



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA

The case for nationally consistent registration of professional engineers

Professional engineers plan, design, construct, test, commission, maintain, operate, and decommission safety critical systems whose performance can have significant consequences for public health and safety and economic implications for businesses and the community. Most engineers provide their services competently, ethically and with diligence. However, in the absence of regulation for engineering, anyone could purport to be an engineer and provide engineering services without appropriate qualifications, experience, or competencies and with disregard to professional standards and ethical conduct.

Engineering services are vital to national economic prosperity and social well-being, yet there is no uniform regulatory regime covering engineering practitioners in Australia.

Registration of engineers enhances public confidence the engineering services have been delivered by qualified, experienced, and competent professionals who practice ethically, develop safe and sustainable solutions, apply local engineering knowledge, and manage risks effectively.

The benefits of registration

Compulsory registration for anyone providing professional engineering services enables significant enhancement of public safety and consumer protection. More broadly, there are six key benefits of a registration system for engineers:

1. Reducing risks to public health, safety, and welfare through strengthening confidence in the competency of the people who deliver professional engineering services.
2. Economic benefits from reduced cost of re-work and improved system performance.
3. Improved industry and consumer information about who is competent to deliver professional engineering services.
4. Professional recognition for registered engineers.
5. Enhanced national and international mobility and trade in engineering services.
6. Legislative efficiency enabling regulators to more effectively develop, implement and improve consistent regulatory frameworks for the delivery of engineering services consistently in a timely manner.

Essential elements of statutory registration scheme

All registration systems should have the same characteristics in that standards must be set, qualification requirements specified, applicants assessed against specified competencies, and a register maintained. Performance must be monitored, and failures investigated and disciplined where appropriate. A register has greater effect if supported by legislated regulatory powers of government.

Engineers Australia supports the co-regulatory model of registration implemented in Queensland and Victoria through Professional Engineer Registration acts, which enables statutory bodies and professional associations to undertake roles that align with their expertise. The co-regulatory model provides greater assurance of the competency of registered engineering practitioners and reduces the risk of physical and financial harm to consumers. This approach allows industry and assessment entities, like Engineers Australia, to assess the qualifications and competency of individuals to the agreed national standards required. This then allows government to implement and maintain a formal register, including prosecution for unregistered work.

Statutory registration of professional engineers should apply to anyone who provides professional engineering services, and in any area of engineering in any industry. The exceptions are those performing professional engineering services under the supervision of an appropriately registered engineer, and those that only apply prescriptive standards/processes.

Some jurisdictions limit registration schemes to the building sector. The benefits of registration extend beyond the building sector as engineers provide critical services and products across all sectors including public infrastructure, power generation, manufacturing, health, and mining. Engineers Australia supports the expansion and alignment of schemes beyond the building sector to realise the benefits of nationally consistent registration of professional engineers.

How to regulate engineering

Engineers Australia supports the co-regulatory model of registration, initially introduced in the *Queensland Professional Engineers Act 2002*, which includes a statutory regulatory body and professional associations each undertaking the various roles they are best suited to perform.

Under a co-regulatory approach, Engineers Australia believes that legislation governing the delivery of engineering services in states and territories should:

- Include restrictions on who may deliver engineering services
- Restrict the ‘registered’ title to those who are on an engineering register
- Register engineers in the broadest possible areas of engineering practice aligned with the areas of practice and not limited to a specific industry sector, with the onus on each registered engineering practitioner to only undertake work that they are competent to undertake. Statutory registration should apply to professional engineers who provide engineering services in any industry
- Base registration on a set of minimum requirements which are benchmarked against recognised national and international standards. Refer to Engineers Australia’s Minimum Requirements for Registration.

Mutual recognition

Australian governments have agreed to a nationally uniform approach to mutual recognition based on the *Commonwealth Mutual Recognition Act 1992*. In 2020 this Act was amended to provide for automatic mutual recognition (AMR).

Engineers Australia supports AMR as a key component of nationally consistent registration, with the effect that an individual professional engineer need only be registered in the engineer’s home state to do professional engineering work while present in, or for a project located in, any other Australian jurisdiction without further application, assessment, or fees. Engineers Australia recognises that the provision of engineering services is not bounded by jurisdictional boundaries and there are productivity and administrative efficiencies through effective mutual recognition.

Support for comprehensive registration of engineers

Broad-based registration of engineers has very high levels of public support across all demographics. In a 2019 Engineers Australia commissioned poll¹, 88 per cent of respondents answered ‘Yes, engineers should have to be registered’.

About Engineers Australia

Engineers Australia was established in 1919 and is Australia’s peak body for the engineering profession.

We are a not-for-profit organisation, constituted by Royal Charter, to advance the science and practice of engineering for the benefit of the community.

Our 115,000 individual members represent all disciplines and branches of engineering and all three of the profession’s occupational categories (Professional Engineer, Engineering Technologist, Engineering Associate).

¹ The poll was conducted for Engineers Australia by OmniPoll. The poll was conducted nationally among 1222 people aged 18 years and over. Respondents were drawn from the online consumer panel managed by Lightspeed Research, OmniPoll’s online partner. Sample quotas were set for each state, city and regional area, along with sex and age. To help reflect the overall population distribution, results were post-weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics data on age, sex, area and highest schooling.