

PRESS RELEASE
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ABCC reduction of powers to bare minimum – but who is going to protect women in construction?

Tony Burke, Minister for Workplace Relations, has announced the Government's intention to initially defund and eventually abolish the Australian Building Construction Commission (ABCC), from 26 July "its powers will be pulled back to the bare legal minimum." The ABCC has been responsible for the enforcement of the Building Code, a code of practice which sets out the Commonwealth Government's expected standards of conduct for all building industry participants that seek to be, or are, involved in Commonwealth funded building work.

There have been many arguments for and against the ABCC's powers to prosecute under the Act**. Some prosecutions have been successful, whilst recent claims state that the ABCC has been more interested in "determining what sticker someone's allowed to put on their helmet" rather than tackling compromised safety standards. Of concern to the National Association for Women in Construction (NAWIC) are the remaining prosecutions that have not yet been determined by the courts specifically relating to the treatment of women on site.

There are cases being pursued by the ABCC that relate to the bullying and sexual harassment of women onsite. The cases awaiting investigation include those allegations of sexualised or demeaning comments to women onsite. One of the cases is alleged use of physical contact and demeaning language to intimidate a female worker.

The government has advised that the current 39 outstanding prosecutions will be transferred to the Fair Work Ombudsman. NAWIC seeks assurances that with eventual abolition of the ABCC, that there will be another avenue to prosecute unreasonable gender-based behaviour.

Workplace safety should be the highest priority. It should include safety from sexual harassment and a requirement that all industry participants act in a manner so as not to "intentionally hinder or obstruct any person, or otherwise act in an improper manner"***

With 73%* of NAWIC members reporting being made to feel unsafe in the workplace we cannot overlook the urgent need to ensure there is an avenue for concerns to be raised, investigated and prosecuted where required. As we strive to improve the industry's attractiveness to women this is a critical area we call upon government to address. We need to ensure women in construction do not get left behind in the politicising.

*NAWIC Industry Survey 2022

**s. 500 Fair Work Act

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For more information please contact Vicky Young on 0419 419 674 or communications@nawic.com.au

ABOUT NAWIC: The National Association of Women in Construction is tasked with achieving equitable construction industry where women fully participate. NAWIC's mission is to drive changes that will aid in the increased recruitment, retention and further vocational development of women within all facets of the construction industry. They achieve this through a focus on advocacy, education, connection and community.