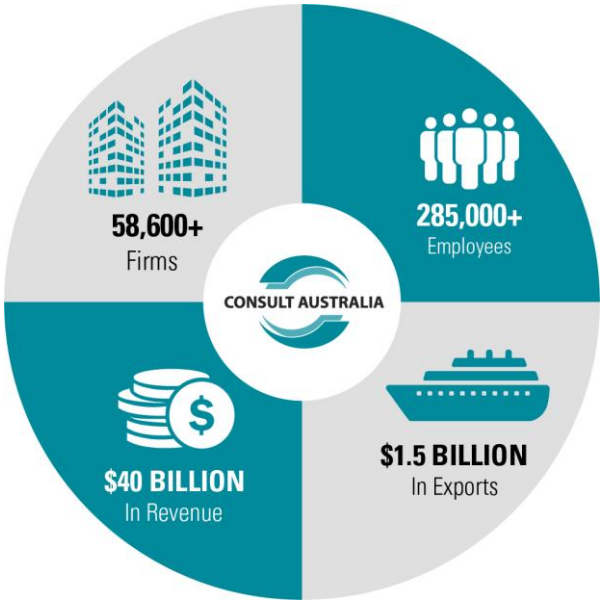
November 2026

Inquiry into use of technology to improve productivity

SUBMISSION TO HOUSE ECONOMICS COMMITTEE

Consult Australia

Postal Address: GPO Box 56, Sydney NSW 2001
Email: info@consultaustralia.com.au
Tel: 02 8252 6700
Web: consultaustralia.com.au



About us

Consult Australia is the industry association representing consulting businesses in design, advisory and engineering, an industry comprised of over 58,600 businesses across Australia. This includes some of Australia's top 500 companies and many small businesses (97%). Our members provide solutions for individual consumers through to major companies in the private sector and across all tiers of government. Our industry directly employs over 285,000 people in architectural, engineering and technical services and many more in advisory and business support. It is also a job creator for the Australian economy, the services we provide unlock many more jobs across the construction industry and the broader community.

Our members include:

A full membership list is available on our website.

Executive summary

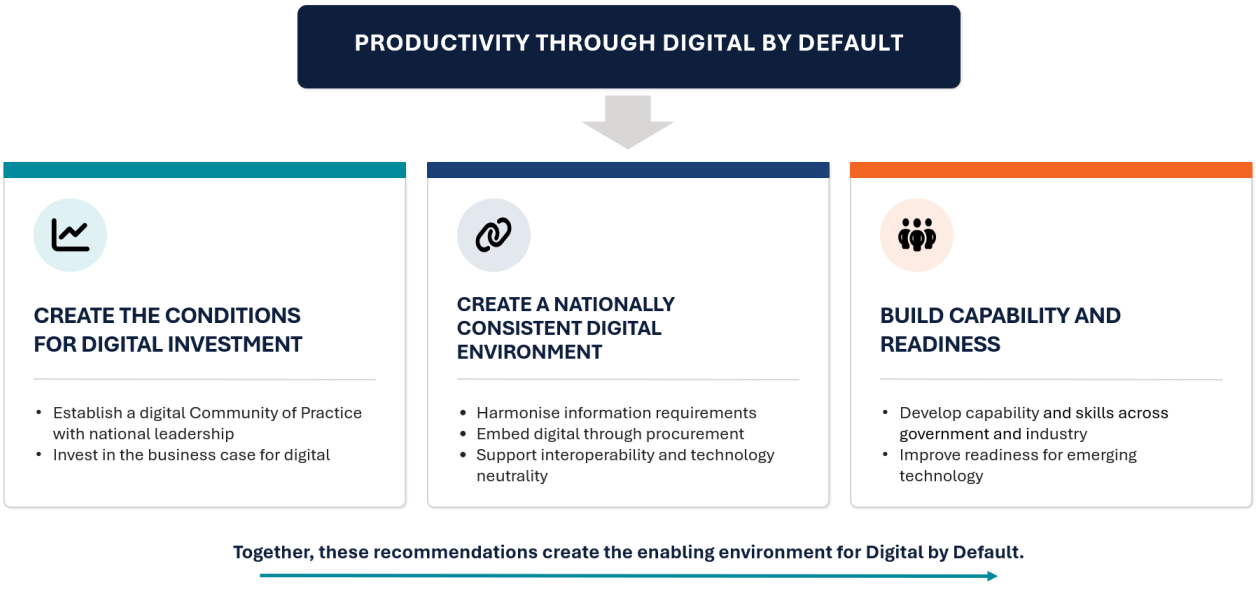
Consult Australia members help plan, design and deliver Australia's infrastructure, buildings, energy systems and communities.

Improving productivity across the infrastructure lifecycle requires addressing the barriers that prevent digital investment from delivering its full benefits. Infrastructure Australia's Annual Budget Statement 2026 describes construction productivity as persistently low, with the long-term trend flat and well below mid-1990s levels. It identifies the National Construction Strategy and the National Construction Industry Forum's Blueprint for the Future as important national reform initiatives, while stressing that their impact will depend on implementation and concrete action.

Infrastructure Australia's 2025 Infrastructure Market Capacity Report found that 64% of surveyed building and construction organisations had invested in data and digitalisation during the previous 12 months, including Building Information Modelling (BIM), artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and automation.

Australia's infrastructure sector already has significant digital capability. Investment by individual businesses will not deliver the full productivity benefits if the wider infrastructure system remains fragmented. Different information requirements, procurement practices and levels of client maturity increase the cost of doing business, make systems and capability harder to reuse and limit adoption at scale. What is needed is a more coordinated approach to information management, procurement and capability development to help translate digital investment into productivity improvements across the entire infrastructure lifecycle. The productivity opportunity is not simply greater use of technology, but using digital information and tools to improve how infrastructure is planned, designed, assured, delivered and operated.

This submission provides three recommendations to realise technology-enabled productivity gains across the infrastructure sector:



Recommendations

Create the conditions for digital investment

Establish national leadership on Digital by Default to form a Community of Practice via the Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meeting. This leadership should prioritise investment in the business case for digital technology.

The potential productivity outcomes include reduced duplication, accelerated learning, greater consistency across jurisdictions and increased confidence by both government and industry to invest in digital transformation and scale.

Australia has significant digital capability across the infrastructure sector. Many organisations are already investing in digital engineering, BIM, AI, automation and data-driven delivery approaches. The priority is now to create the conditions that allow effective digital approaches to be adopted at scale. Coordinated leadership and sharing credible evidence of benefits, costs and implementation requirements would help government clients and industry make informed investment decisions.

Consult Australia's Enabling Digital by Default paper notes that Australia has significant digital capability. However, fragmented requirements, variable client maturity and inconsistent approaches across jurisdictions prevent that capability being deployed consistently.

The challenge is therefore less about identifying new technologies and more about connecting existing initiatives and enabling successful approaches to be used more widely. This includes greater reuse of data, digital methods and capability across projects and jurisdictions, rather than recreating on a project-by-project basis. This requires stronger coordination between governments, agencies and industry.

Consult Australia's submission to the Productivity Commission on Data and Digital Technology suggested that Australia's productivity will continue to lag if barriers to confidence, commerciality, coordination and quality are not addressed. While AI presents significant opportunities, coordinated leadership is required to realise broader data and digital productivity gains.

A nationally endorsed Digital by Default Community of Practice would support the diffusion of proven digital approaches by sharing implementation experience, identifying common barriers and helping successful approaches move beyond individual projects and jurisdictions.

Building the business case for digital technology requires a stronger evidence base on implementation costs and productivity benefits. Consistent evaluation would help government clients and industry understand which approaches deliver value and are worth adopting more widely.

Consult Australia proposes that infrastructure digitalisation be progressed through the Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meeting as a national infrastructure productivity priority. This would provide a national forum to learn from what works, align where consistency matters and establish the common foundations for Digital by Default.

Create a nationally consistent digital environment

Create a nationally consistent digital environment by adopting Consult Australia's Digital by Default recommendations to:

- harmonise standards and guidance for data and information management
- embed digital requirements through procurement with an outcome-led approach.

The potential productivity outcomes include reduced rework, improved interoperability and creation of market demand for digital delivery through procurement certainty.

Consult Australia consistently hears that inconsistent information requirements, standards and procurement settings create unnecessary complexity and cost. This also makes systems and capability harder to reuse and weakens the business case to adopt digital approaches at scale.

Without greater alignment, Australia risks replacing fragmented digital maturity with fragmented digital requirements. These challenges are particularly significant for businesses working across multiple jurisdictions and are a barrier to productivity growth.

Information created during planning and design needs to remain usable through delivery, operations and maintenance and inform future planning and investment. Harmonised information requirements would support this continuity across projects and jurisdictions. Governments and industry would be able to reuse processes and share information between systems, reducing duplication and supporting more consistent digital delivery. Consistent, interoperable and well-managed information is important to realising the benefits of emerging technologies.

Consult Australia has repeatedly highlighted the importance of procurement approaches that encourage innovation, support information management and reward long-term value. Current procurement and contracting practices do not consistently support digital delivery and often create uncertainty around information requirements, liability, intellectual property and data management. Procurement should establish clear and appropriate information requirements early so that information created during project delivery remains useful across the infrastructure lifecycle.

Infrastructure Australia's 2025 Infrastructure Market Capacity Report identified procurement models focused on lowest-cost and project-by-project tendering as barriers to scalable innovations such as digital engineering.

International approaches provide useful examples of how information requirements can be carried through procurement and project delivery.

- The UK approach demonstrates how information management requirements can be carried from policy and standards into procurement and contracts. Public sector clients define information requirements at the outset, aligned with ISO 19650, and these requirements are then given effect through procurement documentation and contractual arrangements.
- Singapore's approach provides an example of how information management requirements can be integrated into project delivery. Public sector leadership, standardised procurement approaches and clearly defined project requirements help ensure digital and information management expectations are applied consistently from project planning through to asset operation.

Australia should draw on these approaches while developing arrangements suited to its federal system and infrastructure market. Consult Australia's longstanding position is that governments should focus on outcomes and interoperability rather than prescribing particular technologies.

Procurement case study – NSW Infrastructure Digitalisation and Data Policy

New South Wales provides an example of how governments can support more consistent digital delivery through coordinated policy, guidance and client leadership. The NSW Infrastructure Digitalisation and Data Policy is built on four principles:

- commit to digitalisation
- prioritise digital practices and technologies
- manage technology and data as assets throughout the infrastructure lifecycle
- invest in capability.

A key feature of the NSW approach is recognising that digital transformation is not solely a technology issue. It also requires clear information requirements, consistent guidance, capable clients and procurement processes that support effective information management. By establishing common expectations for information management and digital deliverables, NSW has taken steps towards greater consistency across projects and agencies, which is a critical foundation for productivity-enhancing technology.

The NSW policy is scheduled to take effect in April 2027.

Build capability and readiness for emerging technologies

This can be achieved by adopting Consult Australia's Digital by Default recommendation to build capability and skills across government clients, industry and the infrastructure workforce.

The potential productivity outcomes include improved adoption of digital tools, data-driven delivery and future technologies such as AI.

Technology only delivers productivity improvements when organisations have the capability to implement and use it effectively. Consult Australia's Digital by Default work identifies capability and skills as one of the five core reforms needed to support digital adoption.

Skills development is required across both government and industry to support broader adoption of digital practices. Government clients need the capability to specify appropriate information requirements, assess delivered data and use it in asset management. Industry needs the skills to produce, share and maintain that information, alongside the ability to apply emerging technologies such as AI appropriately.

Emerging technologies increase these capability requirements. People need to understand not only how to use new tools, but also where these tools are appropriate, and how information is created, managed and used throughout the infrastructure lifecycle. Building this capability will help government and industry make better use of existing digital investments and adopt emerging technologies more effectively.

Capability case study – Victorian Digital Asset Strategy

The Victorian Government's Digital Asset Strategy highlights the importance of capability, governance and organisational maturity in supporting digital transformation. A key feature of the strategy is its focus on understanding and building capability throughout the asset lifecycle, including assessing capability needs during project planning and implementation.

The strategy makes clear that '*people are at the heart of driving and realising digital innovation and change*'. This reflects the importance of investing in skills, leadership and information management practices alongside technology adoption.

Conclusion

Together, these reforms would help turn digital capability into more efficient infrastructure delivery and operations. Consistent information requirements aligned procurement and investment in people would support better decisions throughout the infrastructure lifecycle and help translate digital investment into productivity improvements.

Contact

We would welcome any opportunity to further discuss the issues raised in this submission.

02 8252 6700

linkedin.com/company/consult-australia

info@consultaustralia.com.au

consultaustralia.com.au

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