of assurance about worker competency. Where differences in training quality make employers hesitant to hire workers from other jurisdictions, this undermines the benefits of licensing as a means of validating an individual's skills and competency.

Inconsistent delivery standards mean that workers could potentially complete the same qualification but possess different levels of competence. As observed by the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA): "Individuals may obtain qualifications that satisfy formal requirements, but do not reflect a genuine understanding of the diligence, judgement and disciplined practice required to safely perform electrical work."[129]

Stakeholders also expressed concerns about qualification fraud and activities of poor-quality or fraudulent RTOs that offer individuals a fast-tracked process of getting the required qualifications for a particular licence, undermining the integrity of the qualification. While fraudulent or poor-quality RTOs may eventually have their registration cancelled, workers who obtained a qualification would already have received their licence and could be operating in other states under MR and AMR, without the local regulator being aware that their qualification was fraudulently obtained.

Concerns about training quality and fraudulent RTOs were raised by stakeholders across a range of industries, including building and construction, electrical, fire protection, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and private security. While RTOs deliver content underpinned by national standards and are mostly regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), many stakeholders were concerned about perceived variations in training quality between states and territories.[130]

The Review found some isolated instances of fraudulent qualifications and non-compliant training practices. The Council notes that RTOs are overwhelmingly compliant with the standards and requirements overseen by ASQA, and that the proportion engaged in fraudulent behaviour is small. Further, where ASQA has cancelled qualifications, only a small subset relates to qualifications used to obtain a licence. ASQA estimates that approximately 15% of cancelled qualifications relate to licensed qualifications. Concerns about training quality and qualification fraud primarily relate to the integrity and regulation of the VET system, rather than the MR Act or implementation of mutual recognition schemes.

It is important to note that qualification integrity is not only a matter of provider regulation and enforcement. Nationally recognised qualifications operate as a gateway to occupational licensing. As such, qualification design is an important integrity control. Jobs and Skills Councils, industry bodies and licensing regulators all have a role in ensuring training package products are designed so trainees gain the competence needed to perform their work, particularly in safety-critical or high-risk occupations. This includes ensuring training package products with appropriate assessment requirements, recognition of prior learning policies, workplace evidence expectations and sufficient clarity to support consistent graduate outcomes across the country.

Box 17: Fraudulent registered training organisations offering private security qualifications

The most significant example identified during the Review involved the private security sector, where high profile instances of RTOs providing fraudulent qualifications can have significant impacts within sectors and workplaces, impact confidence and community safety.[131]

New South Wales Police advised that a bad actor was working with a fraudulent training provider in Queensland facilitating the transport of people from New South Wales to Queensland to obtain an accelerated security training certificate that would typically require 130 hours of teaching in just 3 days. This certificate enabled participants to obtain Queensland security licences, which could then be used to seek a private security licence through mutual recognition in New South Wales.

After the activity was identified, New South Wales Police (the regulator for private security agents) worked with the Queensland Government and ASQA to investigate the matter and revoke affected licences. Following intervention in Queensland, a similar practice emerged in the Australian Capital Territory with 2 RTOs offering fraudulent qualifications, forcing New South Wales Police to again investigate the issue, work with ASQA to cancel the RTOs' licences, and then cancel affected interstate licences.

New South Wales Police advised that approximately 500 licences obtained through mutual recognition have been cancelled in recent years because the initial qualifications were fraudulently obtained. New South Wales Police also highlighted the national security risks associated with under-qualified private security workers.

However, qualification fraud has occurred and has partly been facilitated or incentivised by the mutual recognition schemes. Mutual recognition can expand the market for fraudulent training and amplify the impact of poor-quality training across jurisdictions. As noted by Master Plumbers:

"The Mutual Recognition Act's…reliance on the first jurisdiction's assessment, combined with mutual recognition and AMR's capacity to move workers rapidly across borders, amplifies the system risk presented by poor quality registered training organisations and fraudulent qualifications."[132]

Crucially, the MR Act limits the ability of local licensing regulators from refusing a mutual recognition application based on concerns about the quality of an individual's qualifications. Instead, licensing regulators must rely on the first jurisdiction's assessment of an individual's suitability to hold a licence, meaning they may be required to grant someone a licence under MR when they would not do so under a standard application. These problems are explored in the case study in box 18.

Box 18: Plumber obtaining a licence with qualifications from a low-quality RTO

A Tasmanian plumber sought to upgrade his licence to the Certifier level, which requires a Certificate IV in Plumbing and Services. The licensing regulator had concerns regarding the quality of the applicant's Certificate IV qualification, obtained from an RTO in Victoria, and refused the upgrade because it was unable to verify the applicant's qualification.

The applicant subsequently obtained an equivalent plumbing licence in another jurisdiction, despite not residing there, and then sought mutual recognition in Tasmania.

As the individual had been granted a licence in another jurisdiction the Tasmanian regulator had no grounds to refuse the MR application under the MR Act. This was despite the individual's qualifications being from a lower quality RTO whose registration was later cancelled by ASQA.

The Tasmanian regulator understands that the individual undertook plumbing work beyond their competence, which may have resulted in defective work.

The Council does not support allowing licensing regulators to re-assess qualifications that have already been accepted by another licensing authority. Such an approach would be inconsistent with the objectives of mutual recognition, create further delays for applicants and impose additional resourcing burden on licensing regulators. As noted by the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia: "Blanket regulatory responses, such as allowing licensing authorities to conduct their own reassessment of qualifications obtained through RTOs, would be disproportionate, costly and potentially duplicate ASQA's existing regulatory functions."[133]

Concerns regarding training quality are best addressed through regulation of the VET sector, including timely intervention where poor quality or fraudulent providers are identified. The Council notes that the Australian Government, with support from all state and territory Skills Ministers, has recently progressed significant reforms to improve the integrity and regulatory oversight of the training sector. These reforms include the development of strengthened national standards for RTOs in 2025, which took effect on 1 July 2025, and additional resourcing being provided to ASQA for enforcement action. The Council also notes the Government's recent investment in qualification integrity and enforcement activity.[134]

The Council considers that these reforms are likely to address many of the concerns raised by stakeholders during the Review but that stronger information and data sharing between ASQA and state and territory licensing regulators should take place to identify fraudulent and poor-quality RTOs. Once an individual's qualifications are cancelled following regulatory action by ASQA, licensing regulators should collaborate to quickly identify workers in other jurisdictions whose licences may be impacted.

3.5.5 Managing safety and consumer protection risks

The Council notes that insufficient data is available to comprehensively assess the impact of mutual recognition schemes on safety and consumer protection outcomes. Regulators rarely collect compliance, enforcement or disciplinary data in a way that distinguishes between local workers and those operating under MR or AMR. Similar data challenges have been identified in previous reviews of mutual recognition schemes and continue to limit the ability to evaluate these impacts.

While many concerns were raised by stakeholders, there was limited evidence that MR was impacting quality and safety outcomes at a widespread or systematic level. Few examples were provided of instances where MR had led to practical harms.

The Council also notes that previous independent reviews of mutual recognition schemes, undertaken in 1997, 2003, 2009 and 2015, did not identify compelling evidence that any state or territory had set standards at a level low enough to cause harm or to lead to unacceptable risks.[135] Evidence gathered through the Review broadly supports that proposition.

The Council further considers that safeguards within the MR Act have played an important role in managing risks to safety, quality and consumer protections. These safeguards include:

- Workers are not eligible for MR and AMR if they are subject to disciplinary proceedings, have had conditions due to disciplinary proceedings, have had their registration suspended or cancelled, or have not met local public protection requirements or character tests.
- State and territory governments may exempt certain occupations or activities from AMR if they believe that there is a significant risk to consumer protection, the environment, animal welfare, or the health or safety of workers or the public.
- An individual is only eligible to use AMR for a registration from their home state, meaning they cannot "shop" around to be registered in the jurisdiction with the lowest entry requirements.
- For MR, the local registration authority can apply conditions that limit an individual from performing activities which are outside the scope of their first licence to achieve equivalence.

Additionally, workers operating under MR or AMR remain subject to the same criminal and civil liabilities under host-jurisdiction work health and safety legislation as locally licensed workers, including duties relating to the safe performance of work and associated enforcement, prosecution and penalty provisions.

Nonetheless, the absence of widespread or systemic harm does not mean that the current framework cannot be improved. Strengthening and streamlining licensing arrangements, including consistent training, compliance and enforcement would help manage these risks while preserving the labour mobility benefits of mutual recognition. A common assessment framework and reporting would also help identify and assess the drivers and materiality of these risks.

3.5.6 Disciplinary information is not always treated consistently across jurisdictions

Under the MR Act, disciplinary action taken by licensing regulators, as well as licence cancellations and suspensions, impact an individual’s eligibility for mutual recognition. In particular, the MR Act sets out that:

- A worker’s entitlement to AMR ends if they are the subject of any preliminary investigations or actions that might lead to criminal, civil or disciplinary proceedings.
- A licence granted under MR remains subject to the disciplinary powers of the host jurisdiction's regulator. The MR Act provides that disciplinary action taken in one jurisdiction can affect equivalent registrations held elsewhere, but it does not require a host regulator to wait for another jurisdiction to cancel or suspend a licence before acting under its licensing laws.

The MR Act therefore facilitates reliance on disciplinary and enforcement action across jurisdictions. Where cooperation and collaboration are ineffective, perverse outcomes can arise.

For instance, some licensing regulators take a heavy-handed approach to penalising compliance breaches, whereas other licensing regulators might use more informal tools to do so. However, as the MR Act only mentions formal disciplinary action as a disqualifying criterion for mutual recognition, where a regulator takes informal action to resolve issues an individual may still be able to work in other jurisdictions, as illustrated by the case study in box 19.

Box 19: Voluntarily surrendering licence in response to disciplinary action

A building practitioner was granted building registration in a jurisdiction, and then subsequently applied for and granted mutual recognition in Victoria. This initial jurisdiction later identified that the practitioner had provided false information in their application and offered the practitioner the option of voluntarily surrendering their registration or face formal disciplinary action. The practitioner chose to surrender their initial registration, and the jurisdiction did not pursue any further action.

However, as the initial jurisdiction allowed the practitioner to voluntarily surrender their registration without taking disciplinary action, the Victorian regulator is unable to act under the MR Act to cancel their Victorian registration. As a result, the practitioner’s building registration in Victoria remains current.

On the other hand, the rigidity of the MR Act with regards to "disciplinary action" can result in minor infractions having an outsized impact on interstate labour mobility. For example, the Australian Capital Territory recently adopted a demerit point system for construction occupations. Licensed construction workers may incur demerit points for minor instances of regulatory non-compliance, with a licence suspended if 15 or more demerit points in a 3-year period. This has a perverse outcome for individuals relying on automatic mutual registration – since a demerit point may be considered "disciplinary proceedings" under the MR Act, incurring a demerit point for a minor infraction might make a construction worker ineligible to work in other jurisdictions. The Australian Capital Territory has consequently declared construction occupations exempt from AMR for 2 years to develop alternative arrangements.

The Council considers that some of these problems can be resolved by stronger regulator collaboration, communication and information sharing to support consistent disciplinary and enforcement processes across the country.

4. The potential for national licensing or alternative approaches

Mutual recognition schemes have reduced some barriers to interstate worker mobility, but they still rely on state and territory regulatory systems which are commonly poorly aligned with each other. Variations in licensing frameworks, regulatory practices, complementary requirements and implementation continue to create costs and complexity for workers, businesses and licensing regulators for many occupations.

This chapter considers whether national licensing, or other approaches to greater regulatory harmonisation, could further support the development of a single national labour market by reducing unnecessary occupational licensing barriers. It examines the concept of national licensing, reviews experience from existing national licensing schemes, considers the potential benefits and drawbacks of national approaches, identifies characteristics of occupations that may be suitable for national licensing, and outlines legislative models that could be used to implement national licensing arrangements.

4.1 The potential for national licensing

National licensing schemes allow workers to operate across Australia using one licence underpinned by nationally harmonised standards. Unlike state licensing schemes, national licensing schemes impose a single set of nationally agreed requirements on all workers and often do not require licence holders to specify the jurisdictions in which they will operate.

While most Australian occupational licences are state based, there are some notable examples of national licensing and other national regulatory frameworks that may inform development of future national licensing schemes. In some instances, general national laws have been enacted in states, territories and the Commonwealth that achieve consumer protection and occupational safety objectives without licensing systems.

4.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of national licensing

Like mutual recognition schemes, the objective of national licensing is to promote the free and seamless movement of workers under a single national market. National licensing has the potential to address some of the limitations associated with state-based licensing arrangements and mutual recognition schemes, but would also involve implementation costs, governance challenges and policy trade-offs. Accordingly, compared to MR and AMR, there are advantages and disadvantages to this approach.

Advantages of national licensing

National licensing has the potential to improve labour mobility, reduce skills shortages, reduce regulatory duplication and complexity and improve productivity. It could also address some of the shortcomings of state-based licensing and mutual recognition schemes, providing benefits to workers, businesses and consumers.

For example, workers who operate across borders could benefit from the removal of duplicative licence fees, applications and administrative requirements. National licensing could reduce the need for workers to navigate jurisdiction-specific requirements, exemptions and recognition processes, provide greater regulatory certainty and reduce compliance costs. Harmonising licence scopes, regulatory obligations, and standards would reduce the time workers spend on understanding jurisdiction-specific requirements and increase their ability to take on work in other jurisdictions.

Businesses could also benefit from national licensing. Removing the need to register workers in multiple jurisdictions and ensure business practices comply with different regulatory requirements would make it easier for businesses to deploy workers across jurisdictions and respond to changing demand. During this Review, the Council repeatedly heard of businesses who were not taking on work in other jurisdictions because of licensing barriers. National licensing would alleviate these barriers and support businesses to pursue work opportunities across the country.

Consumers would also benefit from national regulation and licensing through increased labour mobility and competition. Greater workforce mobility could improve access to services, particularly in areas with skills shortages and in cross-border regions. Increased competition in licensed occupations would likely encourage innovation, put downward pressure on prices, and lift the quality of consumer services.

Governments and licensing regulators could also benefit from national licensing. A uniform national framework could reduce the administrative burden of processing interstate licence applications and determining licence equivalence under mutual recognition arrangements. Policy development and future reforms may also become more efficient if changes are made to a single national framework rather than changes within each jurisdiction. National licensing – whether delivered through a single national regulator or stronger collaboration of state-based regulators – could support more consistent compliance and disciplinary outcomes and improve the collection of data to assist with workforce planning and regulatory design.

Disadvantages of national licensing

While national licensing would offer benefits, depending on the circumstances of occupations, implementation may involve significant establishment and transition costs, governance challenges and policy trade-offs.

Establishing a national regulatory and licensing scheme for a specific occupation or set of occupations would require substantial harmonisation of existing state and territory licensing requirements, legislation and regulatory frameworks. Achieving agreement between jurisdictions may involve lengthy and complex negotiations, particularly where jurisdictions have different policy approaches, risk tolerances or regulatory priorities. Previous attempts to establish national licensing arrangements (including through the NOLS) demonstrate the challenge associated with reaching and implementing intergovernmental agreements on optional licensing.

National licensing could also impose new costs. Establishment costs could include developing new legislative frameworks, creating governance arrangements and, where required, establishing a national licensing authority or national licensing register. Ongoing operational and maintenance costs would also be incurred. In addition, workers, businesses and governments would face transition costs associated with implementing a new licensing framework, including familiarisation with new requirements, systems and processes.

Workers who operate solely within one jurisdiction might experience limited direct benefits from national licensing, despite bearing some transition or compliance costs. Businesses and workers operating across multiple occupations could also face increased complexity if one licence is nationalised while others continue to operate at the state or territory level. For example, RAC technicians and maritime pilots have continued to encounter licensing barriers following the introduction of national licensing schemes that did not encompass all aspects of their work.

National licensing could also reduce the ability of jurisdictions to tailor licensing requirements to local conditions, including differences in industry structure, workforce availability, geography and risk profiles. While a national framework would improve consistency, it could also reduce flexibility for jurisdictions to respond quickly to emerging issues or local regulatory needs. Future reforms to licensing requirements would likely require agreement across multiple governments, potentially making changes more complex and time consuming to implement.

Achieving national licensing would require agreement on common regulatory standards. Determining the appropriate standard might be challenging where jurisdictions currently apply different requirements and where evidence on the effectiveness of those requirements is limited. Many of the costs and benefits of national licensing depend on how stringent national standards are compared to existing state and territory frameworks.

If the national regulatory standard is more stringent than existing state-based requirements, workers and businesses may bear costs from needing to meet new requirements. Similarly, national licensing may increase costs if extended to occupations that are currently unlicensed in certain jurisdictions. A more stringent national standard could increase barriers to entry, reduce workforce participation and limit competition. Conversely, where national standards are less stringent than existing requirements, moving to a national licence may weaken safety, quality and consumer protection. Balancing these competing objectives would be a key challenge in designing any national licensing framework.

The redistribution or loss of licensing fee revenue could also affect incentives for jurisdictions to participate in, or support, a national licensing framework. Depending on the regulatory model, there might be a need to introduce new funding or revenue-sharing arrangements to ensure that compliance, enforcement and regulatory oversight activities remain adequately funded, especially where a state-based regulatory model is retained.

Box 20: Estimating the costs and benefits of national registration requirements for building and plumbing practitioners

In 2021, the Centre for International Economics (CIE) assessed the economic impacts of implementing the 24 recommendations of the *Building Confidence Report*, including recommendations 1–4 on a national registration framework for building and plumbing practitioners. These estimates were assessed relative to state and territory regulatory requirements as of 2021.[136]

CIE estimated that the costs to workers and businesses of nationally consistent registration requirements would be around $483 million in present value terms over 10 years. These costs included:

- Extending registration to around 16,000 practitioners not currently required to be registered, comprising $65.5 million in initial registration costs and $3.7 million per year in renewal costs.
- Mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for all building practitioners, estimated at $62.3 million per year.

CIE also estimated benefits from national consistency. It estimated that practitioners could save up to 12.5 hours per month, equivalent to around $375 million per year in time savings nationally, or around $2.4 billion in present value terms over 10 years.[137]

4.1.2 Which occupations could benefit from national licensing?

The balance between the potential benefits and costs of national licensing and, therefore, the net benefit of pursuing national licensing, is likely to differ across occupations. Factors such as the degree of labour mobility, differences between existing jurisdictional licensing arrangements, occupational risks, and the administrative costs of current licensing arrangements could all influence whether national licensing is likely to deliver net benefits.

The Council has not made a judgment or recommendation on which specific occupations are suitable, or should be prioritised, for a national licensing scheme. The Council has instead identified several characteristics likely to increase the potential benefits of national licensing. These characteristics are not necessarily sufficient to demonstrate that national licensing would provide a net benefit for a particular occupation, nor are they intended to be a definitive assessment framework. However, the benefits of national licensing are likely to be greatest where occupations possess some or all of the characteristics outlined below.

The potential benefits of national licensing are likely to be greatest where:

- **The workforce is large**. Benefits from reduced duplication in fees, applications, compliance requirements and administrative processes will generally be greatest in occupations with the largest number of workers and businesses. By contrast, many of the costs associated with establishing a national licensing scheme, such as legislative development and system design, are relatively fixed regardless of workforce size.

- **The occupation is economically significant**. National licensing is likely to provide the greatest economic benefits where occupations make a substantial contribution to economic activity, productivity or Australia's international competitiveness, or where labour mobility is critical to deliver projects of national significance. This could include occupations involved in Australia's transition to net-zero emissions, major infrastructure projects, and large international events requiring substantial temporary workforce movements, such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- **Workers commonly move across jurisdictional borders or provide services remotely**. Occupations involving frequent interstate movement are likely to benefit most from national licensing because workers and businesses are more likely to face duplicated licensing costs, administrative requirements and regulatory complexity under state-based licensing arrangements. For example, engineering is highly mobile and desktop based, meaning engineers often provide services across jurisdictions.
- **Existing licensing arrangements impose significant administrative burdens.** National licensing is likely to provide greater benefits where workers and businesses incur substantial costs navigating multiple licensing systems, maintaining multiple licences or managing differences in jurisdictional requirements.
- **Mutual recognition arrangements are not effectively supporting labour mobility**. In occupations where current mutual recognition arrangements are already facilitating relatively seamless movement of interstate workers, the additional benefits from introducing national licensing may be limited. Conversely, the benefits of national licensing are likely to be greater where existing arrangements are constrained by exemptions, inconsistent licensing requirements or other barriers to labour mobility. For example, occupations with substantial regulatory differences between jurisdictions might experience a more substantial increase in labour mobility from national licensing compared to occupations where AMR is working well due to existing alignment. The Australian Refrigeration Council argued that MR and AMR are ineffective for high-risk work in their sector due to persistent scope fragmentation.[138]
- **The occupation involves significant risks that could be reduced by introducing nationally consistent standards**. Where licensing is justified because practitioner error can result in harm to consumers, workers or the broader community, there may be benefits from nationally consistent competency requirements, licence conditions and enforcement arrangements. This is particularly relevant where workers routinely operate across jurisdictions and safety risks are not confined to a single state or territory. Where risks are inherently mobile (for example, workers and services operating across jurisdictions) and safety failures can have cross-border impacts, fragmented or jurisdiction-specific licensing frameworks are likely to introduce inconsistency without improving oversight. A nationally consistent licence can therefore be warranted to create a uniform, enforceable baseline of competence and support effective risk management across jurisdictions. For example, the National Electrical Contractors Association submitted that for electricians, technical complexity and public risk "demand a genuinely national regulatory solution."[139]

The costs and implementation challenges associated with transitioning to national licensing are likely to be lower where the following apply:

- **The occupation is underpinned by nationally consistent training and/or internationally recognised standards.** Existing national training packages, professional standards or international frameworks can provide a strong foundation for national licensing and reduce the costs associated with a new scheme. Ensuring consistency with international standards may also facilitate skilled migration and support efforts to address workforce and skills shortages.
- **Tripartite support for a national scheme exists**. National licensing is likely to be complex, resource intensive and difficult to achieve for many occupations. Agreement is more likely when governments, industry and unions broadly support national licensing and have similar views about the design and objectives of a national scheme.

National licensing might be less appropriate when:

- Tripartite support only exists for a national licensing scheme that would materially raise the regulatory burden in most jurisdictions, without evidence the benefits outweigh the costs.
- The occupation is not licensed in most jurisdictions, particularly when jurisdictions that do not currently licence the occupation have no plans to introduce licensing. In such cases, licensing is more likely to impose net societal costs, and it may be desirable to remove licensing requirements and rely on existing consumer and broader regulatory protections.
- The occupation has genuinely location-specific requirements, such as competence being tied to knowledge of local geography, regulatory arrangements, and operating practices, or where the risk profile for harm differs across the country.
- The expected costs of developing, implementing and operating a national licensing framework are likely to exceed expected benefits.

4.2 Potential models for national licensing

National licensing comes in different forms. The Council considers that national licensing should not be viewed as a binary choice between existing mutual recognition arrangements and the establishment of a single national licence. There are different ways to achieve a 'national licence', both in terms of scheme design and the pathway for implementation.

Australia's federal system shapes the design of national regulation and licensing arrangements for occupations. Australia's constitutional framework does not confer a general occupational licensing power on the Commonwealth. In most cases the states and territories are responsible for regulating occupations. In practice, national schemes have been implemented through the direct use of Commonwealth powers, applied laws arrangements, referrals of power to the Commonwealth or intergovernmental agreements. The choice of model involves trade-offs between national consistency, implementation complexity, governance arrangements and jurisdictional autonomy.

Different forms of national licensing would involve different degrees of harmonisation and regulatory integration. At one end of the spectrum, jurisdictions might retain responsibility for licensing, compliance and enforcement while agreeing to nationally consistent licence categories, eligibility requirements and standards reflecting nationally agreed qualifications. At the other end of the spectrum, a national licensing scheme could involve a single national licence administered by a national regulator with responsibility for licensing, compliance and enforcement functions.

The legislative mechanisms used to implement national licensing also vary. National schemes could be established through uniform legislation models, such as Commonwealth legislation and applied laws arrangements, or policy cooperation models, where jurisdictions agree to align licensing framework (these models are explored further below). Both approaches have the potential to support a national licence with trade-offs between ensuring harmonised regulations and preserving jurisdictional autonomy.

The Council has not obtained legal advice and does not endorse a particular pathway. The most appropriate approach will depend on the occupation concerned, whether the Commonwealth has relevant constitutional power, stakeholder preferences for governance and enforcement, and jurisdictional willingness to cede regulatory authority in pursuit of a national framework.

4.2.1 Uniform legislation models

Uniform legislation models for national licensing establish a single national framework that regulates an occupation consistently across jurisdictions. Uniform legislation can be achieved through applied legislation, where jurisdictions apply the laws of another jurisdiction by reference, and Commonwealth legislation, which is typically only possible through a referral of powers.

Applied legislation model

The most common approach to establishing a national regulatory framework in Australia is the applied legislation model.[140] Under this approach, a host jurisdiction – typically a state or territory – enacts the principal legislation which is then applied by participating jurisdictions through enabling legislation. Amendments to the national law are typically agreed through intergovernmental arrangements or an intergovernmental ministerial council and are enacted by the host jurisdiction before taking effect across participating jurisdictions, subject to procedural requirements.

Examples include the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (box 21) and the Heavy Vehicle National Law (see box 22). The National Occupational Licensing System (NOLS) developed in the early 2010s proposed an applied legislation model, with Victoria enacting the principal legislation in 2010.

Box 21: National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health occupations

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) model demonstrates that a single national regulatory framework can operate successfully across all jurisdictions, including in high-risk professions, without compromising safety.

State and territory governments established the NRAS in 2010 to provide a nationally consistent framework for health practitioners. Registration is issued under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, which was enacted in Queensland and subsequently adopted by other jurisdictions through application legislation.

The scheme establishes nationally consistent registration requirements and enables health practitioners to practise throughout Australia.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency administers the NRAS and implements the procedural framework established by the National Law, including processes for registration, accreditation and compliance. Each of the 16 health professions regulated under NRAS is governed by a national board, which sets registration standards, approves accreditation standards and makes decisions regarding practitioner registration and disciplinary matters. Accreditation authorities approved by the national boards assess education programs, and these programs of study largely determine eligibility for registration.

Box 22: Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme for heavy vehicle drivers

The Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) is an example of a largely uniform national law that provides a single regulator for a traditionally state-based sector.

State and territory governments established the HVNL to provide a consistent framework for heavy vehicle operations. The HVNL is enacted as host legislation in Queensland and applied in participating jurisdictions through adoption legislation. Western Australia and the Northern Territory do not currently participate in the scheme.

The HVNL establishes uniform rules relating to areas such as fatigue management, vehicle standards and operator accreditation. It also includes the National Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme, which allows operators to demonstrate compliance with higher safety and operational standards. While the scheme supports national consistency for the trucking industry, driver licensing is largely administered under state and territory road transport laws, meaning the National Law does not create a single national licence for drivers.

The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator administers the regulatory framework and oversees compliance, accreditation schemes and safety regulation across participating jurisdictions. The national regulator works with state and territory bodies on enforcement matters.

Box 23: Australian Consumer Law

Australian Consumer Law (The ACL) is one of Australia’s most successful examples of a nationally uniform regulatory framework. While not a licensing regime, the ACL illustrates how a single national law can be applied by each state and territory. It confers consumer rights and protections and imposes obligations on any business in Australia engaged in trade and commerce.

Regulators enforce the ACL under a “one-law, multiple regulators” system. While the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is the main national regulator (ASIC is also empowered to enforce the ACL in financial markets), state and territory consumer regulators are responsible for enforcing the law in their jurisdictions. Their enforcement often sits alongside specific regulatory regimes for occupations that provide a higher level of consumer protection. The ACL model demonstrates how a single legislative framework can reduce complexity for individuals and businesses operating nationally. It also shows that enforcement responsibilities can remain distributed while maintaining uniform rules.

An applied law model has the potential to address several sources of inconsistency identified in mutual recognition schemes throughout this Review, including differences in licensing categories, eligibility requirements and licence conditions. By establishing a single legislative framework, it can reduce the need for workers and businesses to navigate jurisdiction-specific requirements. It may therefore support a transition from recognition-based mobility to a stable system where workers are licensed once and recognised nationally by default.

A potential trade-off is that the relatively centralised structure reduces jurisdictional autonomy to experiment with policy, limiting their capacity to respond to local conditions or innovate licensing design. Governance through ministerial councils introduces complexity and delays, while concentrated standard setting raises the risks of regulatory capture or one-size-fits-all outcomes. However, representatives of a state or territory can negotiate changes. For example, New South Wales has adopted a co-regulatory model for health practitioner complaints and disciplinary processes that differs from other jurisdictions in the Health Practitioner National Law.

Commonwealth legislation model

The Australian Parliament has 2 ways to progress a national framework despite constitutional responsibility for most occupational licensing resting with the states. First, the Commonwealth could seek, and obtain, a referral of constitutional power. Alternatively, the Commonwealth may be able to unilaterally legislate using its existing powers, such as the external affairs power in section 51(xxix) or the corporations power in section 51(xx).

A Commonwealth legislative framework has the potential to provide the highest degree of national consistency. A single national regulator could administer licensing, compliance and enforcement functions under a uniform legislative framework, reducing the risk of future regulatory divergence and simplifying governance arrangements. A referral of powers could also enable the replacement of existing state licensing schemes with a single national framework for occupations within scope.

However, achieving a referral of power would require substantial intergovernmental agreement and may involve significant transition costs and institutional change. Transition costs are high because it requires jurisdictions to amend or repeal legislation to align with the federal framework. An example noted in box 24 is financial adviser licences issued by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth).

Box 24: ASIC licensing scheme for financial advisers

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) administers a nationally unified regulatory framework for financial advisers under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth). Financial advisers who provide personal advice to retail clients on relevant financial products are regulated under a single Commonwealth scheme and are not required to hold separate state or territory licences. The framework establishes nationally consistent education, training, professional standards and registration requirements, enabling eligible advisers to practise throughout Australia. ASIC administers the framework as part of the Australian Government's corporations and financial services regulatory system.

Unilateral action by the Commonwealth using existing heads of power can improve consistency in some areas. For instance, the Commonwealth has effectively nationalised the licensing of aircraft pilots primarily using its external affairs power (see box 25).

Box 25: Civil Aviation Safety Authority licensing scheme for aircraft pilots

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) operates a nationally unified licensing framework for aircraft pilots under the *Civil Aviation Act 1988* (Cth). Pilot licences are issued by a single regulator and are subject to uniform eligibility, training and competency requirements, enabling licence holders to operate without the need for additional state or territory licences. CASA administers the licensing framework through a national regulatory system which sets standards under the stewardship of the Australian Government's infrastructure portfolio.

Where a national licensing framework relies exclusively on existing Commonwealth power, coverage may be incomplete in some occupations. For example, reliance on the corporations power is unlikely to extend to all workers or business structures within an occupation, and reliance on it might result in parallel systems that increase litigation risk.[141] In such circumstances, unless another head of Commonwealth power can be used, a referral of power may be required to establish a comprehensive national framework.

4.2.2 Policy cooperation models

Outside of binding uniform legislation models, a national licence could be developed through other coordinated state-based approaches relying on intergovernmental agreements. Under a policy cooperation approach, jurisdictions would agree to align licensing frameworks through an intergovernmental agreement, without establishing binding legislative uniformity. This might involve securing administrative agreement through national frameworks, with details left to each jurisdiction to integrate with local laws. Box 26 explores the example of driver licensing.

Box 26: National Driver Licensing Scheme

The National Driver Licensing Scheme (NDLS) provides a nationally coordinated framework for driver licensing in Australia. Under the scheme, jurisdictions have agreed common licence classes, competency standards, eligibility requirements and information-sharing arrangements, while continuing to issue and administer licences under their own state and territory legislation.

The NDLS demonstrates how a high degree of national consistency can be achieved through intergovernmental cooperation without establishing a single national licensing authority or uniform legislation. Although driver licences remain state and territory licences, nationally agreed standards and mutual recognition arrangements allow licence holders to drive throughout Australia. This scheme is best characterised as a cooperative harmonisation model based on intergovernmental agreement rather than an applied laws or mirror legislation model. Drivers who permanently move to another jurisdiction are typically required to transfer their licence to that jurisdiction.

Box 27: Work Health and Safety laws

Some examples of mirror national schemes or regulatory frameworks include:

- **Model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws**. Safe Work Australia developed the national model WHS laws in 2011. Australian, state and territory governments separately and subsequently implemented them as their own laws to varying degrees. This is not a licensing scheme but delivers important objectives relating to workplace health and safety. Safe Work Australia is responsible for maintaining the model WHS law, while state and territory licensing regulators maintain responsibility for administering and enforcing the laws. This framework demonstrates that substantial regulatory consistency can be achieved without creating a single national regulator and illustrates the importance of ongoing governance arrangements to manage amendments and maintain harmonisation.
- **High risk work (HRW) licences**. This is a national licensing framework established under the model WHS laws. Common licence classes, competency requirements and assessment standards are outlined for workers performing specific high-risk tasks across different occupations, such as scaffolding work or operating a forklift. While HRW licences are issued by state and territory licensing regulators, they are mutually recognised nationally. Licence requirements and processes (including the obligation to recognise HRW licences) are outlined in the national model WHS Regulations developed by Safe Work Australia. This framework demonstrates that nationally harmonised licensing standards can be achieved without creating a single licensing authority and can support labour mobility while preserving state administration where governments have agreed on common competency requirements.

Alternatively, the mirror legislation approach entails jurisdictions drafting and enacting a distinct statute while retaining the ability to amend their legislation. The drafting template is usually a model bill, and as a result jurisdictions enact word-for-word identical legislation (in practice, there may be slight variations from the model bill due to exemptions). Box 27 examines the example of WHS laws.

Each model involves different trade-offs between national consistency, implementation complexity, regulatory flexibility and ongoing governance requirements.

The advantage of policy cooperation models is that they are relatively quick and simple to implement and provide greater flexibility and control to state governments wishing to amend licensing arrangements to suit specific local conditions.

However, they are also more vulnerable to uneven application and divergence over time and might not deliver durable gains in mobility. Such arrangements could potentially act as a transitional mechanism supporting short-term alignment, while more substantive regulatory harmonisation is agreed and implemented.

Of the models examined, none is inherently superior. Uniform applied or mirror legislation models provide a high degree of consistency while preserving an ongoing role for state and territory governments in governance and implementation. Commonwealth legislative models have the potential to deliver greater institutional simplicity and consistency but may require referrals of power or reliance on specific constitutional powers to achieve comprehensive coverage.

4.3 Pathways to a national licence

National licensing comes in different forms. The Council considers that national licensing should not be viewed as a binary choice between existing mutual recognition arrangements and the establishment of a single national licence. Instead a spectrum of approaches can be used to reduce occupational licensing barriers and improve labour mobility, ranging from incremental regulatory harmonisation through to fully integrated national licensing schemes.

The core objective of national licensing schemes is to drive productivity growth and improve labour mobility nationally, without compromising safety or quality. However, there are different ways to achieve a 'national licence', both in terms of scheme design and the pathway for implementation.

Different forms of national licensing would involve different degrees of harmonisation and regulatory integration. At one end of the spectrum, jurisdictions might retain responsibility for licensing, compliance and enforcement while agreeing to nationally consistent licence categories, eligibility requirements and standards reflecting nationally agreed qualifications. At the other end of the spectrum, a national licensing scheme could involve a single national licence administered by a national regulator with responsibility for licensing, compliance and enforcement functions.

4.3.1 A sequential approach would provide benefits

Regardless of the type of licensing scheme or proposed legislative model, there are likely to be benefits from moving towards national harmonisation in a gradual, sequential manner for a range of occupations. For example, this approach could involve:

- states agreeing a nationally consistent set of licence categories, definitions, and eligibility requirements, underpinned by agreed national or international standards
- reviewing and further harmonising training and apprenticeship requirements
- removing exemptions to AMR where possible without undermining safety or quality outcomes
- states retaining authority for monitoring and enforcement and the ability to impose local conditions within their jurisdiction where this provides a net benefit
- establishing a governance mechanism to encourage further harmonisation of regulatory frameworks over time and support sustainability of the scheme
- introducing new digital and data tools to improve information sharing between state licensing regulators while streamlining regulatory processes and providing information to workers.

These approaches should not be viewed as mutually exclusive alternatives. Rather, they represent different points along a spectrum of regulatory integration and could be pursued concurrently or sequentially depending on the occupation and the barriers being addressed. Measures such as greater regulatory harmonisation, improved information sharing, enhanced digital systems and the removal of unnecessary AMR exemptions could improve labour mobility, while also laying the foundations for more comprehensive national licensing arrangements over time.

Master Builders Australia, for instance, argued that "foundational reforms… must come first", including quality-assured recognised prior learning pathways, transparent jurisdictional governance, and a national information and data infrastructure.[142]

Where a national licence is ultimately considered desirable, a staged approach could provide a practical pathway to implementation. Building on existing legislation, institutions and governance arrangements could reduce transition costs, minimise implementation risks and allow jurisdictions to progressively align licensing frameworks before moving to more integrated national arrangements. The Real Estate Institute of Australia noted the success of national licensing "would be contingent on addressing the legislative differences between jurisdictions and [managing] state-based legal and procedural variation during any transition."[143] Similarly, Standards Australia supported a "hybrid framework" seeing mutual recognition strengthened in the short-term, and the progressive implementation of national licensing.[144]

Transitional measures, such as grandfathering existing licence holders or allowing jurisdictions to opt in over time, could further support implementation while reducing disruption for workers, businesses and licensing regulators.

Existing schemes that enable uniform rules or AMR for some occupations, but are not yet national in scope, would promote regulatory harmonisation and labour mobility if expanded. Examples are the Legal Profession Uniform Law (New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia) and the East Coast Electricians scheme (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory). Boxes 28 and 29 provide further information on these schemes.

Box 28: Legal Professional Uniform Law

The Legal Profession Uniform Law scheme creates a common set of rules for lawyers in participating jurisdictions. New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia have adopted the scheme. It covers matters such as practicing certificates, professional conduct, trust accounts, continuing professional development and client protections. The aim is to make it easier for lawyers to work across participating jurisdictions under a more consistent regulatory framework.

The scheme is overseen by the Legal Services Council, the Commissioner for Uniform Legal Services Regulation and state-based regulators.

Expanding the scheme to all states and territories would reduce differences in legal profession regulation, lowering compliance costs for law firms operating in multiple jurisdictions. A nationally harmonised framework could improve efficiency and support competition in the delivery of legal services, while building on the high level of interstate mobility that lawyers already enjoy.

Box 29: East Coast Electricians Scheme

The East Coast Electricians Scheme covers electricians holding specified unrestricted electrical licences and is designed to reduce barriers for workers moving between New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

Under the arrangement, eligible electricians can be recognised for equivalent licences without having to repeat training, examinations or competency assessments that have already been satisfied in their home jurisdiction.

Implementation of the scheme differs. For instance, electricians wishing to work in the Australian Capital Territory are not eligible for automatic deeming under the scheme. New South Wales recognises some contractor licences alongside individual worker licences. And, unlike some other states within the scheme, Victoria requires interstate workers to notify the local regulator – Energy Safe Victoria – before undertaking work.

Expanding the scheme to all states and territories could simplify and streamline licensing arrangements by providing clearer equivalence pathways and reducing administrative friction. While electricians already access broader interstate mobility under the MR Act, the East Coast Electricians scheme is a targeted agreement offering greater clarity and certainty about recognition outcomes for specific licence types.

The Australian Government has committed, through National Competition Policy, to working with state and territory governments, industry and unions to progress national licensing, initially focusing on electrical and engineering occupations. This work will be led by a tripartite group convened by the Council on Federal Financial Relations to identify options to strengthen, streamline or replace current licensing arrangements and support the development of a more seamless national labour market.

Finding 5: National licences are most likely to provide the greatest benefits to labour mobility but careful assessment is required.

5.1 National licensing supports a national labour market, workforce flexibility and mobility, and the consumer choice that mutual recognition schemes strive to emulate.

5.2 Existing Australian national licensing schemes, and other mechanisms for interjurisdictional cooperation, provide valuable lessons for the implementation of future national licensing schemes and demonstrate the significant benefits that can be achieved when they are established. Examples of such schemes are the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health occupations, high-risk work licences, driver licensing, Australian work health and safety law, and the Australian Consumer Law which, while not a licensing scheme, maintains national consumer protection obligations for everyone involved in trade and commerce.

5.3 National licensing schemes can be effectively implemented for specific occupations primarily using state-based powers or primarily using federal powers, sometimes supplemented by referrals of state powers. An example of national licensing based on state powers is the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency administered scheme for registration and accreditation of health practitioners. An example of a federal national licensing scheme is the regulation and licensing of financial advisors, company auditors and liquidators.

5.4 Many of the practical issues associated with the implementation of mutual recognition schemes, including incomplete participation, determining equivalence and regulatory divergence, would be solved by national licensing.

5.5 National licensing is unlikely to be the optimal solution for all occupations. In some occupations, improvements to mutual recognition arrangements and/or greater regulatory harmonisation might achieve similar benefits at lower cost.

5.6 National licensing is most likely to deliver net benefits where:

- the occupation has a large workforce or is economically significant
- workers commonly move for work or work across borders remotely
- the occupation involves significant risks that would benefit from nationally consistent standards
- the occupation is underpinned by nationally consistent training or internationally recognised standards
- tripartite support for a national scheme exists.

In such cases, there may be benefits in taking a graduated approach that builds towards national licensing in a sequential manner, focusing on removing barriers to mutual recognition and improving regulatory harmonisation as a critical first step.

Appendices

Appendix A. Terms of Reference

I, the Hon Jim Chalmers MP, Treasurer, pursuant to section 29B(1)(b) of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) hereby request the National Competition Council (NCC) conduct an independent evaluation of Australia's mutual recognition schemes for workers in support of a review overseen by the Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR).

Purpose

The review should identify, and report on practical pathways to remove, all unnecessary occupational licensing barriers to a single national labour market. In particular, the Review will consider:

- how differences in state licensing and occupational registration requirements are resolved between regulators;
- how workers are made aware of different licensing requirements across state borders;
- whether, and to what extent, current schemes are supported by employer and employee groups, and are supportive of workforce and industry need; and
- how new technologies, systems and/or processes can reduce costs and improve safety, quality and employment outcomes.

Background

Mutual recognition schemes are designed to enhance national efficiency and competitiveness by reducing regulatory barriers to trade and labour mobility. The Australian Government and states and territories of Australia finalised the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registration in December 2020. The Agreement states that the operation and effectiveness of mutual recognition legislation should be reviewed by CFFR every 5 years, supported by an independent evaluation.

The *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (MR Act) establishes a national framework for the operation of mutual recognition of occupations in Australia. Under this framework, individuals licensed in one jurisdiction can apply for equivalent recognition in another, streamlining access to employment opportunities. The introduction of Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR) under Part 3A of the MR Act was intended to simplify this process by allowing workers to work in other participating jurisdictions without additional applications or fees. The MR Act is implemented by states and territories through mirroring legislation, allowing those licensed in one jurisdiction to gain equivalent registration in another by notifying local authorities (subject to any exemptions).

The Australian, state and territory governments have agreed to progress a single national market for workers under National Competition Policy. The findings of this Review are intended to inform the development of more efficient and seamless licensing arrangements, including the progression of a national licence for skilled workers in the electrical trades and engineering professions.

Scope

The NCC is to report on whether and to what extent mutual recognition schemes (including AMR) are enhancing productivity, supporting workforce flexibility, and expanding consumer choice. In particular, the Council should deliver findings supported by evidence in relation to:

1. The impact and effectiveness of current mutual recognition schemes, including:
    a) The extent to which they have improved labour mobility in participating jurisdictions;
    b) Their economic effects, including on participation, addressing skills shortages and productivity;
    c) The extent to which they have managed worker safety and consumer protection risks; and
    d) Identifying the sectors where these schemes have had the most significant effects.
2. The implementation and alignment of current mutual recognition schemes, including:
    a) Variations in implementation across jurisdictions, such as exemptions, delays or inconsistencies in recognition;
    b) The rationale for these variations, and whether they are proportionate to risk; and
    c) The extent to which laws and standards are harmonised across jurisdictions, and areas where misalignment creates barriers to labour mobility.
3. The experience of workers navigating the current mutual recognition schemes, including:
    a) The effectiveness of communication to workers regarding eligibility, processes, and requirements under existing mutual recognition schemes;
    b) The impact of notification requirements on workers; and
    c) The role of registration authorities in supporting cross-border mobility.
4. Opportunities to strengthen and streamline licensing arrangements, including:
    a) Improving the consistency and efficiency of mutual recognition processes across jurisdictions; and
    b) Technologies, systems and/or processes that can reduce costs and improve safety, quality and employment outcomes.

5. The potential for a national licensing framework to complement or replace mutual recognition, particularly where these arrangements are not working effectively, and are likely to increase labour mobility and remove unnecessary costs for participants.

Process

The Review is supported by state and territory governments, which are responsible for occupational entry regulation, and each government will provide appropriate support to ensure the success of the Review.

The NCC should engage widely and undertake appropriate public consultation processes, including inviting public submissions and engaging closely with the Australian, state and territory governments.

The evaluation is not intended to provide a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of options for addressing occupational licensing barriers. However, where appropriate, the NCC should identify and discuss relevant costs and benefits of current and potential future arrangements, especially where these insights could inform future policy development and implementation.

In undertaking its independent evaluation, the NCC should consider the operation and practical implementation of the MRA, relevant material including the Productivity Commission's Mutual Recognition Schemes (2015) inquiry, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registration, the Australian Treasury's National licensing for electrical occupations consultation, and data collected by Australian governments in the operation of current mutual recognition schemes.

The NCC should report back to CFFR with an interim report in April and its final findings no later than six months after the receipt of these Terms of Reference.

Appendix B. Engagement and consultation

The Council undertook extensive stakeholder consultation to support the Review, including through the following channels.

- A Call for Submissions paper was publicly released on 2 March 2026, inviting feedback on the operation of Australia's mutual recognition schemes from licensed workers, businesses, consumers, professional bodies, industry groups and unions. 44 submissions were received in total (full list at Appendix C).
- The Review Secretariat requested information and data on licensing and mutual recognition arrangements from relevant Commonwealth and state government departments in March 2026.
- The Council undertook an initial round of bilateral meetings with state treasuries and licensing regulators, employer groups and unions in March and April 2026.
- The Council shared interim findings with relevant Australian, state and territory government departments for feedback, and undertook a further round of bilateral meetings with state treasuries and licensing regulators in May 2026 to seek their views on the interim findings.
- A consultation paper was publicly released on 5 May 2026, seeking further information on the operation of Australia's mutual recognition schemes and inviting feedback on the Council's interim findings. This second Call for Submissions was sent directly to those who had made a submission to the initial call.
- The Council received 106 submissions in total (full list at Appendix C).
- The Council held a series of 3 industry roundtables with employer groups and unions in May 2026 to test interim findings and elicit views from stakeholders.
- The Council also held a roundtable in May 2026 with Cross-Border Commissioners from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. (The Victorian Cross-Border Commissioner provided a written submission.)
- The Council held a roundtable in May 2026 with relevant Commonwealth agencies, including Jobs and Skills Australia, Safe Work Australia, and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.
- Members of the Review Secretariat also observed the Australasian Symposium for Building Industry Licensing Bodies hosted by the Queensland Building and Construction Commission on 20–21 May 2026. Symposium attendees were building industry regulators across Australian jurisdictions and New Zealand, and the agenda focused on mutual recognition.

The Council is grateful to all those who contributed to this Review.

Appendix C. List of submissions

The following entities provided written submissions to the National Competition Council to support review.

Round 1 – Call for submissions (44 + 13 confidential)

- ACMF
- Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors (AMCA)
- AIRAH
- Association of Consulting Architects
- Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM)
- Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA)
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Australian Glass and Window Association (AGWA)
- Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU)
- Australian Refrigeration Council (ARC)
- Australian Security Industry Association Ltd (ASIAL)
- Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman
- Australian Workers Union New South Wales Branch
- Brian Farmer
- Business Council of Australia
- Consult Australia
- Electrical Trades Union of Australia
- Engineering New Zealand
- Engineers Australia
- Fire Industry Alliance
- Gaming Technologies Association (GTA)
- GuardHERE Consulting
- Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA)
- Insurance Council of Australia
- Joint submission - Engineers Australia, Consult Australia, Professionals Australia and IPWEA
- Maritime Industry Australia Ltd
- Master Builders Australia (MBA)
- Master Electricians Australia (MEA)
- Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
- National Electrical & Communications Association
- New South Wales Small Business Commission
- Peter Gow
- Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre (joint submission with others)
- Productivity Commission
- Property Council of Australia
- Queensland College of Teachers
- Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA)
- Royal Australian Institute of Architects
- Safe Work Australia
- Siemens Healthineers
- Small Business Development Corporation
- Standards Australia
- Surveyors Australia
- The Australian Council of Trade Union
- Victorian Cross Border Commission

Round 2 – Interim findings (40 + 9 confidential)

- Airconditioning and Mechanical Contractors Association of Australia (AMCA)
- Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM)
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Australian Glass and Window Association (AGWA)
- Australian Institute of Refrigeration Air Conditioning and Heating (AIRAH)
- Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU)
- Australian Refrigeration Council (ARC)
- Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL)
- Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU)
- Charlie Xiong
- Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE)
- Clubs Australia
- Council of Reciprocating Surveyors Boards of Australia and New Zealand
- Curtin University – Sustainable Built Environment National Research Centre & John Curtin Institute of Public Policy
- Design Institute of Australia
- Electrical Trades Union of Australia
- Engineering New Zealand
- Joint submission – Engineers Australia, Professionals Australia, Consult Australia, IPWEA
- Fire Industry Alliance
- Gaming Technologies Association (GTA)
- Housing Industry Association (HIA)
- Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA)
- Jing Zhi Wong
- Land Surveyors Licensing Board of Western Australia
- Master Builders Australia
- Master Electricians Australia
- Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
- Michael Sanderson
- National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA)
- Office of Surveyor-General Tasmania
- Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre
- Powering Skills Organisation
- Property Council of Australia
- Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA)
- Royal Australian Institute of Architects
- Standards Australia
- Surveyors Australia
- Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria
- The University of Western Australia
- Victorian Cross Border Commission

Appendix D. Data sources

The following data sources have been considered by the Council throughout this Review.

GovTEAMS data

GovTEAMS is the primary digital platform for intergovernmental communications on MR and AMR. This includes to confirm licensing details when a regulator receives a mutual recognition application. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations provided the Council with a data report from the GovTEAMS platform for all MR requests and AMR notifications since 2022.

Occupational breakdowns

Table 12: 10 most common sectors for MR/AMR

Occupational category	AMR notifications	MR requests	Total requests
Electrical	5210	6833	12043
Security	1550	9850	11400
Property	2974	4502	7476
Building	811	3842	4653
Plumbing Gas	987	2272	3259
Driving and transport	1242	634	1876
Gaming	1207	528	1735
Building certifiers	163	954	1117
Engineers	643	464	1107
Radiation	425	1	426

Source: GovTEAMS dataset, including notifications between 1 July 2022 and 4 March 2026.

Data request from jurisdictional regulators

The Secretariat contacted members of the National Competition Policy Senior Officials' Group in March 2026 to liaise with regulators within their jurisdiction to obtain data relating to use of MR and AMR schemes, with the objective of validating the scope and scale of MR and AMR uptake and comparing uptake across states and territories.

The Secretariat requested the following data from jurisdictional licensing regulators:

1. Volume and utilisation data

- A list of all the occupations, and related licence categories/classes issued pursuant to the Mutual Recognition Act 1992 (Cth);
- For each licensed occupation, a breakdown (by calendar year) of:
  - Applications received, approved/rejected/refused/withdrawn for each occupation for both Automatic Mutual Registration and a general Mutual Recognition application.
  - A list of any conditions/limitations placed on any licences or registrations at the time of issuing.
  - A count of applications refused due to identification of a disentitling criteria.
- A list of all the occupations that have exemptions in place preventing Automatic Mutual Recognition applying.

2. Worker Safety and Consumer Protection

- Number of notifications received from other participating jurisdictions where a licensed person has committed an offence or is ineligible to be issued a licence or registration under Automatic Deemed Registration (**ADR**) / Mutual Recognition.
- Number of reported safety incidents relating to Occupations where a licence is required and subject to MRA.
  - Where possible identify those incidents where the work was undertaken by a person issued a licence pursuant to MRA.
- Number of instances where AMR/MR licences suspended or cancelled including the reasons for these.
- Provide statistics of safety incidents relating to all other occupations that can recognised through the MRA.
- Has the regulator notified any other state authority pursuant to 42P(2) of the MRA.

Given current reform priorities, the Council also requested additional data for the following sectors where available:

- Electrical – number of Certificates of Compliance (COC) or audit outcomes issued by a licensee using a licence issued ADR.
- Building – number of applications lodged with a licence held interstate using an ADR.

- Plumbing or Gas – number of Certificate of Compliance or inspections outcomes submitted where the licensee was using a licence issued under ADR or AMR and the number of compliance matters identified.

3. Processing, Timeliness and Administration

- Number of:
  - Enquiries received about mutual recognition
  - Information requests
  - Website traffic metrics (if available)
- Total revenue from licensing fees and/or average licensing fees generated from mutual recognition applications as a total of overall licensing revenue
- Average processing times for mutual recognition applications
- Any available estimates or internal assessments of administrative costs to government associated with mutual recognition
- Any data, records or summaries of complaints, concerns or feedback received from businesses, individual tradespeople or professional associations regarding:
  - The ease (or difficulty) of operating outside their home jurisdiction under Mutual Recognition or AMR;
  - The clarity of eligibility requirements, processes or guidance;
  - The functioning of the AMR/ADR system more broadly.

  Where available, please provide high-level summaries of common themes or issues raised.

- Details of the licensing system platform used and a description of your ability to share data with other jurisdictions.

Comments on data availability

The GovTEAMS data is likely to underestimate the true usage of MR and AMR as we understand from regulator input that many requests and notifications are processed outside that system, for example via email directly between relevant licensing regulators, meaning those requests are not captured in GovTEAMS data.

The Council recognises that data availability and capacity differs across jurisdictions and between licensing regulators. However the Council does note most licensing regulators were unable to provide data against most of the datapoints requested. There was significant variability in the response rate of licensing regulators across and between jurisdictions – this was an issue across multiple jurisdictions. This was especially the case for smaller occupations, or for occupations where a jurisdiction does not require workers to notify a regulator before commencing work under AMR.

In most cases, each state and territory licensing regulators maintains its own independent database of MR applications and AMR notifications for the licences they regulate. These databases are not interoperable. Inconsistencies in the format of the datasets provided to the Council make it extremely challenging to compare like-with-like. As a result, the Council chose to report volume/utilisation data only for 2025, which had the most complete dataset of all years to date. Comparing data between years is likely to be misleading of broader trends as some licensing regulators only provided data for 2025.

The Council considered providing a more detailed breakdown of volume/utilisation data by occupation, but considered it would not be possible to create a breakdown of MR/AMR uptake by occupation by jurisdiction that would provide a consistent, credible basis for comparison. This is because different jurisdictions report these occupations differently (for example by different licence types, or because occupational groups are managed by different licensing regulators in different jurisdictions, who group them in different ways).

Most licensing regulators were unable to provide data against safety and consumer protection outcomes, noting that this data was not collected systematically. This was also the case for processing and administrative datasets, where a low response rate and/or a lack of systems to collect these metrics meant it was not possible for the Secretariat to generate summary data. Where available, the Council has made use of specific datapoints shared by licensing regulators to illustrate particular issues. However, the lack of consistent, comparable datasets has limited the Council’s ability to quantitatively evaluate the implementation of Australia’s mutual recognition schemes.

Appendix E. AMR Exemptions

AMR exemptions are instruments made under subsection 42S(1) of the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* and lodged on the Federal Register of Legislation. Declarations for the instrument are made by the premier of the relevant state or territory. Exemptions can be enabled for up to 5 years. Unless revoked earlier, the exemption instrument will sunset under section 50 of the *Legislation Act 2003* (Cth), subject to subsection 42S(6) of the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth).

The Council is aware that there are caveats associated with providing a list that creates a single set of occupations for comparative purposes. Some occupations are not clearly defined in some states and therefore it depends on the scope of work as to whether the exemptions apply. Moreover, some AMR exemptions relate to statutory activities or roles rather than distinct occupations.

New South Wales

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00868	Crowd Controller	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Guard Dog Handler	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Monitoring Centre Operator	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Armed Guard	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Loss Prevention Officer	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Firearm Dealer	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Marine Pilot	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Private Investigator	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Teacher – School	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Teacher – Early Childhood	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Bodyguard	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Security Officer	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Airconditioning and Refrigeration Mechanic	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Air conditioning and Refrigeration Certificates	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Building Insulation Installer	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Electrician (General and Wiring)	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Fire Safety Engineer	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Fire Safety – Registered Certifiers	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Fire Safety – Accredited Practitioner	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Fire Protection Plumber	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Food Safety Supervisor	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Food Safety Auditor	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Medical Gasfitter	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Medical Gas Work	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Medical Gas Work Technician	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Mechanical Services	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Builder (General Building Work)	01/10/27
F2025L00811	Builder – Prefabricated Structures	01/10/27
F2022L00868	Security Business Operator (individual)	01/10/27

New South Wales (continued)

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Combatant	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Trainer	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Referee	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Judge	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Timekeeper	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Match-Maker	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Combat Sports Manager	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Artificial Insemination Technician	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Attendant	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Consulting Radiation Expert	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Race Official	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Bookmaker	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Driver	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Owner	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Trainer	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Stablehand	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Harness Racing Artificial Breeding Technician	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Mining Surveyor	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Thoroughbred Racing Bookmaker	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Thoroughbred Racing Jockey	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Thoroughbred Racing Rider	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Thoroughbred Racing Trainer	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Thoroughbred Racing Veterinarian	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Bookmakers	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Bookmaker’s Clerk	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Breeder	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Studmaster	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Trial Track Proprietor	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Health Assistant	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Owner	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Greyhound Trainer	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Pyrotechnician	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Accredited Site Auditor	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Pawnbroker	01/10/29
F2024L00806	Second-hand dealer	01/10/29

Tasmania

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2024L01174	Teacher – School	01/07/27
F2024L01174	Teacher – Vocational Education and Training	01/07/27
F2026L00710	Builder – General Construction – Open	01/07/28
F2026L00710	Builder – General Construction – Medium Rise	01/07/28
F2026L00710	Builder – General Construction – Low Rise	01/07/28
F2026L00710	Builder – General Construction – Domestic	01/07/28
F2025L00665	High Risk Work Licence Assessor	01/07/30
F2025L00665	Security-sensitive Dangerous Substances Permit	01/07/30
F2025L00665	Responsible Worker Status	01/07/30

Victoria

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00846	Airconditioning and Mechanical Services Plumber	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Architectural, Building and Surveying Technicians nec	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Building Surveyor	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Fire Protection Plumber	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Gasfitter	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Plumber (General)	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Plumbing Inspector	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Roof Plumber	01/10/27
F2022L00846	Surveying or Spatial Science Technician	01/10/27
F2023L00092	Crowd Controller	01/07/27
F2023L00092	Firearm Dealer	01/07/27
F2023L00092	Private Investigator	01/07/27
F2023L00092	Security Consultant	01/07/27
F2023L00092	Security Officer	01/07/27
F2025L00679	Teacher – Early Childhood (Pre-primary School)	01/07/27
F2025L00679	Teacher – School	01/07/27
F2025L00679	Teacher – Vocational Education and Training	01/07/27
F2022L00800	Labour Hire Licences	01/10/27

Western Australia

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00930	Aeroplane Pilot	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Marine Pilot	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Air Transport Professionals	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Crowd Controller	01/10/27
F2025C00458	Crowd Control Agent	01/10/27
F2025C00458	Inquiry Agent	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Teacher – Early Childhood (Pre-primary School)	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Electrician (General)	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Electrician (Special Class)	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Helicopter Pilot	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Lift Mechanic	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Teacher – School	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Private Investigator	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Consultant	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Officer	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Monitoring Officer	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Bodyguard	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Installer	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Security Agent	01/10/27
F2022L00930	Teacher – Vocational Education and Training	01/10/27
F2025L00518	Firearm Dealer	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Firearms manufacturer	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Firearms repairer	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Firearms storage operator	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Firearms range operator	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Primary producer using firearms	01/10/30
F2025L00518	Shooting club operator	01/10/30

South Australia

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00797	Teacher – School	30/06/27
F2022L00837	Motor Driving Instructors	30/06/27
F2022L00838	Marine Pilots	01/10/27
F2022L00811	Site Contamination Auditors	01/10/27
F2022L00835	Passenger Transport Driver	01/10/27
F2022L00836	Tow Truck Drivers	01/10/27
F2022L00829	Regulatory Food Safety Auditors	30/06/27
F2022L00829	Regulatory Safe Drinking Water Auditors	30/06/27

Australian Capital Territory

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00851	Conveyancer	01/07/27
F2022L00851	Conveyancing practitioners	01/07/27
F2022L00856	Teacher – Early Childhood (Pre-primary School)	01/07/27
F2022L00856	Teacher – School	01/07/27
F2022L00856	Teacher – Vocational Education and Training	01/07/27
F2022L00858	Firearm Dealer	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Building Assessor	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Building Surveyor	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Drainer	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Electrician (General)	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Electrician (Special Class)	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Fire Protection Plumber	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Gasfitter	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Plumber (General)	01/07/27
F2025L00752	Project Builder	01/07/27
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Manufacturer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Importer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Carrier	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Driver	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Storer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Explosives Supplier	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Shotfirer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Display Operator	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Security Sensitive Substance Manufacturer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Security Sensitive Substance Importer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Security Sensitive Substance Carrier	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Security Sensitive Substance Storer	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Other/Non-Specific – Security Sensitive Substance User	01/07/30
F2025L00809	Labour Hire Service Provider	01/07/30

Northern Territory

Relevant declaration	Occupation	Expiry date
F2022L00865	Teacher – Early Childhood (Pre-primary School)	01/07/27
F2022L00865	Teacher – School	01/07/27
F2022L00865	Teacher – Vocational Education and Training	01/07/27

Appendix F. Legislative framework for mutual recognition schemes

Legislative basis for MR and AMR

The MR Act provides the legislative framework for MR and AMR in Australia.

MR was established through Part 3 of the MR Act in 1992. AMR was introduced through Part 3A of the MR Act in 2021. While the Commonwealth legislation establishes the framework, occupational licensing remains primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), in collaboration with state and territory governments, led the implementation of AMR, including development of the legislative framework and support for jurisdictions implementing the reforms. Currently, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) administers Parts 3 and 3A of the MR Act, although the Commonwealth’s legislated functions and remit are limited, reflecting that primary constitutional responsibility over occupational licensing rests with the states. Each state and territory has enacted complementary mutual recognition legislation, adopting the Commonwealth Act or referring power to the Commonwealth, depending on constitutional arrangements.

Under the Commonwealth’s administrative arrangements, DEWR is responsible for the MR and AMR schemes at federal level. State and territory Departments of Treasury are typically the responsible agencies at state level, and local registration authorities have operational responsibility. DEWR has no role in registering or licensing occupations, or altering any decisions made by a state or territory.

MR pathway

Part 3 of the MR Act enables a person registered in one Australian jurisdiction to obtain registration for an equivalent occupation in another jurisdiction.

To access MR, an individual must apply to the relevant registration authority and provide evidence of their existing registration. Application fees may apply.

Once a valid notice has been lodged, section 25 of the MR Act provides for deemed registration. Deemed registration allows a person to begin practising immediately as if they were fully registered in the second jurisdiction while their application is being considered.

Under section 31 of the MR Act, the registration authority generally has one month to decide whether to grant, postpone or refuse substantive registration. If no decision is made within that period, registration will generally be granted automatically.

The deemed registration framework is intended to ensure workers are not unnecessarily delayed from commencing work while administrative processes are completed.

AMR pathway

AMR was introduced to simplify interstate labour mobility by allowing licensed workers to rely on their home-state licence or registration when undertaking work in another participating jurisdiction.

Unlike MR, AMR allows workers to operate in a second jurisdiction without applying for a new licence or paying additional fees. In some circumstances workers must notify the host regulator before commencing work. Workers remain subject to the laws, standards and regulatory requirements of the jurisdiction in which they are working.

A worker's home state is generally the jurisdiction in which they ordinarily reside or principally undertake work. To use AMR, a worker must continue to hold and maintain a valid licence in their home state.

The legislative intent of AMR is to reduce costs and administrative burdens for workers and businesses while maintaining existing consumer protection and safety safeguards.

Occupational exemptions under AMR

The AMR scheme allows for states and territories to exempt occupations from being automatically registered within their jurisdiction. Ministers of states and territories may declare, through legislative instrument, that a specified occupation is excluded from the operation of AMR. Unless revoked earlier, exemption instruments sunset under section 50 of the Legislation Act 2003 of the Commonwealth, subject to subsection 42S(6) of the MR Act of the Commonwealth. This will generally mean that the instrument will be repealed around the fifth anniversary of the registration of the instrument on the Federal Register of Legislation.[145]

Appendix G. Ministerial declarations of equivalence

Multilateral agreed by all states and territories

Declaration	Occupations covered
Mutual Recognition (Equivalence of Driving and Property Occupations) Declaration 2015	Driving instructors, drivers transporting dangerous goods and explosives, pilot and escort vehicle drivers, passenger transport drivers, property agents, valuers, conveyancers.
Mutual Recognition (Equivalence of Gaming and Other Occupations) Declaration 2009 As amended by the Mutual Recognition (Equivalence of Gaming and Other Occupations) Amendment Declaration 2015 (the equivalence tables for gaming occupations, shotfirers, pyrotechnicians, and pest and weed controllers were updated in November 2015).	Casino and gaming, shotfirers, pyrotechnicians, pest and weed controllers, asbestos removal, demolition, earthworks/excavations, fencing, flooring, foundation work, general concreting, glazing (windows and doors), kitchens, bathrooms and laundries, metal fabrication, painting and decorating, pools and spas, retaining walls, roof tiling, shopfitting, sign and shade structures, solid (wet) plastering and dry plastering, stonemasonry, wall and floor tiling, and waterproofing.
Ministerial Declaration 08/05/2008	Electrical contractors
Ministerial Declaration 9/02/2007	Carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, builders, plumbers, automotive gas installers, air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanics, electricians, electrical fitters, cable jointers, line workers, restricted electrical licences.

Bilateral agreed by some states and territories

Declaration	Occupations covered
Mutual Recognition (Equivalence of Motor Vehicle Repairer Occupations) Declaration 2015	Motor vehicle repairers between New South Wales and Western Australia
Ministerial Declaration 21/05/2004	Coal mine managers (New South Wales Open Cut Coal Mine Manager and Western Australia First Class Coal Mine Manager certificates) between New South Wales and Western Australia.
Ministerial Declaration 25/05/2001	Certain coal and metalliferous mine manager certificates between New South Wales and South Australia.
Ministerial Declaration 05/12/2000	Certain open-cut coal, underground metalliferous and first-class mine manager certificates between Queensland and South Australia.
Ministerial Declaration 25/08/2000	Coal and underground mine manager certificates between Queensland and South Australia.

Appendix H. Abbreviations

the Council	National Competition Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CFFR	Council on Federal Financial Relations
AMR	Automatic Mutual Recognition under part 3A of the MR Act
ADR	Automatic Deemed Registration
MR Act	*Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth)
MR	Mutual recognition under part 3 of the MR Act
the Review	Review of Australia’s Mutual Recognition Schemes for Workers
IGA	2020 Intergovernmental Agreement on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registration
NOLS	National Occupational Licensing System
NOLA	National Occupational Licensing Authority
VET	Vocational Education and Training
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
HRW	High Risk Work licence

Appendix I. Definitions

Activity – an activity authorised to be carried on under a registered occupation.

Automatic Deemed Registration (ADR) – the status of a person who, under part 3A of the MR Act, is taken to be registered to carry on an occupation in a second state or territory on the basis of their substantive registration in their home state or territory.

Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR) – the scheme established under part 3A of the MR Act that allows a person who holds registration for an occupation in their home state or territory to be taken to be registered for the equivalent occupation in another participating jurisdiction, without obtaining separate substantive registration in that jurisdiction.

Deemed Registration (DR) – the status of a person who has lodged a valid mutual recognition notice seeking registration in an equivalent occupation in a second state or territory and is taken to be registered in that occupation, pending the grant or refusal of substantive registration.

Equivalent occupation – an occupation in a second state or territory that authorises the carrying on of activities that are substantially the same as those authorised in the first state or territory.

First State or Territory – the state or territory in which a person holds substantive registration for an occupation.

High Risk Work (HRW) licence – a licence issued under work health and safety legislation authorising a person to perform specified categories of high-risk work, including activities such as scaffolding, dogging, rigging, crane operation and forklift operation.

Home State or Territory – either the state or territory in which the person has their principal place of residence, or in which the person has their principal place of work for the occupation.

Local Registration Authority (LRA) – the person or authority in a state or territory responsible for registering persons to carry on an occupation or activity associated with that occupation.

Mutual Recognition (MR) – the scheme established under part 3 of the MR Act under which registration in an occupation in one state or territory entitles a person to seek registration in the equivalent occupation in another state or territory.

Mutual recognition schemes – the worker mobility arrangements examined in this report, comprising MR under part 3 of the MR Act and AMR under part 3A of the Act.

Occupation – a trade, profession or calling of any kind that may be carried on only by registered persons, where registration is wholly or partly dependent on the attainment or possession of some qualification (for example, training, education, examination, experience, character or being fit or proper), and includes a specialisation in any of the above in which registration may be granted.

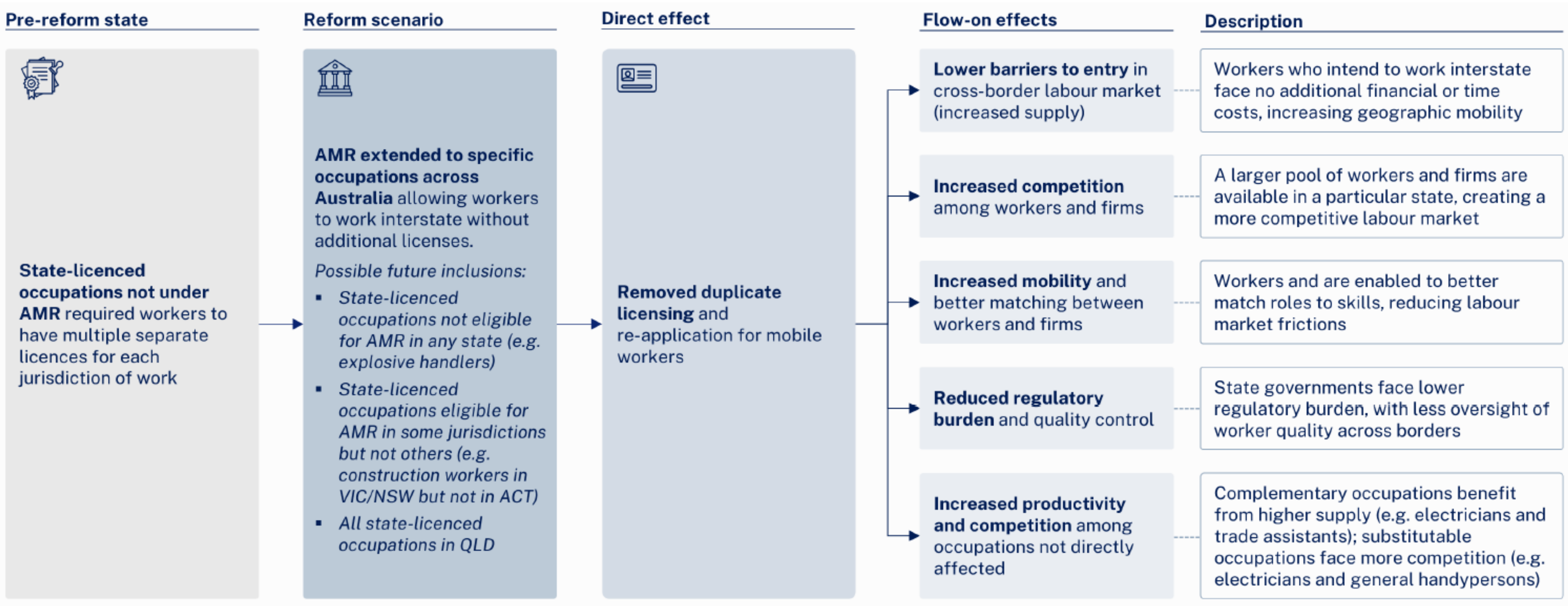
Participating State – a state or territory in which the MR Act applies.

Second State or Territory – the state or territory in which a person seeks registration under mutual recognition or is taken to be registered under Automatic Mutual Recognition.

Substantive Registration – the registration held by a person in a ‘first State’ (for mutual recognition purposes) or in their ‘home State’ (for Automatic Mutual Recognition purposes), excluding any registration that arises solely through Deemed Registration or Automatic Deemed Registration.

Appendix J. Mandala Partners charts

Potential direct and indirect impacts of AMR

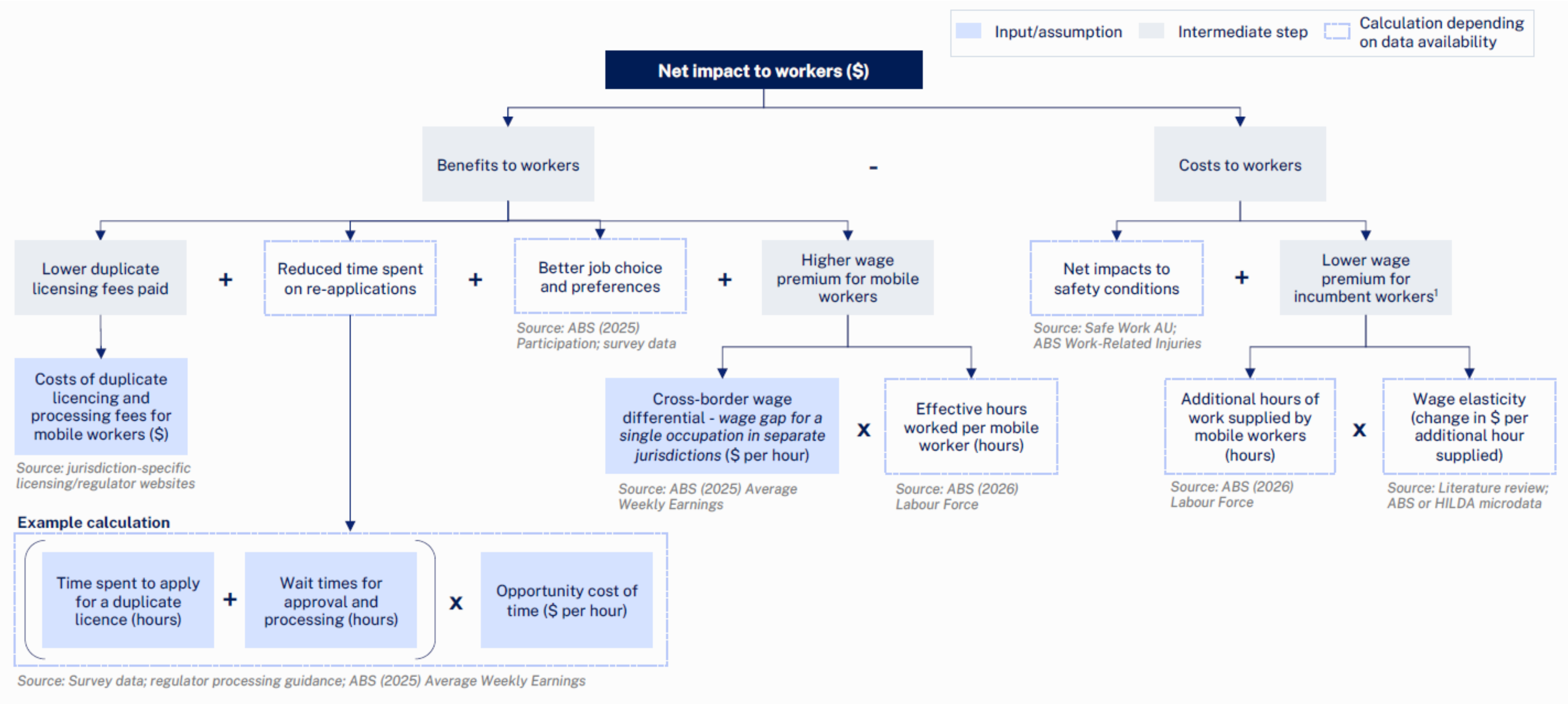


Cost-benefit framework to assess the impact of AMR

Net outcome Benefit Uncertain Cost

Effect	Description	Workers[1]	Governments[2]	Consumers	Broader economy
Direct	**Removed duplicate licensing** and re-application for mobile workers	▪ Lower duplicate fees paid ▪ Reduced time spent on re-applications	▪ Lower duplicate fee revenue collected[3] ▪ Lower duplicate processing costs	▪ Lower consumer prices (if savings passed on)	*NA*
Flow-on	**Lower barriers to entry** in cross-border labour market	▪ Higher wage premium for mobile workers	▪ Increased income tax ▪ Fewer labour shortages	▪ Better choice and availability of workers	▪ Higher job participation ▪ Increased labour supply and activity
	Increased competition between workers and firms	▪ Lower wage premium for incumbent workers	▪ Decreased income tax ▪ Increased/decreased GST from consumer price effects	▪ Lower consumer prices	▪ Increased demand and economic activity
	Increased mobility and better job and skill matching between workers and firms	▪ Better job choice and preference ▪ Increased safety conditions from better skills matching	▪ Fewer labour shortages and required support in shortage occupations	▪ Increased quality of output	▪ Higher job mobility ▪ Increased demand and economic activity
	Reduced regulatory burden and quality control	▪ Reduced oversight of worker safety standards	▪ Lower compliance effort for state governments	▪ Reduced quality oversight of workers across borders	*NA*
	Increased productivity and competition among occupations not directly affected	▪ Higher wage premium for complementary occupations ▪ Lower wage premium for substitutable occupations	▪ Increased/decreased GST revenue from consumer price effects	▪ Increased speed and quality of output ▪ Lower consumer prices	▪ Higher productivity in affected industries

Illustrative methodology to estimate the net impact of AMR for workers



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- Sukrit Sabhlok
- Lucas Walker
- Nargiss Hijazi (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations secondee)
- Angelo Giannakopoulos (Victorian Government secondee)
- Felix Delhomme (New South Wales Government secondee)

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