Final report

Gender Diversity & Inclusivity within the Australian Red Meat Industry

Project code: V.MFS.0017

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Date published: 28 July 2026

PUBLISHED BY
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited
PO Box 1961
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Abstract

An assessment of the current Australian workforce landscape highlights key gaps and systemic barriers, providing context for MLA to consider the extent of gender diversity within the Australian red meat industry. This project synthesises evidence derived from a desktop review and stakeholder interviews to examine workforce metrics and, where quantifiable, benchmark these against comparable industries. The report outlines five priority areas for targeted investment—data collection, professional networks, leadership development, skills and retention, and cultural capability—offering a framework of opportunities that align with MLA's Strategic Plan 2030 - Investing in Our People focus area - to support a more inclusive and sustainable workforce with strengthened industry capability, community engagement, and participation that can better drive innovation and performance.

Executive summary

A key consideration facing the Australian red meat industry is a lack of comprehensive industry-wide evidential reports to assess gender diversity across the red meat value chain, limiting understanding of workforce participation, representation, barriers and opportunities. This project aimed to consolidate current evidence, benchmark the industry against comparable sectors and identify opportunities for future investment aligned with MLA's Strategic Plan 2030 objectives.

The project employed a mixed-methods approach that included a desktop review, stakeholder interviews and an integrative analysis. Findings from industry reports, workforce datasets and academic literature were largely consistent with stakeholder perspectives, providing a robust evidence base for assessing gender diversity across the sector.

The review found that significant progress has been made in attracting women into entry-level and operational roles across the red meat industry. Industry programs, professional networks and mentoring initiatives are supporting greater participation and helping to build leadership capability among emerging female professionals. However, retention and career progression remain persistent challenges. Women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions and industry data indicate that the sector lags to comparable industries on measures such as leadership representation, pay equity and the implementation of workplace practices that support gender inclusion.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted the importance of flexible work arrangements, career development pathways and supportive workplace cultures in retaining women within the industry. Quantitative evidence reinforced these findings, suggesting that organisational structures, workplace practices and cultural perceptions continue to influence participation and advancement outcomes. While recent Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reporting requirements provide an opportunity to strengthen evidence and accountability, industry-wide data remain fragmented and incomplete.

A central finding of the project is that the industry currently lacks a coordinated mechanism to measure progress on gender diversity over time. Establishing a consistent industry-wide evidence base, including agreed metrics and monitoring processes, would provide the foundation for identifying priority issues, evaluating progress and targeting future investments more effectively.

Closing the evidence, coordination and implementation gaps identified in this project has the potential to deliver significant industry benefits. Greater gender diversity can expand the available talent pool, reduce workforce shortages, strengthen leadership pipelines, lower the costs associated with employee turnover and enhance the industry's reputation with consumers, communities and supply-chain partners. Ultimately, improving gender inclusion is not only an equity issue but also a strategic workforce and productivity imperative that supports the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the Australian red meat industry.

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1 Background

Figure 1. MLA Strategic Plan



Source: BGA Work Product, from MLA

Addressing gaps in inclusion and diversity aligns with the objectives of MLA's 2030 Strategic Plan (see Fig. 1), particularly its focus on strengthening industry capability, community engagement, and workforce participation.

Gender diversity across the value chain is an important element of these priorities. As of February 2026, Jobs and Skills Australia estimates that the red meat sectors (sheep, beef cattle & grain farming, and meat & meat product manufacturing) account for approximately 57% of the employment in the agriculture, forestry & fishing sector. Additionally, MLA's 2025 State of the Industry Report estimates the red meat industry generates 264,760 indirect jobs across Australia. However, there is limited data on detailed workforce composition within the red meat industry, which in turn, limits the understanding of current gender representation, barriers, gaps, opportunities and how the industry compares to other sectors. As such, this project responds directly to the identified investment gaps by providing consolidated evidence to understand the current state of gender diversity across the red meat value chain, and to inform possible investment options consistent within MLA's Investing in our People focus area.

The remainder of this report is organised as follows:

- Project objectives
- Methodology
- Results, including current overview, existing data and benchmarks, barriers, gaps, and opportunities for investment.

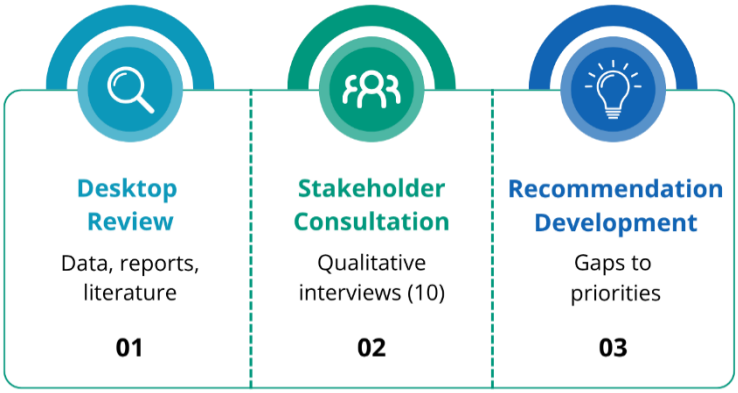
2 Objectives

This project aimed to consolidate current evidence on gender participation, engagement and inclusivity across the Australian red meat industry, with a particular focus on on-farm production (noting Australian Meat Processor Corporation leads the R&D initiatives for the processing sector in terms of attraction, retention, and research options for inclusion of diverse employees). The review benchmarks the sector against comparable Australian industries, identifies gaps in workforce data and capability and provides investment recommendations to advance MLA's Strategic Plan 2030 goals. The work establishes the case for a coordinated, industry-wide response under MLA's Investing in our People focus area.

3 Methodology

We combined different sources of evidence over three stages to develop this report, including quantitative and qualitative data that was gathered through a desktop reviews and stakeholder consultation and then integrated to develop recommendations (See Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Methodology Process



Stage1: Desktop Review

The first stage of the project sought to create a clear evidence base by reviewing existing industry reports relevant to the red meat industry and agriculture sectors as well as workforce and government datasets. This review also builds on findings from commissioned gender-related research, such as studies supported by the Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC) and Meat Business Women (MBW). In addition to other industry reports, data was also integrated from the following agencies:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census
- Jobs and Skills Australia
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency Australia (WGEA) annual industry and employer survey data.

Benchmarking against other industries is then complemented by additional scholarship to situate the Australian red meat and livestock industry globally with regards to gender barriers and advances.

Stage 2: Stakeholder Consultation

Qualitative surveys were conducted as a second stage of the research to complement data gathered from the desktop review by capturing contextually rich nuances. We conducted hour-long interviews online with ten professionals from the meat and livestock industry specifically as well as those employed in the broader agricultural sector. These interviews were designed to focus on lived experience and to document perceptions of the current state of gender equity as compared to changes experienced over time. Respondents also offered feedback on specific barriers and opportunities to illuminate themes that were captured in the desktop review. The eight women and two men who were interviewed shared experiences that spanned various geographies, including Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Some grew up on family farms and had expertise working in sheep, cattle, and dairy production systems. Others offered expertise gained working as consultants, advocates, researchers, processors and exporters in the red meat industry specifically and agriculture more broadly. Educational and professional backgrounds included agronomy, genetics, trade, finances, business, sales, ag tech and educational program delivery. As such, their combined feedback offered a whole-of-supply-chain perspective. Considering

the small study sample, findings from the interviews cannot be considered representative or generalizable. However, the rich qualitative data reveal attitudes and experiences that deepen our understanding of the patterns observed in the quantitative analysis, many of which warrant further investigation. By integrating qualitative narratives with quantitative data, this report reveals the reasons behind the statistics to create a more holistic picture of gender inclusion.

Stage 3: Recommendation Development

Inputs and findings from the first two stages were then evaluated by assessing gaps and barriers in light of stakeholder suggestions and insights gleaned from comparable industry case studies to formulate a set of investment recommendations.

4 Results

The following sections summarise key findings from the literature review, data assessments and stakeholder interviews, including analysis and implications.

4.1 Current gender-related initiatives in agriculture overview

Gender inclusivity and diversity work **specific to Australian red meat** is largely led by the non-for-profit organisation MBW. In 2023 they published the Global Gender Representation Report, which gives a progress statement for gender representation across the global meat industry. Overall, the report highlighted both progress across the different priorities and areas where the red meat industry lags behind others. Findings show that 53% of respondents believe that "inclusion" has moved up in the agenda, with 72% of respondents identifying proactive leadership for equality initiatives as a key driver for change. On the opportunity side, the report highlighted the need to address career pathways, strengthen networks and create role models. Several organisations (including MLA) are signatories of MBW's Food Business Charter, which aims to achieve a 40% female representation across the food industry by 2035.

MBW have also developed the 2026 Global Gender Research Report to update findings from employee and leadership perspectives across red meat production. The updated report highlights the consistent link between gender-balanced organisations and financial outcome improvement, positioning gender inclusion as a core competitiveness, productivity and resilience imperative rather than simply a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) priority. Priority areas identified include early and middle management, day-to-day operational practices, workplace flexibility and clear career pathways. Table 1 outlines key findings of the report.

Table 1. Key findings of the MBW 2026 Gender Representation in the Food Manufacturing Industry

Topic	Key Findings
Representation	In Australia and New Zealand, women account for 31% of employees in both food manufacturing and meat.
Widening gap in women's representation between leading organisations and laggers	Must be addressed via industry coordination. Women make up 46% of the workforce in and 40% of first-line managers in leading organisations, while composing 26% of the workforce and 25% of first-line managers in laggers. This widening gap limits attraction, development and retention of talent
Career progression	Career pipelines break early, where talented women drop off at the threshold of frontline management roles. Responses should focus on clear pathways, such as MBW's LaunchPad programme–an initiative

	delivered internally across MBW partner organisations involving practical workshops, internal role-model speakers and mentoring, to support women's progression into leadership roles.
Middle management gateways	Middle-management capability is a key enabler of gender inclusivity. Cultural and perceptive shifts need to be implemented by middle managers in day-today operations, such as operational language, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) fit, facilities, imagery and crew gender composition
Workplace flexibility	Workplace flexibility must work in practice and should be a priority, especially during child-rearing years. Women are 4 times as likely as men to see flexible working as a barrier, with 40% of women aged 26-45 identifying it as a challenge, yet only 11% of food manufacturing roles are part-time

Source: BGA work product based on MBW's 2026 Gender Representation in the Food Manufacturing Industry.

Beyond the work of MBW, several other initiatives across agricultural RDCs are promoting gender diversity research and programming. These efforts largely elevate the value of high-level corporate policy directives, data collection, training and networking events; see Table 2 for summary.

Table 2. Examples of gender-related work done by RDCs

RDC	Summary
MLA	• Set board level aims and objectives around gender diversity and quantitative metrics through their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy. • Established diversity and inclusion as a priority area for meat sector sustainability. • Implementation has encompassed efforts to align policies with gender inclusion objectives.
AMPC	• Released two literature reviews on inclusion for workforce retention, with subsections addressing gender-specific concerns. The papers establish focus metrics of actual and intended staff turnover, and identify various impactful factors and strategies to manage these. • The 2025 managing workforce diversity and inclusion report identified 10 key recommendations, some of which are applicable to gender. Themes included: career progression, professional development and leadership pathways, workplace communication, safety and flexibility in working conditions.
Australian Pork Limited (APL)	• Conducted gender diversity forums in 2021 to identify priority areas. APL subsequently committed to registering for MBW mentoring programs, along with reviewing maternity and paternity polices and including gender diversity on sector event agendas.
AgriFutures	• Conducted the *Workplace diversity: Women on Agriculture Boards* project in 2025 as a framework for coordinated action across governance, industry and policy settings to accelerate gender balance on agricultural boards. The project also aimed to deliver structured training, mentoring, and industry engagement to prepare women for leadership roles, such as the upcoming Networking Breakfast event for program alumni. • Funds the Rural Women's Award and the Rural Women's Acceleration Grant. This is supplemented by the Acceleration Grant, which provides funding for women who aren't quite ready to apply for the Award. Seven grants are awarded annually as learning and development bursaries of up to $7,000 each year. 35 grants have been awarded since the program started in 2022.

Source: BGA work product based on desktop research.

Broader efforts in the agriculture sector include:

- The **National Farmers Federation (NFF)**, in collaboration with various organisations including AgriFutures, the Grains Research & Development Corporation (GRDC) and the Australian Agricultural Company (AACo), runs the **Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program** (DiALP), an annual training initiative focused on preparing twelve selected participants for senior leadership. Since its inception in 2018, 89 program graduates have gone on to become industry leaders in varying capacity, such as CEOs, board members, and community advocates. While the meat industry has similar leadership programs, such as the MLA Ambassadors for the Red Meat Industry program and Cattle Australia's National Beef Leaders program, these are not gender specific. The demonstrated outcomes of DiALP highlight the value of targeted leadership development in addressing barriers to career progression, strengthening the pipeline of future female leaders, and improving representation in senior decision-making roles. This presents an opportunity for MLA to consider complementary investment in gender-specific leadership initiatives to support workforce capability, succession planning and long-term industry sustainability.
- In 2018, the **Queensland Farmers Federation** (QFF) conducted a study on female leadership in agriculture, composed of an online survey and five workshops engaging women from different agricultural sectors. The study identified financial insecurity as a key issue for farm businesswomen and QFF's Farm Businesswomen Working Group subsequently developed resources for family business transitions and planning to assist financial preparation amongst farm women. Ressia et al. (2022) used the survey data from this study to examine the structural and organisational barriers inhibiting female career progression.
- A key industry event for female participation is the annual Australian Women in Agriculture national conference, administrated by **Australian Women in Agriculture**. The three-day event brings together women across the agricultural sector, including farmers, industry leaders and community voices to build meaningful connections and participate in workshops and panel discussions.

Appendix 8.1 lists various efforts led by organisations across different industries in Australia.

4.2 National Policy Pillars and Accountability Guidelines

Commonwealth and state governmental agencies shape efforts with policies and directives that aim to increase opportunities for women in the Australian workforce.

4.2.1 National

Government agencies and policies at the Federal level offer frameworks to guide and enforce gender inclusivity in the workplace, a summary of recent developments is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Select agencies and policies

Agencies and Policies	Description
The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)	Major statutory agency enforcing disclosures for gender-related data, established by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012. In addition to data collection, the agency has established 19 targets (9 quantifiable and ten action-based). For more detail on these targets see Appendix 8.2.

Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Act 2025	Requires organisations with 500 or more employees to select and implement any three of the 19 WGEA equality targets. The associated instrument documents specify sub targets and adherence processes for each WGEA equality targets, e.g. employers that select Target 2 (gender composition of governing bodies) must specify the baseline and set specific percentage increases to meet the target.
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) Workforce Diversity and Inclusion in Agriculture	Sets a policy agenda and lists supporting services such as the Women's Leadership and Development Program grants and National Women's Alliances, although these are not specific to either red meat production or agriculture.
Australian Government's 2024 "Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality" report	The strategy is a decision-making tool that sets out action paths over the next ten years to progress five priority areas spanning violence, unpaid and paid care, economic equality and security, health, and representation in leadership positions
Gender equality in Australia's foreign policy	Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy delivered by The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The government also supports various initiatives for international gender equality such as the Southeast Asian Gender-Based Violence Prevention Platform, the UN Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence Prevention in Southeast Asia, and more. While this work is not focused on domestic industry, lessons can be drawn from cases of gender analysis and investments.
Portfolio Boards Register (PBR)	In 2024 DAFF established this to facilitate access to board positions and improve diversity and inclusion on government boards. The PBR allows people from diverse backgrounds, including women, to enter a digital candidate pool and stay informed of advertised board member opportunities.

4.2.2 International Development

Similarly, at international levels, the Australian government works in partnership with other countries to promote gender inclusivity in development programs (see Appendix 8.1). For example, recent work from the Australian National University's (ANU) Development Policy Centre (Kanan, 2025) identifies structural inequalities for pregnant women associated with **The Pacific Australian Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme**, a temporary migration program delivering jobs for workers from nine Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste while addressing Australian rural labour shortages. Unequal policies were found to include negative pregnancy tests as a participation requirement, poor access to sexual healthcare (increasing the likelihood of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and associated costs), and fear that job termination due to pregnancy will result in visa termination, since workers' legal status is tied to employers. Such analysis represents a useful case study for identification of structural biases in agricultural workforce systems.

The Framework for Gender-Responsive Livestock Development, developed in 2023 by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in collaboration with other organisations. The Framework can assist the livestock sector plan and implement gender-responsive policies and investments. The framework provides a list of recommendations for supporting gender-responsive research and livestock-related development projects, including the FAO's **"The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems"** publication.

Offering a wealth of information regarding gender equality and equity in agriculture with a focus on developing countries.

The Women's empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) provides metrics and tools that have been widely adopted by organisations globally. The Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI) is a livestock-specific adaptation, which includes the following six dimensions (Galiè et al., 2018):

(1) decisions about agricultural production;
(2) decisions related to nutrition;
(3) access to and control over resources;
(4) control and use of income;
(5) access to and control of opportunities; and
(6) workload and control over own time.

Other International policies focused on gender equality agriculture include New Zealand's **Agri-Women's Development Trust** which funds various leadership programmes, Canada's **AgriDiversity** program, **Agricultural Workforce Equity and Diversity Initiative (AWEDI)**, and the **Farm Credit Canada's Women Entrepreneur Program**, and Ireland's implementation of the EU's **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-27** objectives for participation of women in farming and accompanying Women in Farming Platform.

4.3 Workforce data

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census (and derived products like those published by Jobs and Skills Australia) and WGEA are the main sources for gender-specific data. AgriFutures led the "Mapping the workforce of Australian Agriculture" 2024 project, aiming to identify workforce datasets, data gaps, and existing projects or approaches that will improve workforce data. Several limitations and challenges were raised by the study, including:

- Data lacks specificity, in relation to the use of high-level grouping of industries and the lack of region-level data.
- Data fails to capture workforce nuances related to seasonal, casual, family member, migrant, or labour hiring. Issues were also documented for ownership and employment in mixed-farming enterprises since in the data, they are only accounted for in one sector.

The workforce for the red meat industry is dispersed across the value chain with individuals occupying different operating contexts. Overall, **the agriculture industry is male dominated** (Fig. 3). It is estimated that **32% of those employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry are women**. This share is higher (42%) in the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming industry and comparable to the 33% in meat & meat product manufacturing. The relatively higher female representation in sheep, beef cattle and grain farming compared with meat manufacturing highlights an important area for further investigation. Understanding whether this reflects family farming structures, traditional familial inheritance patterns, occupational differences or other workforce characteristics would help inform more targeted workforce and gender diversity initiatives across the red meat value chain.

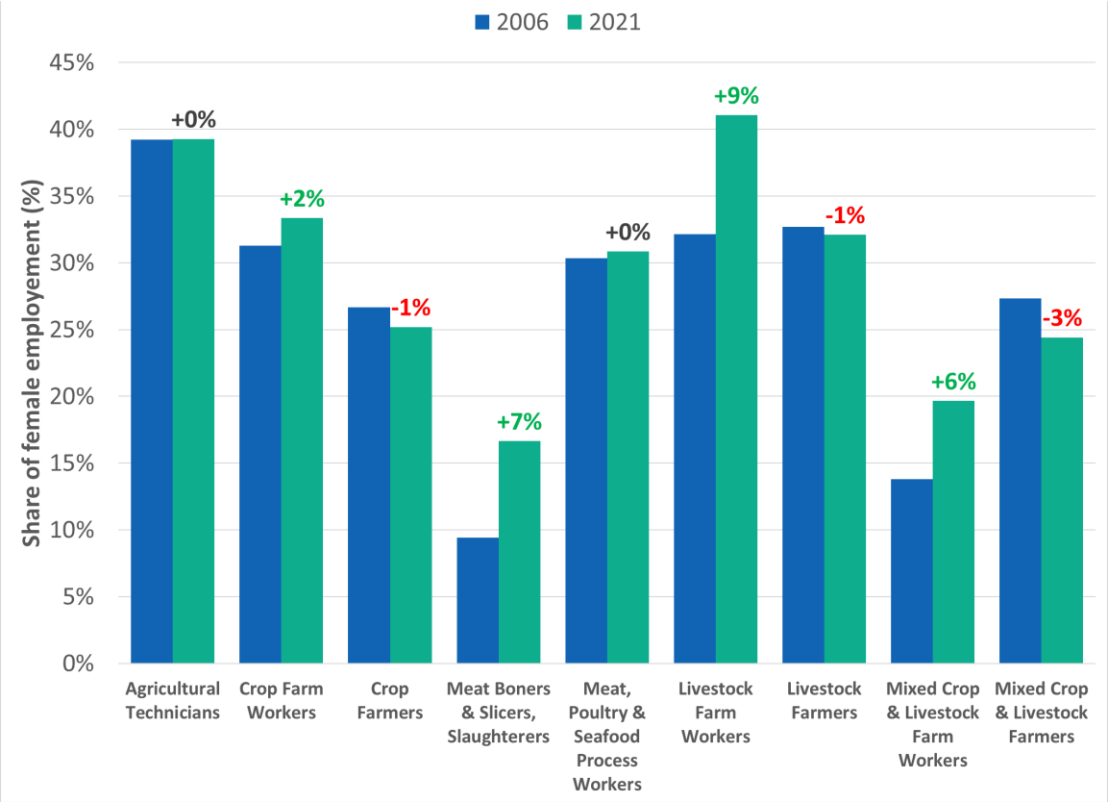
Figure 3. Industry Statistics

AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY & FISHING	SHEEP, BEEF CATTLE & GRAIN FARMING	MEAT & MEAT PRODUCT MANUFACTURING
32% women (292,200 employed)	***42% women*** (121,100 employed)	***33% women*** (46,400 employed)

Source: BGA Work Product from Jobs and Skills Australia based on ABS data (February 2026); 2024-25 WGEA survey data

Workforce composition data suggests a segmentation in roles, employment status and pay. Typically, it is more common for women to be involved in non-managerial roles such as labourers, clerical and administrative roles. According to the gender segregation intensity scale, between 2006 and 2021, among relevant meat industry occupations, farm workers and meat boners, slicers and slaughterers saw the highest women growth rates in the occupations. Fig. 4 illustrates the gender segregation intensity scale for meat and livestock related occupations. The scale considers an occupation to be gender balanced when the share of an occupation by one gender is less than 60%. As this share increases then they are classified as moderately (60-75%), highly (95-90%) and almost completely dominated (over 90%) by a given gender.

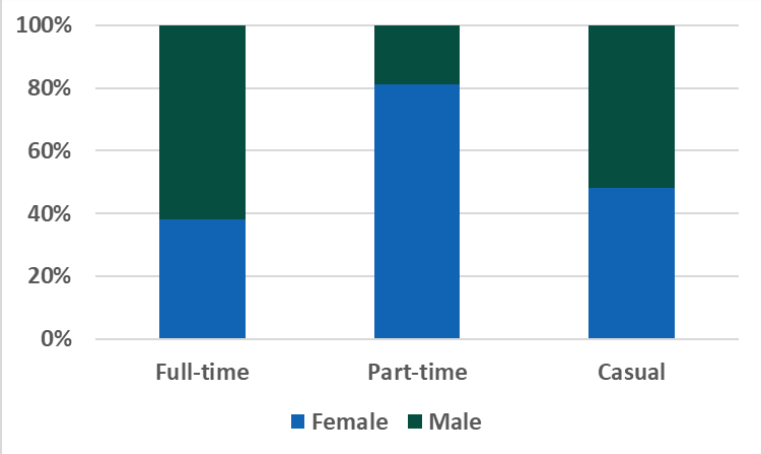
Figure 4. Gender Segregation Intensity Scale (2006 and 2021) for Select Occupations



Source: BGA work product based on Jobs and Skills Australia. **Note: Red and green percentages represent the percentage change in female share of employment from 2006 to 2021 per occupation.**

The data reflects that **a higher proportion of women are more often involved in part-time roles.** In 2024-25, 81% of *part-time* workers in sheep, beef cattle & grain farming were women. In contrast, 62% of *full-time* workers were men. Casuals were near to an even split (Fig. 5). This trend is different to the broader agriculture industry, where women accounted for 31% of full-time, 71% of part-time and 42% of casuals.

Figure 5. Composition by employment status



Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

Employee retention has been highlighted as an ongoing issue across the red meat industry. Estimates at processing plants from prior reports indicate an average employee turnover rate between 35% and 58% (AMPC, 2024; MLA, 2006), with 29% leaving during the first three months (AMPC, 2021). While there is limited evidence examining the drivers of this turnover, AMPC's 2022 Framework of Excellence for the meat processing industry (Glass et al., 2022) found that processing plant retention is most strongly correlated with company size, with larger plants reporting lower turnover– possibly due to established systems or better workload distribution– and concluded that the overuse of short-term employees (e.g. backpackers, seasonal or temporary migrant workers) degrades retention due to the large variation in pay rates and reduced efforts to develop employees.

4.4 Benchmarking agriculture against other industries

For cross-industry comparison to be insightful, it is important to identify industries that have similar structures. The industries chosen for this analysis – agriculture (broad sector), manufacturing, mining and construction – share similar characteristics such as: physical work, male dominated, strong regional and remote presence. The comparison aims to identify areas where the data indicates the red meat industry deviates relative to other industries.

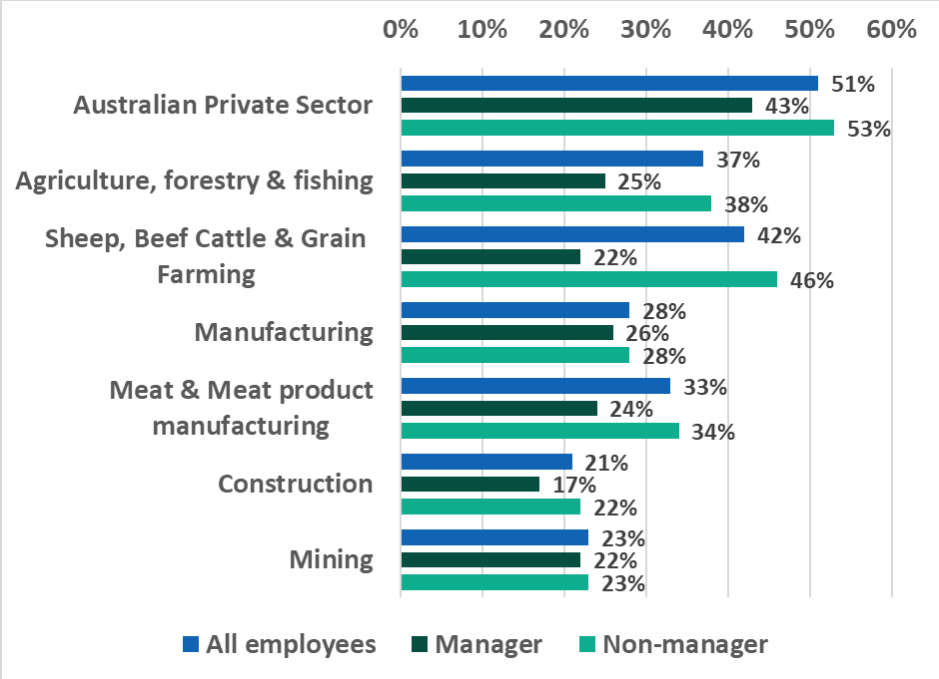
Table 4 . Proportion of women by industry

Industry	Employment	Female Share
Sheep, beef cattle & grain farming	**121,100**	**42%**
Manufacturing	868,100	30%
Construction	1,371,500	13%
Mining	314,500	20%

Source: BGA work product based on Jobs and Skills Australia based on ABS data (February 2026); 2024-25 WGEA survey data

Overall, the red meat industry workforce is more diverse than other industries. Manufacturing and mining in particular, continue being heavily male dominated industries (Table 4). Despite this higher proportion of women, data suggests that the red meat industry, especially on farming, is **lagging in women that are in managerial positions**; see Fig. 6.

Figure 6. Proportion of women by type of position



Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

Career progression is another reviewed aspect in the dataset. Data from 2024-25 shows that fewer women within the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming industry were promoted to managerial positions; only ahead of mining and construction (Table 5). This provides an indication of **women's careers** being **more likely to stall earlier**, limiting both individual progression and diversity of decision-making in leadership positions in the industry. This is further evidenced in the composition of governing bodies. In **2024-25, 81% of members in governing bodies in the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming sub-sector were men.** This is higher compared to the broader agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (76%) and the Australian private sector (66%).

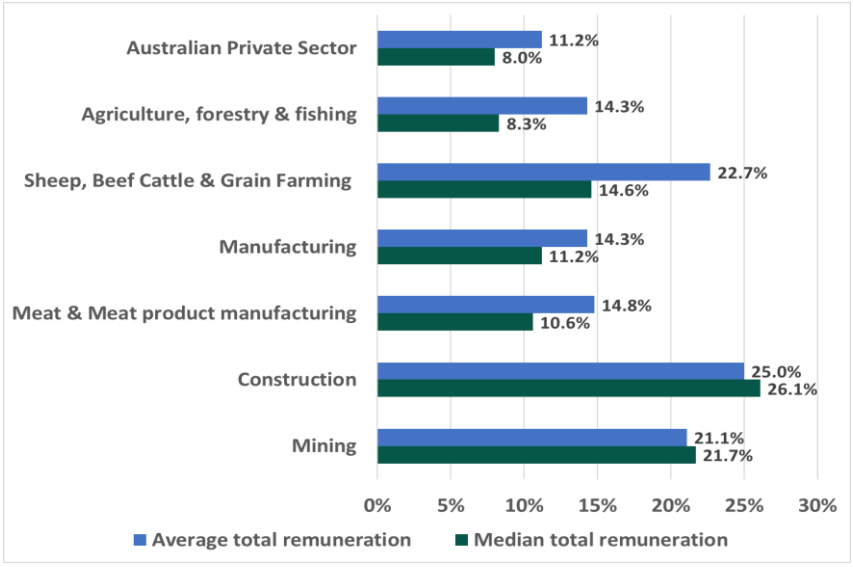
Table 5. Share of women promoted from non-manager to manager in 2024-25 by industry

Share of women promoted from non-manager to manager in 2024-25	
Australian Private Sector	50%
Manufacturing	34%
Meat & Meat product manufacturing	31%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	28%
Sheep, Beef Cattle & Grain Farming	27%
Mining	26%
Construction	17%

Source: BGA work product based on Jobs and Skills Australia (February 2026); 2024-25 WGEA survey data

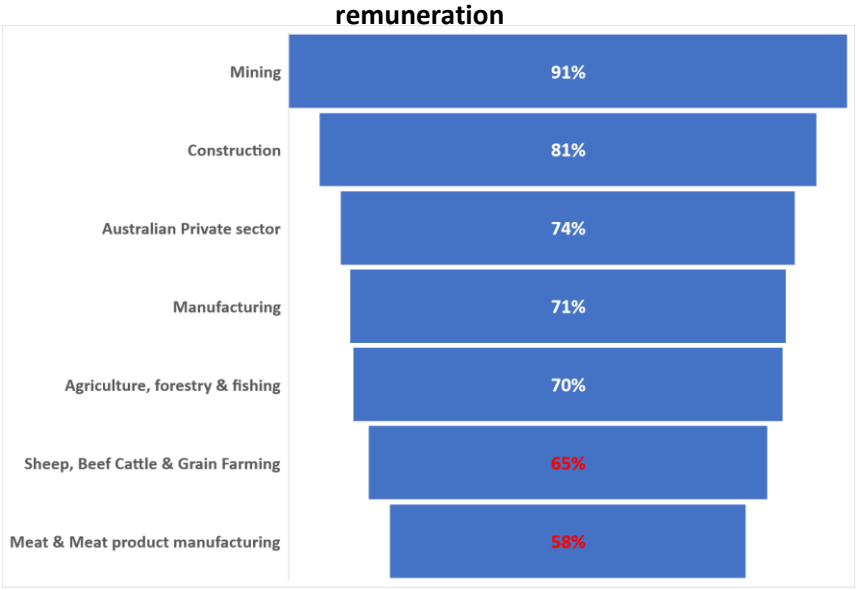
With regards to pay, industry-specific pay gap data for the red meat industry is not currently published as one consolidated figure. In 2024-25, the WGEA reported an average and median total mid-point remuneration gap of 22.7% and 14.6% for sheep, beef cattle & grain farming, respectively (Fig. 7). **This implies that, on average, women in the industry earn approximately 77 cents for every dollar that men earn**. On the other hand, in the meat & meat product manufacturing sector women, on average, earn 85 cents for every dollar men earn. Overall, of the reviewed industries, mining, construction and sheep, beef cattle & grain farming were the only where the average gap is over 20%. Gaps in the other industries ranged between 11% and 15%.

Figure 7. Reported mid-point pay gaps in 2024-25



Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

Figure 8. Share of Employers with a formal policy on equal remuneration

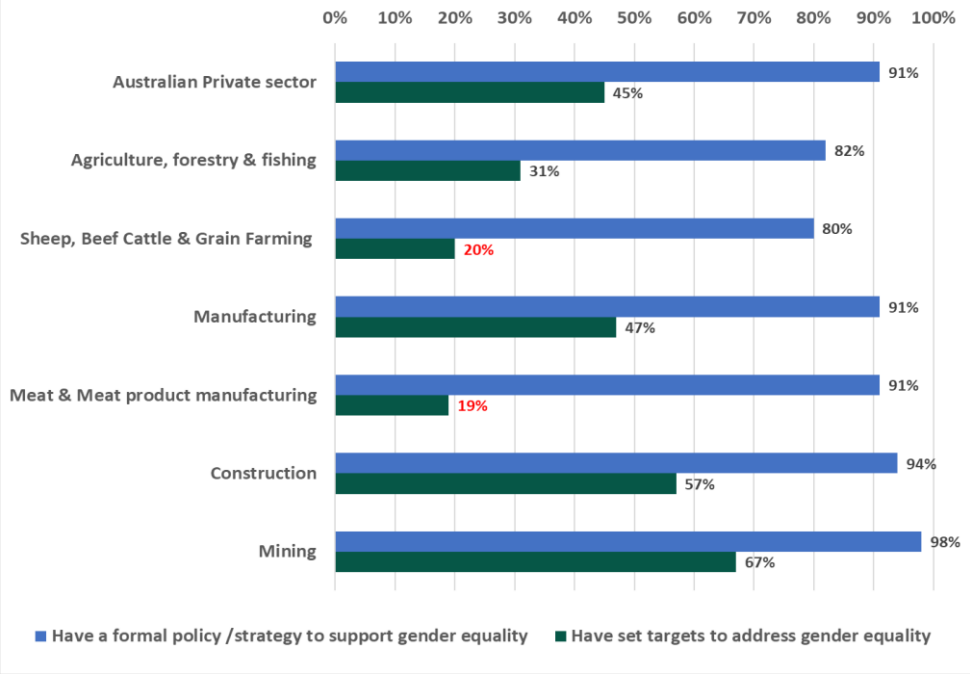


Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

WGEA data also provides an indication of where employers in the red meat industry are at in relation to gender policies and strategies. Overall, the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming is behind other industries in these areas, validating perceptions that efforts in the industry tend to be under-prioritised. For instance, sheep, beef cattle & grain farming, and meat & meat product manufacturing had the lowest share of employers with a formal policy on equal remuneration (Fig. 8).

A common trend is for the vast majority to **have formal policies that support gender equality, but fail to set targets**. Specifically, only 20% of employers in the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming, and 19% of the meat & meat product manufacturing sub-sectors have set targets to address gender equality, which is far lower than 31%-67% seen in other industries (Fig. 9).

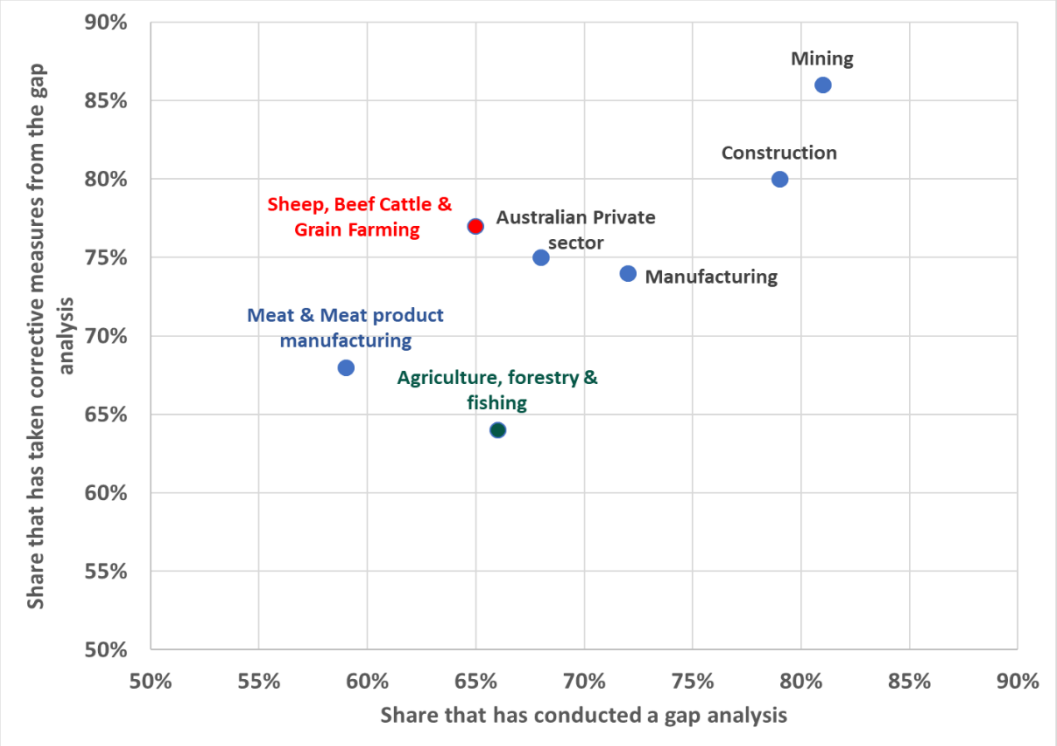
Figure 9. Share of Employers with formal strategy to support gender equality and have set targets



Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

Our review suggests that **gender gap analyses have become more common in the past 12 months**. Around two-thirds of employers have conducted one and its frequent that most took corrective actions as a result of the analysis (Fig. 10), the most common measure being adjustments in unequal pay. However, findings suggest that **agriculture is behind other industries in conducting gender pay gap analysis**. Although the share of large employers in the sheep, beef cattle & grain farming sector that have taken corrective measure align with the employers in broader private sectors, they are still lag behind industries like construction and mining.

Figure 10. Share of employers who have conducted a gender gap analysis and took corrective measures

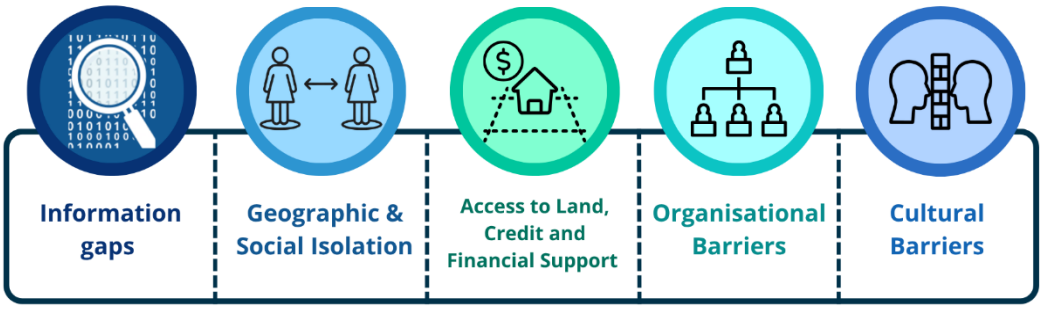


Source: BGA work product based on WGEA 2024-25 Industry Data.

4.5 Gaps and barriers

Following the desktop review and industry benchmarking, a gap analysis was conducted through an in-depth appraisal of the literature. Sources support findings across five emerging themes covering different aspects of female representation and engagement in the workforce, visualised in Fig. 11. Identified gaps include

Figure 11. Identified Gaps and Barriers to Women's Engagement in Red Meat Production



Source: BGA Work Product

- **Information gaps:** The lack of red meat-specific workforce data is a broad barrier to understanding and addressing gender diversity. Gaps in data limit understanding of workforce and labour dynamics in red meat production as workforce publications from the ABS and ABARES are mostly generalised to the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry.

- **Geographic and social isolation:** Geographic and social isolation can be a structural barrier that limit women's access to the networks, mentoring and decision-making connections through which career opportunities and leadership pathways typically flow. Such social isolation may limit professional development.

- **Disparity in access to land, credit and financial support:** Gender-related inequities in land succession, credit access and financial capital limit women's ownership and decision-making authority across the industry. Specifically, lack of formal governance systems may entrench traditional land succession patterns.

- **Organisational barriers:** Workplace policies and practices related to recruitment, hiring and retention limit entry and progression across the red meat industry value chain, with evidence suggesting that careers stall early. Lack of targeted training in governance, risk management and strategic leadership is a barrier for women's professional development.

- **Cultural barriers:** Gendered stereotypes and a failure to recognise and value - women's roles in agriculture limit entry and progression across the red meat industry value chain, with evidence suggesting that the industry continues to be perceived as somewhat constrained by outdated gender norms.

Stakeholder engagement was used to validate and complement desktop findings, and additional stakeholder insights regarding perceived changes and barriers are presented in Section 4.5.

4.5.1 Information gaps in gender analysis

Consolidated gender data for the meat and livestock industry is not currently available. Data is granular at high-level industry groupings, which limits understanding of employment trends and challenges by location. For instance, data may poorly capture some employment trends like seasonal workers, multi-industry labour and for agriculture in particular, unrecorded, unpaid labour propagates exclusion of women from economic and career returns despite vital role in family enterprise. Although, WGEA provides a starting point, these datasets only include larger employers who are required to report this information. Therefore, the practices of small and medium sized farmers are not being counted.

> Lack of external recognition as farmers has been seen in the QLD agricultural chain, such as a male truck driver assuming a female survey respondent could not handle the task of loading cattle, suggesting to "get a better husband" (Ressia et al., 2022).

Additionally, literature suggests that the lack of recognition (public and self) of women as farmers is a common theme, which increases the likelihood of them not being captured as such in existing datasets. This limitation is particularly significant when analysing workforce gender composition, as women disproportionately undertake unpaid reproductive labour that is essential to the functioning of family farm enterprises; however, this form of labour remains especially difficult to capture and quantify (Newsome and Miller, 2025). Furthermore, unpaid labour is especially important for Australian beef, as 2016 DAFF data suggests that owner-operators and unpaid family workers outnumbered employees three to one (DAFF, 2024). Additional concerns with existing datasets are the lack of granularity of data, especially in small geographical areas; agriculture being

> *Women have always been in ag. They just have not always been counted in the census* – BGA Interview respondent

underrepresented due to focus on primary occupation only, which would potentially exclude part-time, seasonal and multiple jobs; and lack of attraction and retention data.

4.5.2 Geographic Barriers & Social Isolation

4.5.2.1 Large, Isolated Properties

Australian farmers often live, work and raise children on large, isolated properties hundreds of kilometres from other properties. Such geographic isolation can exacerbate exclusion from professional networks, amplify under recognition, and limit access to leadership and training programs for women. For example, remote support roles attached to male station managers can restrict women's career progression, especially for executive level positions. Research from Queensland investigating barriers to leadership roles for women using 2018 survey results found that such isolation, especially in the livestock industry, may restrict participation in decision-making processes and limit access to information (Ressia et al., 2022). Unreliable digital technology has been found to exacerbate isolation by restricting communication and access to digital networking.

4.5.2.2 Limited Access to Social Networks

Women's engagement in red meat production may be constrained by the absence of, or limited access to, social and professional networks. Stakeholder engagement found that trust and business networks are often formed in male dominated spaces, limiting women's networking, participation, and career advancement, especially moving from middle management to senior positions. This is especially pertinent where women's representation and role models are absent on boards and in leadership, limiting mentorship opportunities. While industry networking events for women have been conducted to address this, many programs consist of one-off events rather than embedded networks with ongoing operational benefits, and connections often end after the course finishes.

4.5.3 Disparity in Access to Land, Credit and Financial Support

Industries with highest median age

1. Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing – 51
2. Manufacturing – 43
3. Transport, Postal & Warehousing – 43
4. Wholesale Trade – 43
5. Education & Training – 42

Succession planning is an important area to assess given that the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry has the highest median age of any sector in Australia, alongside a predominance of family-owned structures. Access to land is an important determinant of economic security in Australia, increasingly more so than education or employment (Adkins et al., 2019). The success of the business often depends on keeping the farm intact during succession, with one (usually male) successor (Newsome and Miller, 2025). Informal farm governance likely propagates male-line succession, primarily through father-son grooming practices, where sons, rather than daughters, are preparatorily incorporated into farm work from an early age (Alsgaard, 2012). This finding suggests that an increased presence of women in decision-making roles may enhance on-farm governance practices. International literature tells a similar story. Evidence from France suggests female farm entrepreneurs may be pushed towards smaller, less capital-intensive short supply chain (SCC) operations due to exclusion from predominantly male land transmissions (Tourtelier et al., 2023). In the US, farm size and land value are negatively correlated with the share of female farm

"I was caught in the era of draconian wills. Even though I am the best suited to inherit the farm because of my skillset, my brother got it." - BGA Interview respondent

owners, potentially reflecting challenges accessing credit in this context (Schmidt, Goetz and Tian, 2021; Fontanella, 2025).

4.5.4 Organisational Barriers

4.5.4.1 Recruitment, Hiring, and Appointment Biases

> *We see the amount of talent women can bring. If you are sorting based on gender, you have lost half the talent pool.* - BGA Interview respondent

Women's share of the global red meat production workforce is lowest in executive management and in first-line operational managers, as opposed to middle managers and skilled/unskilled labour (MBW, 2023). According to results from the AgriFutures Women on Agriculture Boards (WOAB) project, there is systemic bias in recruitment and appointment processes for high level agricultural positions favouring traditional candidates. While data specifically for red meat production is scarce, findings from Australian red meat processing links perceived gender equity in recruitment, training, and career advancement with improved employee well-being, optimism, and job satisfaction (AMPC, 2024), demonstrating the importance of unbiased recruitment for employee outcomes.

4.5.4.2 Insufficient Organisational Safeguards

Additionally, organisational barriers emerge related to women's role in reproductive labour when childcare services and flexible working conditions are insufficient. Flexible working has been ranked as the number one enabler of gender inclusion in the red meat industry despite male managers being significantly more likely to work from the office. However, flexibility is often driven by individual site leader preferences and poorly managed hybrid working can damage women's career prospects, with exclusion reported by 40% of women aged between 26 and 45 in hybrid environments (MBW Gender Representation Report, 2026.

Overcommitment to managing both work and home responsibilities has also been found to restrict leadership opportunities and impact mental and physical health for Australian farmers who are women (Ressia et al., 2022).

> Businesses reported losing women from production roles during COVID-19 due to the choice between working and childcare, with childcare cost often exceeding wages for the lower paid (MBW Gender Representation Report, 2023).

Organisational challenges are amplified for women from underrepresented backgrounds across agriculture. The AgriFutures WOAB project acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, youth, and culturally and linguistically diverse women are especially prone to underrepresentation or disadvantage, and aims to promote their inclusion. However, research on the intersection between gender and other types of diversity in Australian agriculture is sparse, reflecting a significant research gap.

4.5.4.3 Lack of accessible, targeted professional development

The lack of female representation in higher skilled labour is especially prominent in the Australian red meat industry, with women representing 22% of managerial roles in beef, sheep and grain farming and representing only 21% of high-skill agricultural employment (DAFF, 2022). These skill disparities in conventional livestocking have been attributed to:

- Deficits in targeted professional development opportunities
- Lack of financial support for development
- Poor access to information dissemination services (Ressia et al., 2022)
- Shifts away from owner-manager to high-skilled employment

4.5.4.4 Unequal pay

In 2024-25, WGEA data shows an average mid-point remuneration gap of 22.7% and 14.3% for sheep, beef cattle & grain farming, and meat & meat product manufacturing, respectively. This implies that, on average, women in the industry earn 77-85 cents for every dollar that men earn. However, evidence shows higher concentration of women in entry-level positions across the red meat sector, and underrepresentation in supervisory and management roles. Promotion of women into management positions can combat this, although evidence suggests that female managers must reach relatively high status in order to create organisational change (Cohen and Huffman, 2007). Furthermore, motherhood has been strongly linked to wage drops across academic literature, dubbed the "motherhood penalty" (Kleven, Landais and Søgaard, 2018). These gendered pay disparities likely exist in the red meat sector, and thus represent a barrier to women's engagement.

4.5.5 Cultural Barriers

4.5.5.1 Stereotypes Hide the Value of Women's Contributions

> *The biggest change I have seen is women identifying as 'the farmer'*
> - BGA Interview respondent

Industry stereotypes, culture, and negative perceptions may be deterring female participation, especially in large-scale commodity operations. For example, weak external recognition as farmers combined with low self-identification as farmers. While women are seen as culturally important members of family farming enterprises, female roles may be associated with unpaid reproductive labour and farm assistance rather than occupying the label of "farmers" (Newsome and Miller, 2025). Women are also more likely to experience being mistaken for a junior colleague, having their judgment questioned, having a co-worker get credit for their idea, and sexual harassment, according to the 2023 Global Gender Representation Report (MBW Gender Representation Report, 2023).

4.5.5.2 A lack of recognition limits involvement

> Evidence from red meat processing shows female employees experience lower psychological well-being and higher job-related stress compared to males, and negative perceptions around physical labour, limited flexibility in work arrangements for workers with caring responsibilities, and hazard may limit female recruitment (AMPC, 2024).

Themes of recognition are more salient when recognising the male-dominated culture that can prevail in agricultural organisations, with women encountering stereotyped masculine concepts of farming, where farming sectors existing in a hierarchy of authenticity based on the prevalence of hard labour and heavy machinery. Such gender stereotyping becomes a major barrier to female involvement in leadership and decision-making positions when women's voices and ideas are not always validated, especially in a predominantly male group. Downstream meat processing may also harbor workplace culture that "polices" a narrow set of masculine norms (Bryant & Jaworski, 2012).

4.6 Stakeholder insights

Stakeholder feedback that was gathered during interviews focussed on respondents lived experience of gender inclusivity in the workplace. Most findings align well to our desktop analysis. These findings are based on a small sample of participants and as such, further, more extensive consultation is recommended to validate and build on these insights. Respondents have noticed changes in gender balance in their workplaces over their careers. They offered examples of how they have witnessed and experienced key barriers. Respondents frequently mentioned the benefits of gender-related leadership programs and network building across agriculture.

4.6.1 Gender balance in the industry has shifted over time

All interview respondents mention the significant progress that has been made over the past few decades relative to gender inclusivity in agriculture, broadly - and more specifically - in the red meat and livestock industry. Respondents note major shifts in **workforce composition**, with women now highly represented at early career stages. Gender representation has improved in early career and Research and Development (R&D) roles, largely due to increased female university intake. Achieving balance depends partly on the **talent pipeline**; as more women enter relevant education and early career stages, leadership diversity is expected to improve over time.

Social media and visibility of women's achievements in the industry are also helping shift perceptions and attract more women. Respondents point to far greater visibility and recognition of women in agriculture, with **more women identifying as farmers** and higher engagement in ag tech, advisory, and business roles. Women's unique skills (attention to detail, data management, people management, compassion) are increasingly valued in operational and managerial roles. **Pay equity is structurally improving** due to competency-based agreements and side-by-side gap reviews of salaries to assess parity.

A more globally aware, younger generation is expected to further drive equity. Younger generations (both men and women) display less gender bias and are more accustomed to working in diverse teams, especially through mixed-gender training programs and stock camps. Societal expectations have changed with **younger generations having higher expectations** around workplace behaviour and are less willing to accept poor workplace culture. "Young women see what older women have had to put up with to achieve and they say – I don't want to have to put up with that!"

Respondents note an increased awareness of the **value of diversity** and different leadership styles, with growing recognition that diverse teams drive better business outcomes. "The more diversity they have around day-to-day operations, the more likely they are to succeed." This perspective is supported by findings that positive diversity and inclusive workplace environments can reduce turnover intentions and improve employee performance (AMPC, 2024), although these findings are not agriculture-specific.

4.6.2 Roles and gender inclusivity vary along the value chain

Women are increasingly visible across the supply chain and are taking up roles in areas such as stockyard, supply chain management, customer relations, sales, board positions, and advisory roles. A respondent with experience in the stockyard **experienced a** significant **increase in**

> *Back in 1992 we saw very few women in the camps on station and those who were there served as cooks or domestics, occupying traditional gender-based roles. -* BGA Interview respondent

women applying for entry-level roles in corporate agriculture (from very few in the 1990s to about 70% of applicants now). She noted that over time, more women entered the industry through university and early career roles. Several other respondents corroborated that observation commenting that at the **station level, businesses and production operations are doing well recruiting young women** into junior roles. Pathways and opportunities depend on roles opening up. "Changes happen as opportunities and pathways open up and women get into the business."

Historically, **physical demands on-farm** were viewed as a barrier, but advances in technology and equipment have largely removed this obstacle. As one respondent said: "There is nothing women can't do now!" Physical barriers are being overcome through **structural accommodations,** such as modified smaller motorbikes. Respondents pointed out that **mechanisation, automation, practice changes** and other technologies are impacting the industry significantly to reduce some of the traditional physical barriers that often limit women's roles along the value chain. Workplace safety regulations and workplace expectations are also supporting better practices. Therefore, MLA investments in innovative technology improve efficiencies and safety, but also access.

> *Some employers may assume men are better suited to heavy work or that farming is "dirty work" which woman prefer not to do.* - BGA Interview

For certain roles, such as **station managers that are "partnered"** traditional societal and industry expectations still favour men as leaders. "There is a lot pinned on the man and we still see the woman as a 'plus 1' – a significant other or accessory. One respondent noted that many women in agriculture sacrifice executive careers to support their partner's pastoral career progression. The "glass ceiling" remains for women moving from middle to senior management, often compounded by lack of role models at the executive level. "When they get to mid management, they tend to resign or follow the male." Although there is a preference for men in leadership and contractual roles, owners often choose to contract with men who involve their partners, implicitly recognising the essential contributions women make to management. However, these **contributions are rarely formalised in contracts or benefit structures.** This highlights a significant **gap between women's actual involvement and the formal acknowledgment and protection of their work.**

The **processing sector** faces various challenges. Respondents noted a stigma, including perceptions that it is dirty work or mainly "jobs for the boys." Another problem is "a lack of role models. So, women are not seeing other females to aspire to those roles." Despite these limitations, a respondent noted that women are said to possibly be more suited to roles in meat processing because they tend to "leave less waste on the bone" and are "more detail oriented" in meat packing. Respondents noted that there are many career opportunities in processing beyond traditional labour roles, including science, food technology, veterinary roles, engineering, and accounting. Nowadays, data driven roles are often going to women.

Similarly, a respondent noted that **sales and international trade roles** tend to remain male-dominated due to entrenched social cultures and relationship dynamics. Despite stereotypical limitations, customer expectations are beginning to influence change, increasingly expecting respectful workplace cultures.

Respondents notice an increase in women holding **executive, board, and advisory roles** in organisations like Sheep Australia and MLA, as well as those people leading investment funds from the US and UK, an observation supported by the WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2024-25 Report, which found the percentage of women holding governing body Chairs in agricultural increased from 4% in 2023-24 to 14% in 2024-25. Systematic data collection could further investigate the veracity of these claims.

4.6.3 Structural gaps, undervalued female contributions and gender stereotypes remain significant barriers

Several respondents emphasised the challenges associated with women not being counted or valued as farmers historically, despite making key contributions to both farm operations and business management. Women still do a **large amount of unpaid work** in family businesses, including administration, bookkeeping and coordination. Old-school attitudes and gender stereotypes remain barriers, including assumptions about women's caregiving roles and what work is suitable for women One respondent said: "The roles [for women] have changed, but leadership still thinks they are the same as 15 years ago."

Respondents shared dissatisfaction with unequal pay rates. As a result, imposter syndrome is common among women working in the agricultural sector. When asked what could help women develop greater self-confidence in the workplace, one respondent answered, "Equal pay! You want to feel that you are valued just as much as your male colleagues … it was easier for me to push for professional development programs than to get a pay raise."

> *It is about being valued…I deal with the smartest women, but they don't think they have worth.* - BGA Interview respondent

The majority of respondents emphasised that lower confidence and self-doubt among some women impacts their careers in job application and promotions, often waiting until they meet nearly all criteria while men apply with less. They also described women overworking to prove themselves without equal recognition, and struggling to own their achievements rather than feeling merely grateful for them "I find myself thanking my boss for giving me the opportunity even though I know I have worked so hard to get here." This is compounded by cultural norms and fear of being labelled too assertive.

Involving men as champions and advocates for gender inclusivity is viewed as critical. For instance, "Women are very good at advocating for themselves, but until we get men advocating for women, nothing's going to change." This is especially true among those men in leadership positions who are well-positioned to model change. As another respondent said, "The culture is built from the top in organisations. The workplace tends to mimic leadership."

4.6.4 Supportive work environments accommodate changing family dynamics

Women's reproductive roles continue to limit recruitment as well as career advancement in the workplace. "There is this worry that women will disappear on maternity leave and so more is invested in the men." All respondents raised concerns about the difficulties that women face progressing in their careers after starting families, due to high childcare costs, limited flexible work, and difficulty staying engaged.

Some organisations are introducing positive initiatives such as paid maternity leave, flexible work and working-from-home arrangements where possible. Providing targeted support for young parents, such as childcare subsidies for advisory committee participation is considered extremely helpful. Similarly, expanding flexible and part-time work to retain talent, especially after career breaks. "Safeguards are important, like part-time arrangements." COVID has normalised remote work and made some roles more accessible, especially

> *Even though I made no money because of the cost of childcare, I chose to work in order to stay relevant* - BGA Interview

for people with caring responsibilities or regional living constraints. Some organisations now better understand that family and caring responsibilities are part of normal work life. Ensuring that family and partnership dynamics are considered in leadership pathways and succession planning helps create a supportive work environment. "Improvements require that we ask: What do women want? What have they experienced? How can we support women differently?" Of equal importance, is support for paternity leave and normalizing men sharing childcare responsibilities.

4.6.5 Women role models, mentorship and professional networks matter

Despite progress at entry and mid-levels, respondents notice a continued **lack of women occupying senior management and executive roles**. The lack of female representation on boards and in leadership roles slows the pace of institutional change. "As more women are around the table and are equals from an intellectual standing, we are seeing this accelerate." Yet, many women leave the sector or do not progress to senior levels due to traditional gender roles, societal expectations, or following a partner's career. Therefore, respondents saw the value of featuring the ways in which women are achieving to build aspiration and enhance motivation to succeed.

> *In the higher CEO roles, you do not have a woman to point to* - BGA Interview respondent

Cross-industry and cross-generational mentoring are viewed as highly valuable. Respondents pointed to the value of building stronger professional communities and providing ongoing support networks for women in agriculture. Leadership development programs and "women supporting women" were repeatedly identified as an important enabler for confidence and career progression. One respondent observed that delivery of these programs could be improved if they were designed to be more than "one-off events" and fostered continued alumni engagement. Furthermore, one respondent suggested that leadership programs begin to feature younger successful women professionals to unburden the limited cohort of seasoned "pioneers" from having to serve in speaker roles repeatedly across multiple leadership programs.

Respondents noted the trust and business networks are often formed in male-dominated social spaces which create barriers for women to access key relationships and opportunities. Access to industry networks and trusted mentors can be critical for women's visibility and leadership progression. "Opportunities come through networks in any industry…there are many highly capable women who just don't have access" One interview respondent said she had personally succeeded due to support she found from both men and women in the industry who helped her access strong professional networks and offered ongoing mentoring. Without a mentor or sponsor, many people may not know that committees, boards or leadership pathways exist. **Strong female managers and leadership examples** helped one respondent see a pathway for her own progression.

4.6.6 Institutional directives, accountability and incentivising change

Respondents noted that their colleagues hold diverse perceptions about the value that policy and accountability frameworks play in supporting gender balance and inclusivity. A couple of respondents mentioned that businesses often dislike government reporting requirements and may see gender reporting as "red tape." They thought that excessive compliance and policy could slow progress. On the other hand, other respondents felt that legislative changes have helped shift workplace expectations. For example, with regards to accepted behaviour in workplaces "Legislative changes around harassment and bullying are making a difference because now companies have a duty to

prevent it and not just to respond to it." These individuals felt that having a "zero tolerance" policy of sexual harassment makes a big difference because it helps to set clear boundaries.

4.6.7 Summary of gaps and barriers

Table 6 provides an overall summary of the different identified gaps and barriers. These combine perspectives from both the desktop review and interviews. Even though insight from both are mostly aligned, there are some differences on the importance that can be derived from each. For instance, while the desktop review revealed a clear limitation on data and how can this be constraint to gender parity, interviewees did not mention data as a gap or barrier. Instead, interviewees highlighted their lived experiences in the workplace, highlighting instances of isolation, a lack of networks, pay inequity, inflexible work environments, limited representation in leadership positions, and gender stereotypes.

Table 6. Gaps Summary

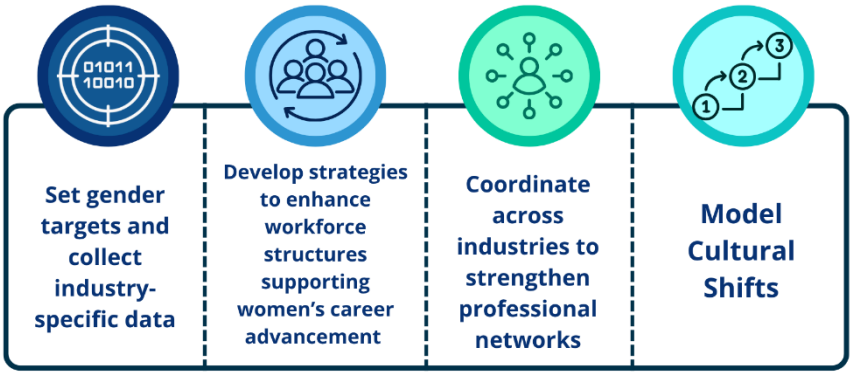
<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Limited Data
Data specificity only available at broad industry groupings, limiting understanding of employment trends and challenges like attraction and retention
WGEA data limited to large employers, creating knowledge gaps about small and medium farms
Data not capturing well employment trends, e.g. unpaid and seasonal labour
Women underrepresented in data low self and public recognition as farmers as Under recognition of women as farmers</td></tr>
<tr><td>Perceptive and cultural barriers
Bias in recruitment and appointment processes with maternity perceived as a risk
Imposter syndrome, women not publicly or self-identified as farmers despite vital contributions
Negative perception of unequal gender representation within the workforce- with women seen as support roles, thus sacrificing career progression
Women more likely to have judgment questioned, ideas credited to others or face harassment
Male champions are essential to drive cultural change</td><td>Organisational barriers
Male succession patterns of farmland restrict access to land, exacerbated by informal governance practices
Insufficient child care support and hybrid working solutions constraint return after parental leave
Unequal pay structures
Flexible work often depends on individual manager preference, not policy
Women in contracted roles rarely formalised, lose recognition if male partner leaves
Bias in recruitment favours traditional candidates for senior roles</td></tr>
<tr><td>Geographic isolation and the absence of strong networks
Geographic isolation limits access to networks connecting aspiring leaders to decision-makers
Lack of female leaders and role models limiting mentorship and career visibility
Existing networking programs limited to one-off events
Trust and business networks often form in male-dominated social spaces</td><td>Limited professional development opportunities
Limited access to targeted ongoing training in rural and remote areas
Limited progression of women from operational to management roles
Deficits in targeted professional development, financial support and information access
Limited awareness of career pathways
Poor visibility of female representation in high-skilled positions</td></tr>
</table>

Source: BGA work product

4.7 Investment Opportunities

The synthesis of evidence and analysis of gaps helps to build the foundation for developing recommendations. Translating the evidence into investment recommendations required determining where the gaps and barriers are. Each recommendation (Fig. 12) in this section is built from one or more of the barriers identified in the prior section. The proposed recommendations aim to address the specific identified gaps and barriers.

Figure 12. Broad Investment Opportunity Themes



Source: BGA Work Product

4.7.1 Set gender targets and collect industry-specific data

The goal is to address a foundational gap in industry capacity to track unmeasured gender-related variables in a consistent systematic manner. Since larger employers are already required to report to the WGEA, data efforts should be aligned to avoid duplication, fragmentation and reporting fatigue. Collecting industry data to consolidate workforce composition, leadership representation, retention, engagement and safety for red meat, would allow the industry to determine baselines against which to set targets and measure progress.

Since data can have quantitative and qualitative parameters, data collection efforts should leverage existing resources like WGEA employer and industry data, ABS Census, AMPC research, partnerships with industry bodies or incorporation of gender-related perspectives into targeted producer surveys. For example, Fig. 13 illustrates showing how some targets focus on improving metrics using percentage point increases, while others have a more binary approach of action completed or not. Appendix 8.2 contains a list with examples of targets and metrics set from different organisations, including WGEA.

The establishment of industry-wide baseline data would facilitate employers and the industry as a whole to set targets, it would also create momentum to further support WGEA targets and progress the industry's longer-term goals.

Figure 13. Examples of WGEA Targets

Numerical

- Increased representation of managers by a given percent
- Increased representation in promotions to manager by a given percent
- Gender pay gap closed by a given percent

Action

- Undertake gender pay gap analysis
- Improve employer funded parental leave
- Improve flexible work offerings for employees

Conducting a detailed gender gap analysis across the red meat value chain stages will allow identification of operation-specific biases in management and informal practices. For example, some remuneration and employment structures (i.e. employment contracts) on remote stations only acknowledge male station managers despite typically hiring applicants with partners who also contribute to the enterprise. Quantification of such contracts would assist targeted efforts to remedy contractual biases.

Although the act of collecting data is important in order to be able to track progress over time, so too is collective decision making around what metrics matter, for whom, and why. Therefore, we highlight the value of generating dialog and buy-in across the industry around the benefits of gender data collection and associated opportunities for catalysing transformational impacts on workplace performance and culture. This can be supported by publishing meat and livestock industry workforce composition snapshot reports that are updated annually or biannually.

Investment opportunities include

- Collect and compile industry data on workforce composition, leadership representation, retention, engagement and safety and publish a meat and livestock industry workforce composition snapshot report
- Establish industry wide baseline data and industry-set targets to monitor progress
- Conduct an industry-wide gender gap analyses to identify where gaps are most material and incentivise producers to conduct their own

4.7.2 Develop strategies to enhance workforce structures to support women's career advancement

Attraction and retention are ongoing issues the industry has faced in past years, as such, new methods are required to make the industry more attractive. These issues are evidenced in downward employment trends and high turnover employment rates. This means that the challenge is not only for more people to enter the workforce, it is also on how can they be incentivised to stay. Inequity in working and pay conditions, limited flexibility with work arrangements and the absence of progression from operational roles are factors that affect women's participation. AMPC research found that perceived equity in training and career advancement correlates with improved employee wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Interviews highlighted that certain roles tend to be more heavily male dominated (e.g. physical, sales and international trade), while sectors like the pastoral tend to recruit trained women out of school for entry level positions, but opportunities dwindle going into middle management. However, interviews also suggested that high risk roles (e.g. kill floor or livestock handling) may deter women after childbirth due to shifted priorities.

Career stagnation is a common perceived barrier, further exacerbated for women in leadership positions. Beyond cultural norms, which are covered under another recommendation, targeted training can be inaccessible for women in regional and operational roles, where location, under-recognition and limited financial support create barriers to participation.

Development of a cross-sectional workforce retention strategy would provide sectoral guidance and coordination of efforts to ensure organisational efforts are aligned. Strategy should focus on work-life balance factors affecting women as they move from operational to management roles. **Research into**

the barriers halting women's career progression from operational to middle management roles and on into executive leadership will guide strategy development where supply chain stage-specific data is absent, and this aligns with the data-focused recommendation to conduct an industry-wide gender analysis. Strategic investment priorities should target immediate barriers to women's career progression in red meat production, including:

- Post-parental leave return-to-work transition pathways and technological training
- Development of pilot cases for child care support alternatives, especially for poorly serviced remote areas
- Development pilot cases for hybrid and flexible work options, supported by best practice guidance for hybrid management to prevent exclusion or isolation.

Such investments would likely benefit both workforce attraction, due to increased perceived benefits of working in the industry, and intake of women into middle and upper management positions.

Targeted, ongoing training in practical business management skills specific to each supply chain stage can remedy the gendered imbalance in access to training and development opportunities. Guidance and training materials can be developed for supervisors and managers to better handle workplace dynamics, while previous programs can be expanded upon to build up supply-chain specific training and skill needs such as financial and business literacy.

For instance, data shows that women are less likely to work in managerial positions, making structured progression pathways involving mentoring and project-based learning important for managerial career entry. Examples of existing initiatives to build from include the Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program and MBW's emerging leadership opportunities.

Even though interviews highlighted that since COVID-19 flexible working arrangements have improved, they are still seen as a major enabler of gender inclusion. **Investments can cover pilot cases to show how different inclusive recruitment practices, flexible work designs and return-from-leave pathways can positively impact business operations.**

Investments in automation and farm equipment can reduce the physical burden of operational tasks, increasing attractiveness of operational roles to young workers. Given the strong trend towards this automation, future investments in automation should focus on the reduction of highly physical roles or tasks performed in livestock handling and meat processing.

Investment opportunities include

- Develop and implement cross-sectional workforce retention strategies
- Identify how technological advances create new opportunities to attract young workers
- Support initiatives to support post-childbirth return-to-work (i.e. pilot cases and guidance documents for child care support, return-to-work transitions and alternative flexible work models)
- Develop cross-sectoral, cross-generational mentoring programs, leveraging existing training programs and creating continued education opportunities by engaging alumni across programs and cohorts
- Expand funding for women's leadership and diversity programs to improve access among more women, to support alumni who have been through these programs and diversify the pool of speakers and curriculums

4.7.3 Coordinate across industries to strengthen professional networks

Geographic and social isolation is one of the most persistent perceived barriers, particularly those in production and remote roles. Given the predominance of operations across vast regional and remote locations where informal professional networks are harder to build and maintain. Cross-industry and cross-generational mentoring is seen as highly valuable, while engaging with different age groups and supply chain positions is seen as necessary to capture varied experiences and perspectives.

Interviews highlighted that geographic isolation can exacerbate other barriers. To counter this, strengthening networks that engage men and women in agriculture are seen as enablers to create a culture that anyone can thrive in the industry.

The **investment opportunities lie in building stronger networks to foster inclusivity and to provide opportunities** to share success stories, career opportunities, mentoring or board appointments. Individual employers are likely unable to provide these opportunities, requiring the need for industry assistance and coordination to leverage existing programs and organisations making the investment case for MLA to be coordination and resourcing to expand outreach and increase engagement.

Critically, networks should involve practical knowledge exchange and social connection for participants, as connections from fragmented, one-off events can quickly dissipate. Smaller sector or region-specific professional networks, peer support groups and cross-generational mentoring programs may provide more intimate and practical relationships, while larger cross-sectoral networks can support industry-wide social connections. This can be particularly important since these network events can be a way to continue being connected with the industry during parental leave. Initiatives should separately prioritise mentoring, coaching and confidence-building groups for women returning from maternity or family leave, supported by the structured transition pathways and support programs.

Establishment of women-focused spaces in existing corporate networks may benefit from encouraging unbiased appointment practices, such as self-nomination for development opportunities to remove selection bias, and exposure mechanisms such as ex officio and observer roles for committee or board positions to make practical leadership experience and executive-level social networks more accessible to aspiring women. **Additionally, pilot studies for digital technology and infrastructure** that supports connectivity, information dissemination, networking and webinar accessibility can especially benefit social opportunities for geographically isolated women.

Investment opportunities include

- Build stronger professional communities and ongoing support networks for women in agriculture
- Increase visibility of female leaders and role models in industry network events
- Support cross-industry and cross-generational mentoring and networking programs
- Pilot digital technology and infrastructure options to support connectivity, information dissemination, networking, and webinar accessibility especially for geographically isolated areas
- Expand funding for women's leadership and diversity programs to improve access among more women for supply chain-specific training in governance, risk management, financial and business literacy

4.7.4 Model Cultural Shifts

Cultural practices represent significant challenges women face in the industry. They can take place at different levels of the value chain, from recruitment to workplace behaviours and leadership participation. While not unique to the industry, the physical and male dominated work culture can place more pressure on the issue and traditional gender expectations continue being influential factors. Therefore, enhancing capabilities and changing workplace culture can lead to improved psychosocial safety and reduced workplace claims.

Interviews highlighted that men are often perceived as more suitable for leadership roles, where networks in male dominated spaces can limit women's participation and career advancement, especially moving from middle to senior positions. This is exacerbated by lack of role models and poor female visibility on boards and in leadership roles.

Given the trend of women's career progressions stalling in middle management positions, **coordination of targeted talent attraction campaigns that draw clear pathways from education to middle management to executive positions.** Communicating the available opportunities and delineating actionable steps towards high level positions may attract entrants by giving confidence to graduates and entry-level applicants. Pathways may also consider opportunities beyond traditional labour roles, including science, food technology, veterinary roles, engineering, and accounting. Delineation of career pipelines may also benefit from financial incentives such as scholarships, bursaries and entrepreneurial funding pathways to encourage uptake and overcome disparities in access to finance and land that may limit entrance of women into red meat production operations. Additionally, media components of talent attraction campaigns may consider **development of new innovative materials to expand outreach and raise awareness across generations**, especially social media and internet-based content for younger generations.

In conjunction with strengthening industry networks recommendation, **MLA is positioned to bridge the gap between policies and actions with campaigns to demonstrate industry efforts on gender diversity.** The goal is to elevate the industry's reputation as progress is made. Targeted campaigns can demonstrate businesses within the industry that change is possible, important and provide value not only for the industry, but also for the community. Just as MLA and the industry have successfully built campaigns around the quality and provenance of Australia's red meat to strengthen industry reputation and drive market acceptance, the same approach could be applied for gender diversity to communicate a clear message that the industry is open and that careers pathways exist for all who wish to enter. Focusing on campaigns that encourage change in workplace behaviours and facilities, pay structures or empowerment to share stories, can advance the industry towards a more diverse workforce.

Investment opportunities include:

- Implement extension programs for farm managers teaching practical unbiased recruitment and management practices
- Coordinate targeted talent attraction campaigns with clear pathways from education to middle management to executive positions, supported by social media marketing
- Develop industry-wide marketing campaigns supporting women's self-identification as farmers and positive supply chain perceptions
- Develop campaigns that showcase how organisations have adapted and perceived returns to investments

5 Conclusion

5.1 Key findings

This project set out to establish a baseline understanding of gender diversity in the red meat industry. Both the desktop review and stakeholder interviews revealed consistent themes across gaps, barriers and opportunities, which implies that there's good understanding in the industry of what's happening and what actions could help. However, it's the lacking in documentation, consistent implementation and monitoring that constrain diversity.

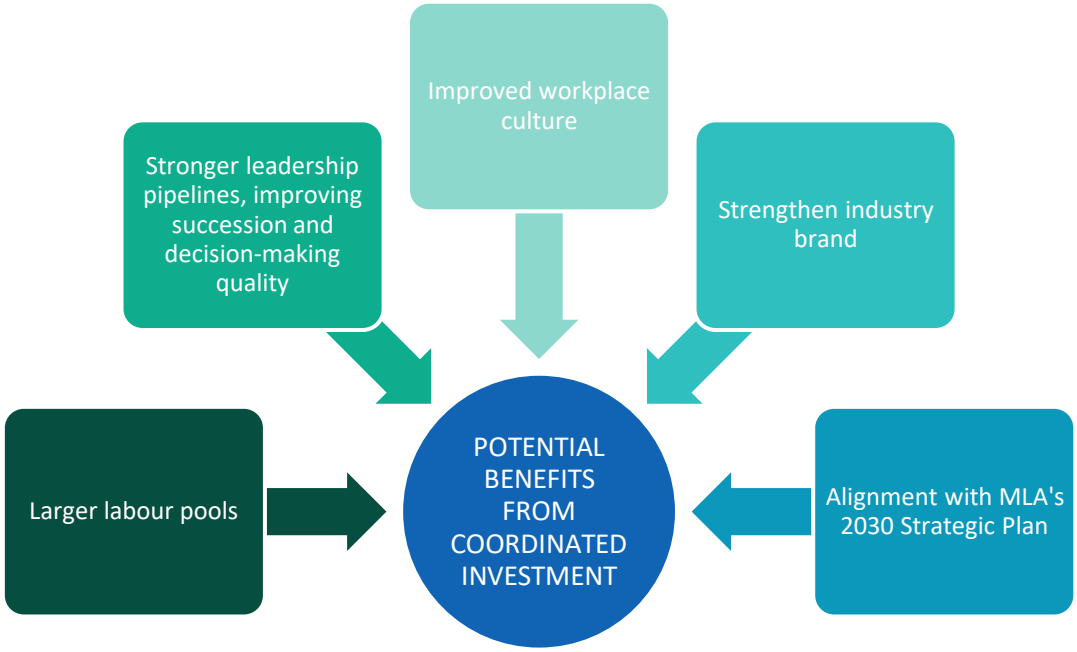
An initial finding of this study is that the Australian red meat industry has no way of knowing whether its position on gender diversity is improving, worsening, or static, because there's no consolidated data at the industry level. Efforts led by WGEA are bridging the data gap, but the industry needs industry-specific evidence that extends beyond large employers. Where data does exist, it suggests mixed performance when compared to other industries. We found that the industry is aligned with others in areas like female participation, but it lags in pay equity and promotions. Other organizational factors have ripple effects that increase the likelihood of career stagnation among women which can be even more amplified in situations of geographic isolation or limited access to strong professional networks. Women are entering production roles in growing numbers, but sometimes there are no clear pathways for them to reach leadership positions. Flexible work was repeatedly identified as a potential high impact action to attract and retain women, but it often depends on individual manager discretion. As such organisational structures and cultural perceptions are sometimes constraints for increasing participation and representation. Several opportunities emerged from the review across different themes, including:

- Industry level gender-related data collection
- Strengthening existing networks
- Targeted workforce attraction, development and especially retention
- Shifting organisational and cultural perceptions

5.2 Benefits to industry

Investment in gender diversity delivers returns that extend beyond participation statistic, such as a larger and more accessible talent pool that addresses labour shortages. Additionally, given that the industry has higher median age than other industries, stronger female representation in leadership and governance improves succession depth. Closing the gap between red meat and better-performing peer industries also protects the industry's reputation with consumers, communities and supply chains. Finally, an Australian red meat industry that is visibly addressing gender diversity and where anyone can thrive is better positioned to attract the younger generation of workers that place more importance on workplace culture and work-life balance when choosing where to work. Fig. 13 illustrates potential benefits to the industry to support progress towards achieving the industry's long-term objectives.

Figure 14. Benefits from coordinated investment



6 Future research and recommendations

Future work should focus on implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This report as well as other industry reports (e.g. MBW global gender representation and AMPC's workforce diversity and inclusion reports) has identified the key barriers and opportunities affecting gender inclusion across the Australian red meat industry. The priority now is to translate this evidence into practical, on-ground action. Initial investment should focus on strengthening the industry evidence base through improved data collection, agreed performance measures and ongoing monitoring. As this foundation matures, investment can progressively expand towards targeted workforce attraction and retention initiatives, leadership development, organisational capability building, and stronger industry collaboration. This phased approach will enable MLA to evaluate outcomes, refine future investment priorities, and maximise the long-term workforce, productivity and sustainability benefits of improved gender inclusion across the Australian red meat industry.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Investment Examples

Sector	Organisation	Project
Across agriculture	AgriFutures	Mapping the workforce of Australian Agriculture project - 2024 Workplace diversity: Women on Agriculture Boards project - 2025 Rural Women's Award - Annual Rural Women's Acceleration Grant - Annual
	National Farmers Federation	Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program - Annual
	Australian Women in Agriculture	Australian Women in Agriculture national conference - Annual
	ABS & ABARES	Agricultural workforce publications - Ongoing
Cotton	CRDC	Understanding and building Women's Participation in the Cotton Industry report - 2016
	Cotton Australia	Diversity pledge - 2018
Dairy	Dairy Industry Association of Australia	DIAA Women Ecolab Scholarship - 2023 DIAA Women Awards - 2023
	Dairy Australia Limited	Women in Dairy project - Regular meetings
Grains	GrainGrowers	Diversity Pledge - 2023
	GRDC	IREC women in Irrigated Ag Conference - 2026 Generating Regionally Outstanding Women (GROW) program, under the AgSkilled Initiative - Ongoing Gender diversity quotas for selection of Emerging Leader Award recipients and composition of regional investment panels - Ongoing
Red meat	Australian Pork Limited	Gender Diversity Forum
	Meat Business Women	Global Gender Representation Report
	AMPC	Literature reviews of the attraction, retention and inclusion of diverse employees - 2024 Managing workforce diversity and inclusion - 2025
	MLA	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy - 2025 Australian Beef Sustainability Framework - 2025
Seafood	Women in Seafood Australia	Turn the Tide Mentorship Program - 2023-26 National Seafood Industry Leadership Program Bursaries - 2023-26 Turn the Tide Entrepreneurship and Leadership Program - 2023-26 Weaving connection program - 2023-26 Conversations that Count workshop series - 2023-26 WISA Guppies conference childcare service - Ongoing, launched in 2024 Women in Seafood Australasia Bursary Program - Annual
Wool	Australian Wool Innovation	Board and Company Diversity Policy - 2024

Source: BGA Work Product

Table 7. International initiatives

Project	Organisation	Region
"It's not illegal to be pregnant" Research report on reproductive justice and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme	Development Policy Centre	Australian research analysing labour program for Pacific and Timor-Leste workers
The Framework for Gender-Responsive Livestock Development	FAO, World Bank, ILRI, IFAD	International
The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems report	FAO	International
The Women's empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)	IFPRI	International
Agri-Women's Development Trust	Multiple partners including AGMARDT, ANZ, and beef + lamb New Zealand.	New Zealand
AgriDiversity	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	Canada
Agricultural Workforce Equity and Diversity Initiative (AWEDI)	Canadian government	Canada
Farm Credit Canada's Women Entrepreneur Program	Farm Credit Canada	Canada
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-27	European Commission	EU
Women in Farming Platform	European Commission	EU

Source: BGA Work Product

8.2 Targets and metrics

Source	Target/indicator	Metric (if relevant)
WGEA	Increased representation of non-managers	Representation of [under-represented gender] in [one non-manager category] increased by [_pp]
	Increased representation of managers	Representation of [under-represented gender] in [one manager category OR for managers overall] increased by [_pp]
	Increased representation in promotions to manager	Representation of [under-represented gender] in promotions to manager increased by [_pp]
	Increased representation by pay quartile	Representation of [under-represented gender] in [quartile] increased by [_pp]
	Composition of governing body	Representation of [under-represented gender] on the governing body increased by [_pp]
	Reducing the gender pay gap	[Median OR average], [base salary OR total remuneration] gender pay gap closed by [_pp]
	Reducing the gender pay gap for managers or non-managers	[Median OR average], total remuneration gender pay gap for [either managers OR non-managers] closed by [_pp]
	Undertake gender pay gap analysis	Action
	Equal remuneration and gender pay equity policies	Action
	Introduce employer-funded parental leave	Action
	Increase the uptake of primary parental leave by the underrepresented gender	Representation of [under-represented gender] taking primary parental leave increased by [_pp]
	Improve employer funded parental leave	Action
	Improve facilities or support for employees with carer responsibilities	Action
	Improve flexible work offerings for employees	Action
	Proportion of managers who are part-time	Proportion of managers working part-time increased by [_pp] at the end of the target cycle
	Improve supports for employees experiencing family and domestic violence	Action
	Employee consultation on gender equality issues	Action
	Improve policies regarding preventing, reporting and responding to sexual harassment	Action
	Mechanisms for reporting to employer's CEO, key management personnel and the governing body on sexual harassment	Action

CEW	40/40/20 by 2030	executive leadership teams to be comprised of 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men, with the remaining 20 per cent flexible to any gender.
MBW Food Business Charter	female representation across the food industry by 2035	40% female representation across the food industry by 2035
ASBF Annual Updates	Percentage of women and men in the workforce	Percentage of women and men in the workforce
NFF Diversity in Ag leadership	More management roles occupied by women	Double the number of women in agriculture's management roles by 2030.
UN Sustainable Development Goal 5	Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments; Proportion of women in managerial positions