



20th January 2026

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

***Re: Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative.***

Summary

This submission addresses the Committee's Term of Reference concerning evidence and data demonstrating the links between gender equality and economic growth and prosperity, drawing on national and international research and ASDA's recent workforce data from the Australian space sector.

Gender equality is a proven enabler of economic growth, innovation and national security. For Australia, failure to act represents not only a social cost, but a direct threat to prosperity, competitiveness and sovereign capability.

By embedding gender equality into economic and national security policy frameworks, Australia can unlock untapped talent, strengthen its innovation economy and secure its future in an increasingly contested global environment.

Yours sincerely,

National Committee,
Australian Space Diversity Alliance (ASDA)

Email: contact@spacediversity.com.au

Postal address:
C/ Aviation/Aerospace Australia
1300 889 459
GPO Box 3339
Melbourne VIC 3001 Australia



About the Australian Space Diversity Alliance

The Australian Space Diversity Alliance (ASDA) was established in 2024 by a collective of Australian space industry professionals united by a shared goal: to champion inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) in the space sector. Our mission is to foster greater participation and innovation by ensuring that the Australian space industry represents the full spectrum of capabilities and talent.

We are driving change to ensure the space sector reflects the full depth, diversity, and talent of Australia. Our purpose is to expand participation among underrepresented groups across all identities and intersectionalities, so the industry becomes more inclusive, equitable, and accessible.

A thriving and innovative space industry must be built on the strengths of all Australians. Our mission is to advocate for systemic change that embeds inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) across the sector. We work to amplify marginalised voices, dismantle barriers to entry and advancement, and create pathways that support the long-term success of diverse talent.

Research continues to show that diverse workforces lead to more innovative thinking, improved decision making, and stronger collaboration. By fostering a culture of inclusion and shared opportunity, ASDA supports the development of a sustainable space ecosystem that reflects Australia's full potential and global leadership ambitions.

Through advocacy, partnerships, education, and storytelling, we're building a future-focused space sector, one where everyone can see themselves and their contribution in orbit.

Our submission

Gender equality is not only a matter of social justice; it is a proven driver of economic growth, national resilience and strategic capability. For advanced economies such as Australia, the ability to attract, retain and mobilise diverse talent is central to productivity, innovation and long-term prosperity.

This submission addresses the Committee's Term of Reference concerning **evidence and data demonstrating the links between gender equality and economic growth and prosperity**, drawing on national and international research and ASDA's recent workforce data from the Australian space sector.

Evidence from Australia's space workforce

As shown in recent survey results measuring inclusion across the Australian space workforce¹, ASDA has identified that the sector is highly diverse but unevenly represented, particularly across senior and technical roles. The data demonstrates three critical findings:

- **Inclusion delivers strong performance outcomes**, including improved collaboration, innovation and problem-solving.
- **Exclusion remains a critical risk**, contributing to workforce attrition, reduced psychological safety and loss of skilled talent.
- **Visible and credible national leadership** is essential to shifting culture, signalling standards and inspiring the next generation of Australians to pursue space and STEM careers.

¹ DCA 2024–2025 Inclusive Employer Index.SSSDLN Space Sector Report.



These findings align with the Diversity Council of Australia Inclusive Employer Index 2025², conducted in partnership with the Space, Spatial & Surveying Diversity Leadership Network, which confirms that inclusive organisations consistently outperform their peers across engagement, retention and innovation metrics.

For Australia, these findings are directly relevant. Persistent gender gaps in workforce participation, leadership and pay represent lost economic output and underutilised national capability, particularly in high-growth sectors such as STEM, defence, space and advanced manufacturing.

Strategic risk to Australia's economic and sovereign capability

This inquiry arrives at a decisive moment for Australia's innovation economy:

- Australia ranks 22nd among the 139 economies featured in the Global Innovation Index 2025, well below economies with comparable security and prosperity ambitions. Notably, Australia is 6th in Australia ranks 6th among the 17 economies in South East Asia, East Asia, and Oceania behind Republic of Korea, Singapore, China, Japan and Hong Kong.
- Participation in STEM continues to decline³, particularly among women and other under-represented groups, narrowing the future talent pipeline.
- These trends pose structural risks to Australia's long-term growth, competitiveness and sovereign capability, especially in strategically sensitive domains such as space, defence, cyber and advanced technologies.

Gender inequality within these sectors is therefore not a peripheral issue. It directly undermines Australia's ability to build, sustain and control the capabilities essential to economic security and national resilience.

ASDA's contribution to Australia's space future

The Australian Space Diversity Alliance exists to ensure the Australian space sector reflects the full breadth of national talent. ASDA advocates for inclusion, diversity, equity and access across all identities and intersectionalities, grounded in evidence that:

- Diverse teams deliver higher innovation outputs
- Inclusion improves decision-making quality and risk management
- Equity strengthens collaboration and long-term workforce sustainability

By partnering with industry, government, academia and community stakeholders, ASDA supports the development of a space workforce that is capable, inclusive and future-ready.

National leadership initiatives including highly visible symbols of inclusion and participation have the power to amplify this work, embedding cultural expectations and demonstrating what an inclusive Australian innovation economy can look like.

² Diversity Council of Australia & Space, Spatial & Surveying Diversity Leadership Network (2025), Inclusive Employer Index.

³ STEM Equity Monitor, August 2025. Department of Industry, Science and Resources.



Recommendations

To strengthen economic growth and prosperity through gender equality, ASDA recommends that the Australian Government:

1. **Embed gender equality as a strategic economic policy lever**, explicitly linking inclusion outcomes to productivity, innovation and sovereign capability objectives.
2. **Require gender-disaggregated data and inclusion metrics** across publicly funded STEM, defence and space programs to inform evidence-based decision-making.
3. **Invest in inclusive workforce pipelines**, particularly for women and under-represented groups in STEM, through education, mid-career transition and leadership development initiatives.
4. **Demonstrate visible national leadership**, using government-backed initiatives to normalise inclusion as a standard of excellence, not a compliance exercise.
5. **Align foreign, defence and economic policy settings** to recognise gender equality as a contributor to national resilience and strategic advantage.