



AIHS

Australian
Institute of
Health & Safety

Think forward

Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy:
Consultation Submission

6 June 2023

Acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Australia and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work, and we acknowledge that sovereignties of these lands and waters were never ceded. We pay our respects to Traditional Owners' Elders past and present, and commit to supporting them and Indigenous emerging leaders to create more equitable, healthy, and safe workplaces for all Australians, and in particular for those most disadvantaged.

About us

The Australian Institute of Health and Safety (AIHS) is the national association for people who work in generalist health and safety roles (practitioners and professionals). The AIHS represents more than 1,000 occupational health and safety (OHS) practitioners and professionals in Victoria, and more than 4,000 nationally. Beyond our membership, we advocate for the >20,000 people who work in health and safety across Australia.

In July 2019 our name changed from the Safety Institute of Australia to emphasise the importance of occupational health as well as safety. For more than 70 years we have worked towards our vision of safe and healthy people in productive workplaces and communities.

Our voice as a profession and association of health and safety experts is often distinct from those of government, employers, and workers. Our focus is on the science-, evidence-, and risk-based practice of health and safety, to create safer and healthier workplaces.

As the peak body representing those who advise workplace stakeholders on health and safety risks in construction and infrastructure settings, we wish to highlight the following key points:

- The construction industry continues to experience skilled labour shortages and challenges; this extends to OHS practitioners and professionals
- The construction industry continues to experience poor OHS outcomes relative to other industries
- The planning, design, and procurement of infrastructure projects by state and private clients plays a critical role in 'downstream' construction OHS outcomes
- The healthy and safe delivery of infrastructure projects has the potential to significantly positively impact workforce and community wellbeing outcomes
- The "active client" or "model client" project delivery method is a proven, effective way of maximising positive OHS outcomes on infrastructure projects
- Victoria's communities expect state- and privately-funded infrastructure projects to be delivered on time, on budget, to specification, and with minimal impacts to the environment and project workers' and other stakeholders' health and safety
- We encourage all delivery agencies, both public and private, and regardless of the commercial and contractual mechanisms in place, to support and implement an active client method in delivering Victoria's infrastructure
- We believe Infrastructure Victoria, through the 30-year strategy and others means, is well placed to advocate for this delivery method to stakeholders.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]

Our submission

The construction industry across Australia, including Victoria, has experienced poor OHS outcomes for many years. Nationally, 24 fatalities occurred in 2021 (<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/key-work-health-and-safety-statistics-australia-2022>).

OHS practitioners and professionals play a vital role in working to minimise fatalities and serious incidents. They do this by advising duty holders, including employers and workers, on practical solutions to minimise health and safety risks to workers.

To this end, section 22 (2) (b) of the Victorian OHS Regulations (2017) requires that employers must “employ or engage persons who are suitably qualified in relation to occupational health and safety to provide advice to the employer concerning the health and safety of employees of the employer” (<https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-10/04-107aa043%20authorised.pdf>).

WorkSafe Victoria articulate their position on this issue in their guideline *Employing or engaging suitably qualified persons to provide health and safety advice* ([https://content-v2.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/ISBN-Employing-or-engaging-suitably-qualified-persons-to-provide-health-and-safety-advice-2008-10.pdf](https://content.v2.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/ISBN-Employing-or-engaging-suitably-qualified-persons-to-provide-health-and-safety-advice-2008-10.pdf)). This position includes “membership of a professional association”.

The Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) has developed extensive guidance for Australian and other government agencies to deliver infrastructure projects (<https://www.fsc.gov.au/useful-documents-downloads?s=Model%20Client#s>). Under the label of “model client”, this work was completed in 2007 through the assistance of construction OHS academics at Melbourne’s RMIT University.

In Victoria, the “Big Build” infrastructure program has been an exemplar of this approach. Led by the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA) (<https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/about/mtia>), the MTIA advocates for an active client approach in delivering road and rail projects across Victoria. This approach has resulted in millions of work hours being completed to deliver billions of dollars worth of infrastructure with superior OHS outcomes. Whilst serious incidents have occurred, the rate of harm sustained by project workers is lower when compared to other parts of the construction industry. An example of this approach can be seen in their Major Infrastructure Safety Hub (<https://www.mish.vic.gov.au/>).

There are numerous benefits to the model, as per RMIT Distinguished Professor Helen Lingard: “*The model acknowledges the important role that clients can play in setting work health and safety performance expectations, selecting contractors with appropriate health and safety capability and working with them to ensure that work health and safety are well managed across the program of work. In particular, the model enables the sharing of lessons between contractors working on different parts of the transport infrastructure construction program. This is a departure from traditional client behaviour, in which workers’ health and safety was treated exclusively as a matter for contractors, with little involvement or input from the client.*” (<https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/all-news/2019/dec/delivering-major-infrastructure-projects-safely>).

Whilst Infrastructure Victoria are tasked with focusing on identifying the ‘what’, ‘where’, and ‘when’ of Victoria’s infrastructure needs, and not so much the ‘how’, we implore the agency to consider incorporating OHS aspects of project delivery into the development of the 30-year strategy. For

example, what skills needs will accompany these projects? What education, qualifications, and capabilities will professionals responsible for managing risks be required to hold?

Due to the pandemic and other factors, the OHS profession is in a generational recruitment and growth phase (https://www.linkedin.com/posts/the-safe-step_the-safe-step-hse-job-market-report-may-activity-7069201230320824320-i1gt?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop).

Future infrastructure projects must more strategically consider the workforce capabilities and risk management support and expertise required to deliver assets to standards expected by the Victorian community. This means projects delivered on time, on budget, and to the required specifications and quality, with minimal impacts to the environment and worker and other project stakeholder health and safety.

Key points

We submit:

- The construction industry continues to experience skilled labour shortages and challenges; this extends to OHS practitioners and professionals
- The construction industry continues to experience poor OHS outcomes relative to other industries
- The planning, design, and procurement of infrastructure projects by state and private clients plays a critical role in 'downstream' construction OHS outcomes
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Should you wish to contact us to discuss any of the points raised above further, please do so via

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We thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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