



# State of the Industry - Drilling

The Drilling industry is critical for exploration and the provision of infrastructure needed to access energy and mineral resources, including critical minerals essential to advancing Net Zero outcomes.

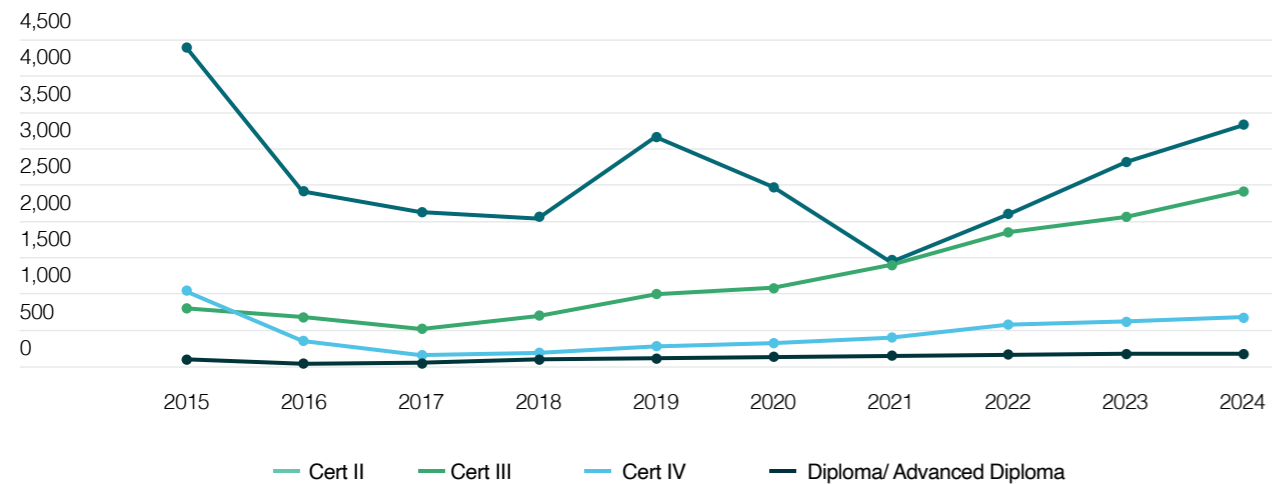
The industry employs a workforce of 12,1000 people employed by drilling contractors across drilling and support roles. The workforce was split across the mining (53%), construction (13%) and support services (30%) industries in 2025. With 8,400 individuals employed as drillers and drillers' assistants in 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Drilling enrolments, and completions are showing rising trends

Certificate II in Oil & Gas Drilling (Onshore) and Well Servicing has consistently been the most enrolled drilling qualification since 2015 (Figure M26). It also has the most female completions among the three total qualifications over the decade. However, drillers and drillers' assistants remain in short supply nationwide.

With drilling an essential component of mineral mining, the demand for resources for advancing Net Zero targets and the move towards electrification will require more of the workforce. Skills development through traineeships and a push to increase female participation can alleviate these pressures. Industry has identified that recognition of prior learning (RPL) could help ensure more qualified drillers obtain qualifications.

Figure M26: RII Drilling qualification enrolments 2015–2024



Source: VOCSTAT, "TVA program enrolments 2015-2024", 2024.



<sup>1</sup> ADIA, "Economic Impact of Drilling in Australia", 2025.

Figure M27: Female completions 2015–2024



Source: VOCSTAT, "TVA program completions 2015-2024", 2024; Note: Superseded and current qualifications added together. Only qualifications with female completion shown.

Table M7: Key occupations, 2021

Occupation	Employed	Shortage	In CSOL?
Drillers, Miners and Shot Firers nfd	230	RS	No
Driller	8,070	S	No
Driller's Assistant	2,260	S	No

Source: ABS, 2021 Census Data, 2022; JSA, "Occupation Shortage List", 2025; Department of Home Affairs, "The Core Skills Occupation List", 2024. Note: 1. RS: Regional Shortage; S: Shortage; NS: Not in Shortage. 2. The key occupations have been selected based on AUSMASA's remit. Since it is difficult to measure the drilling workforce within ANZSIC classification, the occupation figures presented reflect the total number of workers in relevant occupations (ANZSCO 6-digit level) across all Australian industries. 3. The employment figure is rounded to the nearest 10.

Industry has raised concerns about the attrition of Drillers from commodity-price-driven exploration into other, more perennial sectors such as geotechnical and water well drilling. Industry has identified that recognition of prior learning (RPL) could offer a potential solution, helping to ensure more qualified Drillers can obtain their qualification in the Certificate III in Drilling Operations or a similar qualification. As this would create a training culture from the top down, it would enable the more experienced Drillers to be more actively involved in training future Drillers.

AUSMASA has also heard industry concerns about water well licensing. Each state and territory has its own water legislation and regulations that provides the basis for water well license requirements. The National Uniform Drillers Licensing Committee (NUDLC), a body representing state and territory regulators and representatives from the Drilling industry, works to harmonise a national approach to water licensing. At present, New South Wales (NSW) operates a 6-class system, whereas all other states and territories use a 3-class system. To obtain a water well licence, no qualifications are required with applicants required to sit an open-book examination. In most states and territories license applicants also must pass a verbal license interview with a panel of industry experts and/or regulators adjudicating.

This current system may not fully address knowledge and skills gaps that are left to employers to address. Because new license holders may lack underpinning knowledge, industry stakeholders have suggested that accredited training – such as a water well skillset or a Certificate III in Drilling Operations should be the prerequisite for obtaining a license.

