



# **Response to the 2019 Infrastructure Audit**

**Infrastructure Australia**

**October 2019**

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## About us



Consult Australia is the industry association that represents the business interests of consulting firms who provide design, advisory and engineering services for the built and natural environment. We represent an industry comprising some 48,000 firms across Australia, ranging from sole practitioners through to some of Australia’s top 500 firms with combined revenue exceeding \$40 billion a year.

**Some of our member firms include:**



## Summary

Consult Australia strongly supports the purpose of the 2019 Infrastructure Audit (the audit), and Infrastructure Australia's broader cycle of planning and research activities to help inform nationally significant infrastructure investment decisions. To this end, we believe it is critical that the upcoming Australian Infrastructure Plan and updates to the Infrastructure Priority List appropriately consider and respond to findings in this audit. We also support Infrastructure Australia's ongoing role to advocate for infrastructure policy in line with their research activities, and for evidence-based planning and decision-making processes supported by independent infrastructure bodies.

Consult Australia welcomes a number of findings and focus areas in this year's audit. We particularly support the audit's consideration of industry issues and how these link to overall infrastructure outcomes, and how procurement practices can improve. The audit's methodology is sound and rigorous, and we support the use of a 'vision and validate' approach as this helps ensure Australian governments are strategically influencing and driving forward the best policy reforms and infrastructure outcomes over the next 15 years.

While the audit does not use the language specifically, some of the findings highlight that infrastructure should be viewed as an enabler of economic and social development in our cities and regions. As such, infrastructure planning and investment decisions must be integrated into, and structurally informed by, broader economic and social considerations rather than demand and capacity considerations for particular asset types.

Consult Australia's key concern with infrastructure trends over the next 15 years relates to current procurement practices and their likely impact on the overall health of the infrastructure industry. The size and scale of projects, and how work packages are structured, are skewing the market and having a significant impact on the sector. Infrastructure spend by governments should lead to productivity gains to the infrastructure industry during the project as well as the final economic and social benefits for the Australian economy. The industry's productivity is being limited because of poor procurement practice that incorporate inappropriate risk allocation and onerous contractual requirements that are being passed down the supply chain. We believe these problems are exacerbated by the recent upswing in infrastructure investments and are likely to worsen in this 'new normal' of elevated activities unless addressed.

Throughout our submission, we identify a number of additional opportunities and challenges to those outlined in the 2019 Infrastructure Audit. These are summarised below.

### *Future trends impacting Australia and infrastructure*

- Better understanding and leveraging quality of life outcomes and the social benefits from infrastructure investments.

### *Infrastructure services for users*

- A need for community engagement on how Australia's infrastructure is funded and financed.
- The current service expectations from particular infrastructure types and influencing efficiencies in how our infrastructure networks are utilised by the community.

### *Industry efficiency, capacity and capability*

- Improving the public service's contracting and procurement skills.
- Reducing the cost of tender processes and bidding for industry.
- Investing in well substantiated and articulated public reporting of infrastructure performance.
- Considering how Australia's STEM talent pipeline and skills development approach can respond to the infrastructure industry's current and future workforce demands.
- Recognising the essential role the Commonwealth Centre of Procurement Excellence can play in improving procurement practices.

### *Transport*

- Increasing the uptake of public transport through safety and improved access measures.
- Considering public transport access issues in inner city locations from urban sprawl and developments in outer suburban locations.
- The adoption of technologies to reduce carbon emissions in transport infrastructure and to reduce the overall environmental impact of the transport sector.
- Improving the flow of freight, particularly for last mile journeys, by addressing freight bottlenecks in cities.

### *Social infrastructure*

- Better integrating social infrastructure in the infrastructure planning process, which could be addressed through the infrastructure bodies which currently tend to focus more on transport infrastructure.

### *Telecommunications*

- Improvements in telecommunication services can help spread and enhance economic development opportunities across the country.
- New technology potentially making the approach to current telecommunication services and infrastructure redundant or less effective.

### *Water*

- The appetite of governments to focus on water resilience, security and other water management issues in times of high supply.
- Achieving greater efficiencies in the water sector by looking at consumption by consumers and promoting better practice behaviours.

Lastly, our submission highlights Consult Australia's current policy priorities. These priorities have been identified and pursued because they represent key concerns for our member firms. As such, we ask that Infrastructure Australia consider these topics further, particularly when developing the next Australian Infrastructure Plan. Our current policy priorities are:

- Better procurement and fairness in contracting;
- Sustainable and equitable infrastructure funding reforms;
- Best practice infrastructure governance, planning and decision-making;
- A mentally healthy infrastructure industry; and
- A robust Australian STEM talent pipeline.

## Future trends impacting Australia and infrastructure

Consult Australia supports Infrastructure Australia's analysis on the future international and domestic trends that will in turn have implications for our infrastructure over the coming 15 years. We agree with the key message that Australia's rapidly growing, ageing and urbanising population, coupled with the unique circumstances and growth trajectories of cities and regions, pose complex policy challenges. These challenges are interrelated to our infrastructure network and what we need from it.

Infrastructure Australia makes a strong point that current global, technological and environmental influences are creating an outlook of unparalleled uncertainty, We agree this requires a more proactive infrastructure planning approach. These unpredictable future trends also increase the importance of infrastructure investments being backed up by a robust decision-making process that aligns to, and helps to validate, the vision of long-term infrastructure plans.

Another key message in the audit's review of future trends impacting Australia and infrastructure is the benefit of new liveability and wellbeing frameworks that can help address inequalities across the community. This section of the audit highlights how a number of other countries are making significant inroads into how they assess and maximise the social benefits of infrastructure, and in turn improve quality of life outcomes from investment decisions. We believe there are significant opportunities for governments and independent infrastructure bodies to explore how these frameworks could be implemented in an Australian setting.

### Additional opportunity

To better understand and leverage quality of life outcomes and the social benefits from infrastructure. This could include giving more weight to social benefits when conducting a cost benefit analysis for an infrastructure investment proposal including for example, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal safety and subjective wellbeing.. Internationally, we have seen these considerations prioritised with the King's Cross development in London providing an example of the outcomes achieved.

This additional opportunity applied nationwide can provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

Consult Australia agrees with the audit's finding that new technology and the use of data can help address some future challenges facing Australia. The benefits of new technology and other innovative practices to date have not been evenly spread across the community. This imbalance potentially highlights emerging market inequalities in our infrastructure networks which may require government intervention. Examples of emerging inequalities in our infrastructure networks were identified in the audit's findings, such as the quality of and access to telecommunication services in regional and remote areas.

## The audit's cross-sectorial review

### Infrastructure services for users

Consult Australia agrees with one of the audit's key messages that Australia's infrastructure services will need to evolve and adapt to meet the future needs of users, and respond to changing demands on assets over their lifetime. However, we also believe that a sustainable funding and financing model for infrastructure, supported by an effective asset management approach, is critical if these services are to respond to user needs. The lack of such a model is arguably the cause for some past failures. It is therefore difficult to separate issues surrounding infrastructure services adapting to meet the future needs of users and the funding and financial model underpinning these services.

#### Additional opportunity

To better engage with the community on how Australia's infrastructure is funded and financed. This could be in line with the current community engagement approach, and proposed improvements, to infrastructure planning and the delivery of projects.

An example of an opportunity for better community engagement is how governments engage with the community on asset recycling.

This additional opportunity applied nationwide and can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

Consult Australia also supports Infrastructure Australia's position in the audit that it is important to consider the views of the community when planning and investing in infrastructure. We believe this is not just important for the social licence of an individual proposal, but also for the concept of infrastructure developments and the benefits they can bring to communities.

We believe there is a role in the infrastructure planning and decision-making process to influence user behaviours in regard to access and the performance of infrastructure services. The shape and density of many of our fast-growing cities has changed considerably over recent decades, and this must also change how we expect our infrastructure services to operate.

#### Additional challenge

The current service expectations from particular infrastructure networks (such as roads). Specifically the need to influence efficiencies in how our infrastructure networks are utilised by the community, particularly in the context of rapid population growth and changing urban environments.

This additional challenge particularly applies to our fast-growing cities, with an immediate to longer-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

Infrastructure Australia highlights an important point in the audit on the need to improve access to infrastructure services in many outer-urban, regional and remote communities. This points to the importance of infrastructure investment as an economic development tool, and the need to consider growth and employment opportunities to increase productivity in cities and regions.

### Industry efficiency, capacity and capability

Consult Australia agrees with the audit's finding that larger and mega infrastructure projects (which have become a default) are stretching industry and government, driven by a number of political factors. These include unrealistic timeframes and inappropriate risk allocation, which we believe can be addressed by reconsidering how work packages are structured.

Both design and construction firms face a number of challenges finding staff with appropriate skills and experiences to meet significant demands. This is only exacerbated by the increase in mega projects which almost always use the design and construct (D&C) contracting model. Contracts are becoming so large that the industry capability is being exceeded and project failures are becoming more common. This aligns with independent research into mega projects showing they rarely succeed in achieving project objectives.<sup>1</sup> Reconsideration of the scale of projects is needed to ensure there is not a concentration of contracts where the capability to deliver is limited to a few contractors. Increasing the number of contracts that suit tier two and three contractors and consultants will help boost skills, capabilities, and the productivity of the broader market.

Consult Australia agrees with the audit's finding that many projects are facing procurement issues. We believe improvements can be made to the delivery model, the tender process and contract terms. Too often the D&C model is adopted without any consideration of the range of other models available. In regard to tendering, the process is costly for industry and this is often not recognised by governments clients. This process can be administratively burdensome, template driven and without the appropriate expertise inputted.

These concerns are not unique to consultants – contractors also find processes and tender documentation costly, inefficient, time-consuming, and risks allocated inappropriately, while government clients have admitted that they are faced with 'institutional baggage' when attempting to address.

#### Additional opportunity

To improve the public service's contracting and procurement skills to help maximise the value of investments. This includes the need to ensure that work is not concentrated in certain areas of the industry, and improve the design of work packages to achieve better outcomes.

This additional opportunity applied nationwide can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

<sup>1</sup> Korda Mentha: [Impact of inappropriate risk allocation on mega project failure \(2018\)](#)

### Additional challenge

The cost and timescales of tender processes and bidding for industry. This will increase overall project costs in the long-term if left unabated.

This additional challenge is nationwide and if addressed will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

We strongly support investment in well substantiated and articulated public reporting of infrastructure performance. This will help inform stakeholders, so they are better equipped to participate in local, regional and national dialogues on infrastructure, investment, and pricing. At present our infrastructure situation in Australia is largely opaque to people unfamiliar with the day-to-day machinations of specific sectors. How performance metrics are defined will be critical in the signals they send, the data collection they motivate, and the information that is then furnished to enable meaningful decision making for our infrastructure networks, including the best procurement model for new projects.

### Additional opportunity

To invest in well substantiated and articulated public reporting of infrastructure performance.

This additional opportunity if applied nationwide can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

We agree with the audit's finding that industry is facing poorly integrated planning. However, we believe the audit does not go far enough into the issues relating to poor integrated planning and our member firms see a number of instances where projects are developed without due regard for integration with other infrastructure, services and adjoining communities. We believe that coordinated planning for critical infrastructure should consider and be developed hand-in-hand with a view to building cities and places that serve the wider community. Of concern is the desire of governments to fast-track projects which has the potential to further exacerbate this issue.

Consult Australia advocates for the need for an improved decision-making process for infrastructure to maximise productivity, economic and social benefits from investments. There are examples around the country where governments have side-stepped the rigorous infrastructure governance arrangements they have recently established and made premature project announcements. As such, insufficient due diligence has been taken to determine how to maximise the benefits from an investment. Consult Australia sees an important role for independent infrastructure bodies to publicly advocate for governments to undertake appropriate steps before project announcements, and to call out examples which are not following best practice.



We support the audit's call for more post-completion reviews for projects to ensure expected benefits were realised. Consult Australia believes an integral part of this is ensuring projects are following best practice business case development processes, which includes considering the business case as a live document that is updated by revisiting assumptions regularly. This provides an accurate document to conduct post-completion reviews against. This is explored in our recent thought leadership on business case development (referenced later in this submission).

We strongly support the audit's new focus on the industry's workforce. The significant and sustained increase in infrastructure investments in some areas across the country is placing significant demand on the workforce delivering these projects. While these projects will help change the face of our country by improving how communities are connected and growing the economy, their delivery is dependent on having a workforce with the right capabilities and capacity.

We welcome the audit's finding on how a 'lumpy' project pipeline is leading to issues for the infrastructure industry's capacity, skills and resources. This highlights the importance of a sustainable and long-term pipeline of projects that is considering workforce demands, and in turn ensuring other government policy areas (such as education, skills development and training) are being informed by this demand. We see STEM education and skilled migration as prime examples – two areas we see as slow to respond to workforce demands in the infrastructure sector.

Workforce capacity and capability issues are not only challenges for industry, but also for government agencies engaged in procurement activities for infrastructure. This year the Commonwealth Government established the Centre of Procurement Excellence, in recognition of the need to upskill government procurement capability. Consult Australia believes that this is a critical initiative that should be supported by governments across Australia so that best practice in procurement is shared across the country.

### **Additional challenge**

How Australia's STEM talent pipeline and approach to developing skills and experience can respond to current and future workforce demands.

This additional challenge is nationwide and if addressed will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

### **Additional opportunity**

The Commonwealth Centre of Procurement Excellence can play a key role in bringing together procurement best practice, so that jurisdictions (not only Commonwealth agencies) can upskill procurement expertise, which is essential for successful infrastructure projects and outcomes.

This additional opportunity if applied nationwide will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

## The audit's review by infrastructure type

### Transport

Consult Australia agrees with the audit's finding that Australia's transport sector is rapidly changing due to the significant congestion challenges facing our fast-growing cities, and the range of innovations transforming the way people travel and our supply chains across the country.

We support Infrastructure Australia's call for transport network planning to concentrate on social inclusion, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage in the community. Transport infrastructure investment and services should be considered an important tool for addressing inequalities across society.

#### Additional opportunity

To increase the uptake of public transport services through safety and improved access measures.

This additional opportunity relates to fast-growing cities, and smaller cities and regional centres, and will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

In regard to the quality of Australia's transport network and related services, we believe this must be underpinned by an effective and sustainable infrastructure investment model. This model should consider how revenue raised from the use of transport networks balances with investment and maintenance demands.

Consult Australia believes the transport sector has significant room for improvement with its environmental impact. The Climate Council highlighted in a 2018 report that the transport sector is Australia's second largest source of greenhouse gas pollution, with the sector seeing the largest percentage growth since 1990 at 62.9 per cent. The report calls for the rapid roll out of a fleet of sustainable transport solutions, which encourage mode shift and uptake of environmentally friendly vehicles, and a credible national policy to tackle transport emissions.<sup>2</sup>

#### Additional challenge

Public transport access in inner city locations from overcrowding that is caused by urban sprawl and developments in outer suburban locations.

This additional challenge relates to fast-growing cities and if addressed will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

<sup>2</sup> Climate Council, [Waiting for the green light: transport solutions to climate change \(2018\)](#)

### Additional opportunity

The adoption of technologies to reduce carbon emissions in transport infrastructure and to reduce the overall environmental impact of the transport sector.

This additional opportunity if applied nationwide will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

We welcome Infrastructure Australia's consideration of freight and passenger transport together in the 2019 audit. We believe planning for both networks cannot be in isolation from each other, however we do believe there are investment opportunities on separating these networks at bottlenecks to improve their effectiveness.

### Additional opportunity

To improve the flow of freight, particularly for last mile journeys, by addressing freight bottlenecks in cities. This could include separating freight transport routes and investing in projects that remove pinch points around freight hubs.

This additional opportunity relates to fast-growing cities, and will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

## Social infrastructure

We strongly support the inclusion of social infrastructure for the first time in this year's audit. Our social infrastructure arguably provides the basis for the health of our overall economy and for the shape of our community.

Consult Australia agrees with Infrastructure Australia's view that social infrastructure is essential in making our communities liveable. However, we believe it is important to also look at the societal benefits of what is traditionally described as economic infrastructure as we believe the audit has not applied the same focus in this area for these other types of infrastructure.

We recognise that social infrastructure has a unique link to other infrastructure types as investment and planning decisions are heavily linked to social policy and service delivery considerations. Areas of government charged with these types of considerations often sit outside the traditional infrastructure decision making process (such as departments of health and education), and we believe there should be a role for independent infrastructure bodies to encourage better connections.

### Additional opportunity

To better integrate social infrastructure in the infrastructure planning process, such as through the independent infrastructure bodies which currently tend to focus more on transport infrastructure. This approach may improve economic and quality of life benefits from social infrastructure, and help ensure decisions align with the broader approach to infrastructure networks.

This additional opportunity if applied nationwide can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

## Energy

We support Infrastructure Australia's view in the audit that more certainty in energy policy is needed for Australia's energy sector. As with most sectors, a clear and consistent policy decision can help encourage private investments and partnerships in the energy sector and in turn address some of the current challenges around rising supply costs.

Consult Australia also agrees that Australia has significant energy potential (particularly with renewables and related export opportunities) and this could be a source of economic advantage, and assist with a transition back to a low-cost energy producer in the coming decades.

We do not propose any additional energy sector opportunities or challenges to those in the audit.

## Telecommunications

We agree with Infrastructure Australia's view that 5G technology presents a significant opportunity to enhance Australia's economic productivity. Australia could also improve its global competitiveness and comparative advantage by being an early adopter of this technology.

Consult Australia supports the audit's finding that significant access concerns to some telecommunications in the community (in certain areas and demographics) is leading to disadvantage and difficulties for some individuals to interact with services. This highlights the importance of the government's role in intervening in cases of poor service outcomes, and other programmes focused on supporting community uptake of telecommunication services.

### Additional opportunity

Improvements in telecommunication services helping to spread and enhance economic development opportunities across the country.

This additional opportunity relates to smaller cities and regional centres, and small towns, rural communities and remote areas, and can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

### Additional challenge

New technology potentially making the approach to current telecommunication services and infrastructure redundant or less effective.

This additional challenge if addressed will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

### Water

Consult Australia supports the audit's finding that the water sector is facing unprecedented risks and challenges from climate change, population growth, ageing assets and competing interests. To this end, we believe the water sector is currently facing structural challenges with any response likely to heavily influence the sector's effectiveness over the long-term.

We also support Infrastructure Australia's view that recent high-profile events in the sector have undermined confidence in the water management. Increasing the public's engagement and the transparency of public investment decisions will likely help address some of these concerns.

Lastly, we agree with the audit's finding that recycled water presents some significant opportunities for the future of the water sector. A focus on downstream consumer behaviours will likely assist with current and future upstream supply challenges.

### Additional challenge

The appetite of governments to focus on water resilience, security and other water management issues in times of high supply.

This additional challenge applies nationwide and if addressed will provide an immediate to long-term impact on Australia's future infrastructure.

### Additional opportunity

To achieve greater efficiencies in the water sector by looking at consumption by consumers and promoting better practice behaviours. For example, we already see significant variances in water consumption by city and jurisdiction which is likely largely driven by consumer behaviours.

This additional opportunity applies nationwide and can provide an immediate to long-term improvement to Australia's future infrastructure.

## Policy considerations for the Australian Infrastructure Plan

A key purpose of the audit is to consider the challenges and opportunities that require action via policy reforms outlined in the next Australian Infrastructure Plan. As such, we have also taken the opportunity to share Consult Australia's current policy priorities that we recommend are considered by Infrastructure Australia in this plan's development process. These policy priorities have been identified and pursued by Consult Australia because they represent key concerns for many consulting firms who provide design, advisory and engineering services for infrastructure projects.

We will be happy to meet with Infrastructure Australia to discuss these policy priorities further or participate in industry workshops on related topics.

### Better procurement and fairness in contracting

Consult Australia has long campaigned for better procurement practices. The majority of project delivery mechanisms are ultimately a complex web of contractual relationships. Project risk and reward are often allocated according to the respective bargaining power of the parties, rather than with the most appropriate party. Therefore, better procurement and fairness in contracting is needed.

Improving the early stages of procurement and design are required. Instead of using a default delivery mechanism (such as D&C) public sector clients need to give full consideration to the project's requirement and the best suited delivery mechanism. 'One size' does not fit all.

Improved tendering documentation must be appropriately scoped and include adequate and verified background information that can be relied on. Industry, as experts, could be better engaged to develop these scoping materials to limit the cost issues that arise when items are challenged.

Shifting to collaborative forms of contracting would be the best outcome for clients, the industry, and ultimately the communities that will benefit from the project outcomes, by taking a partnership approach to more appropriately allocate risk and de-risk projects by identifying problems and solutions early.

These issues are explored in more detail in our [Model Client Policy](#) for governments, which we recommend is considered for adopting in the audit's recommendations.

### Sustainable and equitable infrastructure funding reforms

Consult Australia has recently commenced policy activities that aim to promote sustainable and equitable infrastructure funding reforms to ensure Australia is capable of meeting demands for new infrastructure and maintenance requirements into the future.

We released a report titled [Re-building the social licence for asset recycling: the need for asset transfer conditions that focus on delivering real public benefits](#) in March 2019. This report argued the case for asset recycling is strong when delivered successfully, and provides governments with a valuable tool that can help address challenges of keeping pace with infrastructure investment demands in growing cities and regions. However, broader public concerns with asset recycling cannot be ignored if governments wish to continue using this valuable tool. The report therefore encourages governments to focus on asset transfer conditions that will build public support for asset recycling by focusing on longer-term impacts from transfers to the private sector.

Consult Australia is currently exploring the next policy activity for this campaign, and this will potentially be presenting the case for introducing a new road user charging model across Australia. We expect to commence undertaking this work in early 2020.

### Best practice infrastructure governance, planning and decision-making

Advocating for better practice infrastructure governance, planning and decision-making processes has been a focus of Consult Australia over recent years. We have been strong supporters of the establishment of independent infrastructure bodies and their role supporting evidence-based infrastructure investments.

In January 2018, we released a report titled [‘iBodies’: infrastructure governance in Australia](#). This report calls on all governments in Australia to enact model legislation to establish independent statutory infrastructure bodies (“iBodies”), with the legislation structured around four core components of independent, planning, assessment, and prioritisation. The report also calls for governments, where iBodies have already been created, to confirm their ongoing support for them and where necessary amend their legislation in line with the proposed model approach.

Following on from our recommendations regarding the assessment of infrastructure in the iBodies report, we also released a follow up report on [Business case development in Australia: the benefits of an integrated process through collaboration](#) in August 2019. This report takes a more detailed look into this aspect of good infrastructure governance and provides guidelines for governments and industry with the aim of improving the infrastructure business case process. The overall objective of the report is to make the case for an integrated business case process through collaborative behaviours across project teams by demonstrating how this approach delivers better outcomes.

### A mentally healthy infrastructure industry

Another of Consult Australia’s current focus areas is on promoting the importance of mentally healthy workplaces to our member firms and the broader built environment industry. This initiative aims to tackle mental health stigmas and promote what firms and the industry can do to improve workplace practices.

We released a report titled [Striving for mentally healthy workplaces](#) in October 2018. This report is focused on how firms and the broader industry can create mentally healthy workplaces by sharing best practices and successful case studies that are focused on being scalable for workplaces of all sizes. The report notes that benefits from mentally healthy workplaces are significant – employees feel empowered to perform at a high-level and comfortably balance work with a healthy life, and thriving employees can drive an organisation’s performance and deliver a competitive edge. Consult Australia has since hosted a number of events and panel discussions on the report and mental health in the workplace over the last 12 months.

Consult Australia launched its Mental Health Ambassador Network in June 2019. The network is made up of senior leaders, managers and specialists from our member firms, and was established to help drive a cultural change in the industry. The ambassadors are currently focused on delivering initiatives aimed at tackling mental health stigmas and improving workplace practices. These include a video blog series to share personalised stories from professionals at member firms.

It is important to recognise the impact that the cyclical ‘boom and bust’ project-based way of working in our industry has on mental health. This is a key reason for our continuing advocacy for a smooth pipeline of well scoped infrastructure projects, which will provide greater job security and allow for better workforce planning. It also underscores the need for better procurement practice and calling an end to the adversarial nature of our industry by taking a more collaborative approach to project delivery and contracting models. One simple change that we are currently advocating for is that government agencies stop the practice of issuing calls for tenders over the end-of-year period, to allow people to take time to be with their families rather working through the holiday period to achieve tender deadlines.

### A robust Australian STEM talent pipeline

Consult Australia has recently launched a new policy initiative focused on the importance of a robust STEM talent pipeline for Australia’s future. We launched our first discussion paper for this initiative titled [Australia’s STEM education challenges](#) on 29 October 2019. The paper highlights the increasing demand for STEM skills in our industry and skill shortages being experienced from a sustained increase in projects. Despite considerable efforts by governments to date, the paper flags that Australia’s approach is still not keeping pace or aligning to the demands of our industry and the broader economy, and concludes by calling for a focus on industry partnerships to improve outcomes.

We have also launched a ‘gateway’ work experience pilot in Queensland in early October. The pilot aims to provide our local member firms with an opportunity to showcase our industry and related careers to high school STEM students. The pilot has been launched for an initial 12-months and is being delivered in partnership with an organisation called Grandshake.

Consult Australia will be holding member forums through our state and territory divisions in early 2020 to discuss emerging themes from our discussion paper on STEM education challenges. This



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Infrastructure Australia

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forum will look at opportunities for a nationwide industry-wide approach for promoting STEM education and career opportunities in our industry. This approach could look at upscaling current initiatives at member firms across industry.

## Contact us

We would welcome any opportunity to further discuss the issues raised in this report. To do so, please contact:

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