Australian protective security procurement practices

REPORT

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Contents

Executive summary 2

Recommendations 2

Introduction 3
- Methodology 4
- State of play, 2018 4
- What stakeholders told us 5

A wider protective-security task 5
- AUKUS changes the scale and distribution of demand 6
- Brisbane 2032 Olympics will test mobilisation 6
- Regulatory and policy context 7

From licensed workforce to deployable capability 7
- Skills must follow the task 8
- Training and accreditation 8
- Mobility and the limits of a national headcount 9
- Wages, costs and workforce sustainability 9

Procurement policies, practices and models 9
- Value for money and price weighting 9
- Compliance and capability delivery 9
- Where contract delivery can weaken 9
- Price, value and evidence 10
- International and adjacent-sector comparisons 11

From buying posts to assuring a service 11
- Evidence for the next decision 12

Conclusion 12

Appendix 1: Survey results 13

Appendix 2: State and territory legislative arrangements 15

Appendix 3: Licensing structures 16

Appendix 4: State and territory procurement frameworks 17

Appendix 5: Evaluation weightings, by jurisdiction 19

Appendix 6: SSIA cost schedule 21

Notes 22

Acronyms and abbreviations 24

Executive summary

Australia's protective-security task is broadening to meet increasingly complex requirements. The challenge for Australia's protective-security system isn't simply having more guards but having the right capability when and where it's needed. A contract can specify the number of officers and hours yet say little about the skills, relief staffing, supervision and response procedures that make those people and hours useful.

Recent security incidents at RAAF Base Williamtown, RAAF Base Darwin and Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane illustrate different demands on site protection, although none establish that a guard or procurement decision caused the incident.[1]

Private security officers are the first line of protection across crowded places, critical infrastructure, transport hubs, data centres, retail precincts, major events and government and Defence sites. This report analyses whether current procurement practices are optimising national-security outcomes or constraining the capability, capacity and workforce sustainability of the sector.

The size of Australia's licensed workforce doesn't tell a purchaser how many suitable people can protect those sites. Industry figures record 170,698 individual licence holders in 2026, compared with 147,729 in 2020.[2] They don't measure active workers, available hours, location, competence for a particular role or the ability to cover an absence. The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane in 2032 provide a fixed deadline for testing this distinction between a national headcount and the workforce available for actual shifts.

Commonwealth procurement rules already allow officials to assess quality and whole-of-life value as well as price.[3] The gap lies in making those principles operational: defining the site's protective tasks, examining the bidder's roster and supervision plan, seeking a fair explanation for a materially low price, and verifying that the evaluated service is delivered. Price competition remains essential, but a low rate alone says little about protection. Evidence from a Fair Work Ombudsman inquiry and a provider survey points to assurance and price concerns.[4]

The implications for government and industry are straightforward. As recommended and set out below, the Department of Finance should issue risk-tiered Australian Government guidance within 12 months, while procuring entities should apply suitable checks now. Defence security and procurement authorities should pilot this guidance at selected bases and AUKUS-related facilities, assigning screening and clearance requirements according to the relevant role. Regulators, purchasers and industry should build a comparable measure of deployable capacity, and Brisbane 2032 should test it against a staged workforce plan. The success measure is what happens after contract award: qualified personnel on shift, reliable relief, recorded incidents, accountable subcontractors and a defensible whole-of-contract cost.

The recommendations below set out how to test and scale that approach by proposing that Australia's security purchasers, regulators and providers act on four linked questions: whether contracts deliver the capability an event or facility needs; whether industry has the capacity to meet growing demand; whether that capability remains available under pressure; and whether the security delivered justifies its cost.

Recommendations

1. Capability: Specify the service and verify its delivery

The Department of Finance (Finance) should, within 12 months, issue risk-tiered federal government procurement guidance with model questions and contract terms linking site duties to the personnel, supervision, relief arrangements and subcontractors proposed at tender. Procuring entities don't need to wait for the guidance and should begin proportionate checks under existing value-for-money rules, seeking explanations for materially low bids, recording why those explanations were accepted or rejected, and comparing the evaluated offer with the service delivered at 6-month and 12-month intervals.[5]

Defence security and procurement authorities should pilot this approach at selected bases and AUKUS-related facilities that have higher personnel security requirements. Site risk assessments should determine which duties require induction, employment screening, Defence Industry Security Program (DISP) assured suppliers or individual clearances. The pilot should track personnel deployed, approved relief arrangements, authorised exceptions and whether incidents reach the appropriate Defence authority. Defence should review the results within 12 months and apply the lessons as Submarine Rotational Force – West develops.[6]

2. Capacity: Measure the workforce available for the roles required

State and territory licensing regulators should agree on compatible role categories. Major purchasers should set out expected demand, while industry associations and providers should contribute appropriately protected data on active workers, qualifications, locations, available hours and realistic mobilisation times. Beginning with selected roles and regions, participants should publish definitions, a baseline and its known gaps within 12 months, and test forecasts against staffing achieved in procurements and exercises.[7]

State and territory ministers responsible for private security should also commission an operational map of equivalent licensed activities and the worker recognition pathways for regulators to publish within 12 months. Licensing and training authorities should identify a limited set of assessable, portable skills for roles requiring more than entry licensing and, before 2030, test a route for event or emergency deployment, reporting processing times and unsuccessful transfers while retaining local probity and role requirements.[8]

3. Resilience: Plan for demand peaks and disruption

Brisbane 2032 delivery partners, Queensland licensing and training agencies, and major security purchasers should build a workforce plan from the roles and shifts needed by venue, function, region and peak period, testing training, screening, licensing, accommodation, transport, supervision and relief lead times against verified supply. A baseline should be available within 12 months, followed by annual updates and a mobilisation exercise undertaken before 2030, showing whether Olympic Games demand can be met without drawing essential staff away from existing clients.[9] The same method should inform planning for Defence facilities and other sites where an unfilled shift or failed relief arrangement has serious consequences.

4. Value: Publish what the changes cost and achieve

Finance and willing major public purchasers should compare contracts using the new specification and assurance method with suitable earlier procurements, adjusting for site risk, and, after the next procurement cycle, publish de-identified findings on bidder numbers, smaller firms' participation, qualified staffing, unfilled shifts, incidents, turnover, subcontracting, variations and the cost of administering the checks. Requirements that raise costs without improving delivery should be simplified.

Introduction

Australia has relied on private security officers to protect people, facilities and critical services for decades, yet the rules governing their work remain fragmented. In 2012, Tim Prenzler and Rick Sarre traced a regulatory system built largely through separate state and territory responses to local problems, and fraudulent training certificates and underpayment that showed the practical consequences of weak oversight.[10] Governments had recognised recurring problems without resolving them.

ASPI returned to this question in its 2018 report *Safety in numbers*.[11] It argued that security officers were an underused part of Australia's counterterrorism effort and called for a federal security industry authority. That authority hasn't been established, and licensing requirements still differ across jurisdictions despite state reforms.

Demand from major events, critical infrastructure, defence and essential services is placing greater reliance on a private security workforce that's expanded significantly over the past decade and continues to grow. Yet the policy, regulatory and procurement settings that govern the sector haven't evolved at the same pace.

The absence of nationally consistent regulation creates administrative inefficiencies, limits workforce mobility, reduces visibility across jurisdictions and leaves gaps that can be exploited to circumvent licensing requirements. It also complicates planning for events and operations that span multiple jurisdictions.

At the same time, procurement practices remain heavily focused on lowest cost contracting. Value for money is intended to balance cost, quality, capability and risk, but price often dominates in practice, rewarding competition on labour costs rather than capability and discouraging investment in workforce development and technology. In a national-security context, those decisions affect the quality, resilience and reliability of services protecting Australia's most important assets and events.

These challenges are emerging as Australia prepares for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, expanding critical infrastructure obligations and growing demand for security-cleared personnel, while workforce shortages, inconsistent training standards, lengthy clearance processes and limited career pathways constrain supply. Physical security is also increasingly integrated with electronic security systems, access-control technologies and cyber-enabled platforms. Inconsistent regulation of electronic security providers and limited oversight of adjacent technology services present additional vulnerabilities that warrant consideration as part of a modern protective-security framework. Current settings were largely designed to manage commercial service delivery rather than to build and sustain a nationally resilient protective-security capability.

The demands placed on this workforce have meanwhile grown more varied: managing crowds, screening and sudden evacuations; working with integrated electronic and cyber systems at critical infrastructure, transport hubs and data centres; and recognising and reporting unauthorised access, drone activity or signs of insider risk at defence facilities. A general security licence establishes eligibility to perform regulated work, not readiness for every site or task.

These pressures make public procurement a central part of the solution. A contract expressed mainly as the number of officers for the number of hours specifies coverage—but says little about the capability being purchased. Buyers must also decide what officers need to recognise and report, how they'll be trained and supervised, who can replace an absent officer, and how the

service will respond when systems fail or an incident exceeds a contractor's authority.

This report examines the connection between the task, the workforce available and the contract used to bring them together. It first sets out the background since ASPI's 2018 report, the methodology, and what stakeholders told us. It then assesses the breadth of the protective-security market, including Defence and AUKUS sites, and the regulatory settings that shape it. It examines whether the workforce has the capability and capacity to meet demand, assesses procurement policies, contracting models and value-for-money practice, and compares Australian approaches with international and adjacent-sector models, before using Brisbane 2032 to test the challenge of planning for a surge in demand. It assesses the changing security environment and AUKUS requirements, then considers what licensing figures reveal about deployable capacity. It examines training, workforce mobility, subcontracting and tender evaluation, before using Brisbane 2032 to test the challenge of planning for a surge in demand. It concludes with practical decisions for public purchasers, Defence and regulators. Throughout, the focus is on how governments can specify, procure and verify the capability they need.

Methodology

This report combines desktop research, open-source procurement and industry data, targeted consultations and a survey of security industry participants. The desktop review covered federal, state and territory procurement frameworks; publicly available tender and contract information; government inquiries; workforce and licensing data; industry research; and relevant international approaches. Consultations with security providers, peak bodies and subject-matter experts examined how procurement settings affect contract design, workforce capability, competition and security outcomes. The survey tested providers' experience and perceptions of purchasing practices.

Those sources allow the report to compare formal procurement rules with how participants perceive how the rules operate in practice, but they do not provide a systematic record of tender decisions. Statements of work, evaluation criteria and weightings weren't consistently accessible, providers couldn't supply relevant tender documents, and access conditions constrained the use of some approach-to-market materials.[12]

The report therefore treats survey and consultation findings as evidence of participant experience, not as a measure of how often particular practices occur; rather, it identifies them separately from public rules and inquiry findings. This limits conclusions about the prevalence of price-led purchasing, while allowing recurring concerns to inform reforms that purchasers can test against contract performance.

The analysis assesses protective-security procurement against four measures, providing a practical framework for considering whether current procurement and regulatory settings are producing the security outcomes that Australia requires:

1. ***Capability*** asks whether government is buying the security outcome it needs, including the skills, supervision, workforce continuity and other capabilities needed to deliver effective security services.
2. ***Capacity*** considers whether the industry has sufficient workforce and organisational capability to scale when demand increases, including for major events, critical infrastructure and nationally significant activities.
3. ***Resilience*** examines whether that capability can be sustained through disruption and over the life of a contract, including through workforce pressures, changing costs, subcontracting and supply-chain risks.
4. ***Value*** considers whether the price paid reflects the capability and security outcome delivered, rather than treating the lowest price as a proxy for value for money.

Each part of the analysis is assessed against these measures, together with workforce sustainability and national-security outcomes, and the findings, recommendations and conclusions are organised on the same basis.

The consultation examined whether existing protective-security procurement and regulatory settings remain fit for purpose, focusing on five key areas:

- ***Procurement and value for money*** ascertains how services are specified, evaluated and procured, including the balance between price and non-price criteria.
- ***Workforce capability and service quality*** distinguishes how procurement practices affect training, wages, retention, supervision and investment in personnel.
- ***Regulatory and licensing frameworks*** identifies their consistency across jurisdictions, including their impacts on workforce mobility and service delivery.
- ***Federal, state and territory government roles*** determine how the division of responsibilities affects consistency across Australia.
- ***Opportunities for reform*** characterises the changes most needed to align licensing and procurement frameworks with national-security objectives.

State of play, 2018

Eight years ago, ASPI's special report, *Safety in numbers: Australia's private security guard force and counterterrorism*, found that Australia's 120,000-plus licensed security personnel—a workforce more than double the size of the combined police agencies and permanent ADF—were the 'forgotten partner' in counterterrorism, despite being the first responders across critical infrastructure, crowded places, transport hubs and defence sites.

Its central finding was that inconsistent training standards, the absence of uniform 'fit and proper person' requirements, poor pay, low esteem and jurisdictional fragmentation had left this workforce unable to realise its full potential, and that the wholly

state-based regulatory model, with light Council of Australian Governments coordination, had failed.

The report's headline recommendation was a federal Security Industry Authority (SIA), to control licensing, vetting, training standards and competency validation nationally, and to integrate the private security workforce into Australia's counterterrorism strategy.

Supporting recommendations included stronger enforcement of training standards, incorporation of counterterrorism awareness into training courses; a career progression model for security officers; consideration of formalised additional powers for suitably trained officers; engagement of the guarding sector in national and state counterterrorism forums; and structured liaison between law enforcement and the private security industry.

The report argued that a nationally consistency licensing framework would cost less than the security incidents it helped prevent and warned that it would be unfortunate if change occurred only in the wake of a crisis.

Eight years on, no federal authority has been established. Reform has occurred only gradually at the state level—most substantially Victoria's 2024–2025 *Private Security Act* overhaul, alongside smaller licensing and labour-hire adjustments in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. The weaknesses identified in 2018 have accumulated, rather than been resolved, even as reliance on private security services has continued to grow.

What stakeholders told us

Australia's protective-security market is being asked to deliver increasingly capable and resilient services through procurement and regulatory settings that often prioritise minimum compliance and lowest cost over sustainable capability.

Those settings are interconnected. Where procurement rewards the lowest price without testing whether it can support lawful wages, training and supervision, providers have less capacity to invest in workforce capability and service quality. Fragmented licensing adds further costs and constrains workforce supply and mobility, while limited ongoing assurance makes it difficult to identify whether contractual commitments are being maintained.

Workforce capability, service quality, lawful employment, regulatory compliance and resilience are therefore not separate considerations from value for money. They're components of the capability that the purchaser is seeking to acquire.

Price-driven procurement, little testing of price realism, fragmented licensing, workforce constraints and weak compliance oversight are connected problems. Tenders are weighted heavily on price, which is prioritised over the expected training, supervision and employment conditions, while bundling services favours multi-service providers over specialist and smaller regional firms.

Workforce pressure is a dominant concern. Licensing delays of weeks or months may keep trained workers from starting or result in many leaving the industry due to extended processing times. Poor information sharing between licensing regulators, the Fair Work Ombudsman, tax authorities and labour hire regulators allow repeat noncompliance to go unchallenged.

The major areas of concern are crowded places, workforce pressures and Brisbane 2032. Industry survey respondents also identified Defence and AUKUS-related sites as a significant area of concern. Accordingly, this report treats them as an important and growing market segment, rather than the market's primary focus. Survey results are reported in Appendix 1.

A wider protective-security task

Most protective-security demand sits outside the Defence organisation. Licensed officers protect crowded places such as stadiums, shopping centres, entertainment precincts and places of worship, together with critical infrastructure, transport hubs, data centres, health and government facilities and major events. Since 2018, incidents at Bondi Junction, AAMI Park and music festivals have shown officers as first responders in crowded places, and the Bondi Junction inquest examined the training and supervision of contracted security staff.[13] The Defence examples below illustrate questions of scope, escalation and responsibility that arise at every type of site.

A protected site must prepare for risks that extend beyond terrorism. A Defence facility may have to manage unauthorised access, theft, hostile reconnaissance, insider risk, and drones operating beyond the reach of perimeter controls; a public venue may confront crowd violence, weapons or a sudden need to evacuate; a critical-infrastructure operator may have to coordinate physical security with cyber and operational systems. A procurement specification should follow the risk assessment rather than specifying a generic category of guard. Defence's 2026 estate audit explicitly links changing strategic competition, foreign interference, cyber threats and AUKUS to the physical security of its workplaces.[14]

Defence acknowledged reports of unidentified drones near RAAF Base Williamtown and Newcastle Airport in July 2026, and New South Wales Police subsequently confirmed another incursion in August 2026; the operators and their purposes hadn't been established. A static guard can't be treated as a counter-drone system. The operational questions concern observation, prompt reporting, coordination among the base, airport and police, and specialist detection and response.[15]

In September 2026, at RAAF Base Darwin, Defence advised that a person allegedly entered the base, assaulted an ADF member and left in a stolen vehicle, prompting a lockdown and a military security and police response. The police investigation was continuing when the incident was reported, raising questions about access, escalation and the protection of personnel.[16]

In July 2024, an Army vehicle was stolen from Gallipoli Barracks and later found in Brisbane; a person was subsequently charged.[17] Vehicle custody, identity verification and control of equipment are different tasks again. These incidents don't establish a rate of base-security failure or show that a guard or purchasing decision caused a breach. They clarify why buyers and site operators must define distinct layers of protection and responsibilities when one layer is bypassed.

The division of responsibility is essential. Private security personnel may control routine access, observe and report anomalies, protect a scene, assist an evacuation and follow agreed escalation procedures, while Defence and police retain their own powers and specialist response functions. A tender for an unarmed guard shouldn't quietly assume specialist surveillance, or armed response; conversely, a staffed post without a tested procedure for communicating an incursion may leave the wider system blind at the moment it needs information.

Success also needs to be defined before an incident. For routine access, the measure may be timely, lawful verification and escalation of anomalies; for a more sensitive site, records of access exceptions, tested communications, supervisor availability and relief workers can perform the same role. The site operator shouldn't discover during an incident that no one had specified which team receives an officer's report.

Buyers should evaluate site induction, supervisors who can make decisions, tested communications, relief staffing, access records and a clear interface with public authorities, to a depth that varies by site. A shopping centre, a flight line and a classified Defence workshop shouldn't be bought to the same specification. A licence confirms permission to undertake a regulated activity; it doesn't demonstrate competence for each of those settings.[18]

AUKUS changes the scale and distribution of demand

AUKUS makes the forward demand more tangible. Under AUKUS Pillar 1, Submarine Rotational Force – West is planned to commence at HMAS Stirling in Perth from 2027, and the wider submarine pathway includes the Henderson Defence Precinct and construction facilities at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia. Those activities will add workers, allied personnel, contractors, sensitive information and high-value assets to sites that must function securely and reliably over the coming decades.[19]

AUKUS Pillar 2 distributes classified and sensitive work more widely. The AUKUS partners have announced an advanced undersea systems project with delivery beginning in 2027, which can involve Defence facilities, industrial firms and other partners, each with its own security and access requirements.[20]

Those announcements don't yield a forecast of additional guard posts, but more organisations will need to define and assure proportionate physical protection and access arrangements. Some work will require specialised competence or individual clearances; other work will require only supervised access and employment screening.

These distinctions affect both the supplier and the individual. Defence says an entity providing security services for Defence bases or facilities ordinarily needs DISP membership, subject to stated exceptions, with levels tied to the business need and classification of material handled. An individual Australian Government security clearance is a separate assessment that must be sponsored and justified by the role. Neither a state security licence nor a corporate DISP membership automatically confers one.[21]

The two AUKUS pillars expose different points in the same workforce chain. Pillar 1's concentrated sites make shortages of inducted staff, relief personnel and assured suppliers visible at a gate or facility, while Pillar 2 distributes smaller tasks across a wide breadth of suppliers and research settings, making it harder to infer consistent protection from any one prime contractor. Treating every AUKUS activity as one security category would obscure where screening, clearance, specialist competence and relief staffing are actually needed.

This raises a practical sequencing problem. Screening, induction and clearance can take longer than an ordinary change to the roster, while turnover and leave require replacements throughout a contract. A tender that promises cleared or site-ready workers without identifying the approval pathway, relief pool and lead time may be unable to deliver its own staffing plan. The same licensed worker may suit a general access role but be unable to enter a sensitive area or start before screening is complete, which is why a count of licences isn't a measure of AUKUS readiness.

A purchaser must therefore identify which posts require site-specific induction, which roles need screened or cleared workers, how long approval may take, and what supervision and relief must look like.

Requirements should reflect the task: indiscriminate clearance demands could shrink capacity without improving protection, and a role that needs only controlled access shouldn't consume scarce cleared personnel. Price competition remains legitimate; the test is whether the proposed contract produces an assured capability at an explainable price, rather than whether it offers the lowest hourly rate.

Brisbane 2032 Olympics will test mobilisation

The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games show that event staffing is a network problem. The Queensland workforce plan describes more than 4,200 guards trained and employed, four major firms and 55 subcontractors. The state's planned training scheme didn't attract the expected take-up, and existing Queensland and interstate licence holders met part of the need. There was no reported shortage during the event.[22] The lesson is to distinguish

a successful event from a repeatable mobilisation system: a larger and more dispersed event must know earlier how many workers are needed, where they'll come from and how competence is to be verified.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games is a deadline for obtaining that answer, not proof of an already quantified shortage; there's no verified public, role-based workforce estimate of peak demand or full-time equivalent supply. The organising committee is responsible for planning and staging the games in partnership with delivery bodies.[23] It should work with Queensland agencies, regulators and prospective suppliers to publish a staged demand model separating venues, training sites, accommodation, event-time peaks.

A credible plan should identify the tasks and shifts, the share of workers likely to be already employed, interstate mobilisation, training and licensing lead times, accommodation and transport, screening and any genuinely clearance-dependent roles, supervisors, relief rates and the effects on other clients, then retest its assumptions in exercises. A competitive contract can't remedy an undeveloped labour pool a few months before opening.

Preparations should start with mechanisms under existing powers. Queensland can map recognition pathways and licence activities with other regulators; games delivery partners can stage procurement so providers have time to train, verify and retain personnel; purchasers can make prime contractors accountable for subcontractors, and industry can contribute anonymised capacity information. These measures also improve readiness for other national events, even if the final Olympic Games demand is lower than an early scenario.

Regulatory and policy context

Private security is regulated through eight separate state and territory regimes with different regulators, licence classes, probity thresholds and compliance obligations (as outlined in Appendix 2).

Core requirements for individual officers are broadly consistent, but differences in business licensing, labour hire licensing and audits add cost for national providers and hinder consistent standards.

Federal government settings add further layers. The Protective Security Policy Framework (PSPF) sets personnel and physical security requirements that flow into contracted guarding, and AS 4811:2022 Workforce Screening is referenced for employment screening.[24] Under the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018* (the SOCI Act), responsible entities must manage personnel, physical and supply-chain risks.[25] The Australian Government Security Vetting Agency (AGSVA) targets 20 business days for a baseline clearance and up to 180 days for positive vetting.[26] Procurement models built around hours and licence minimums don't always specify or price the screened, integrated and sometimes cleared capability that these requirements demand.

From licensed workforce to deployable capability

Private security is embedded in the day-to-day protection of facilities and events. National guidance on crowded places emphasises owners and operators understanding risk and implementing protective measures that may combine guards, procedures, design and technology.[27]

Guarding demand can't be inferred from the terrorism threat level alone: crowd behaviour, screening requirements, public-health tasks, critical-infrastructure obligations and major events create different operational demands.

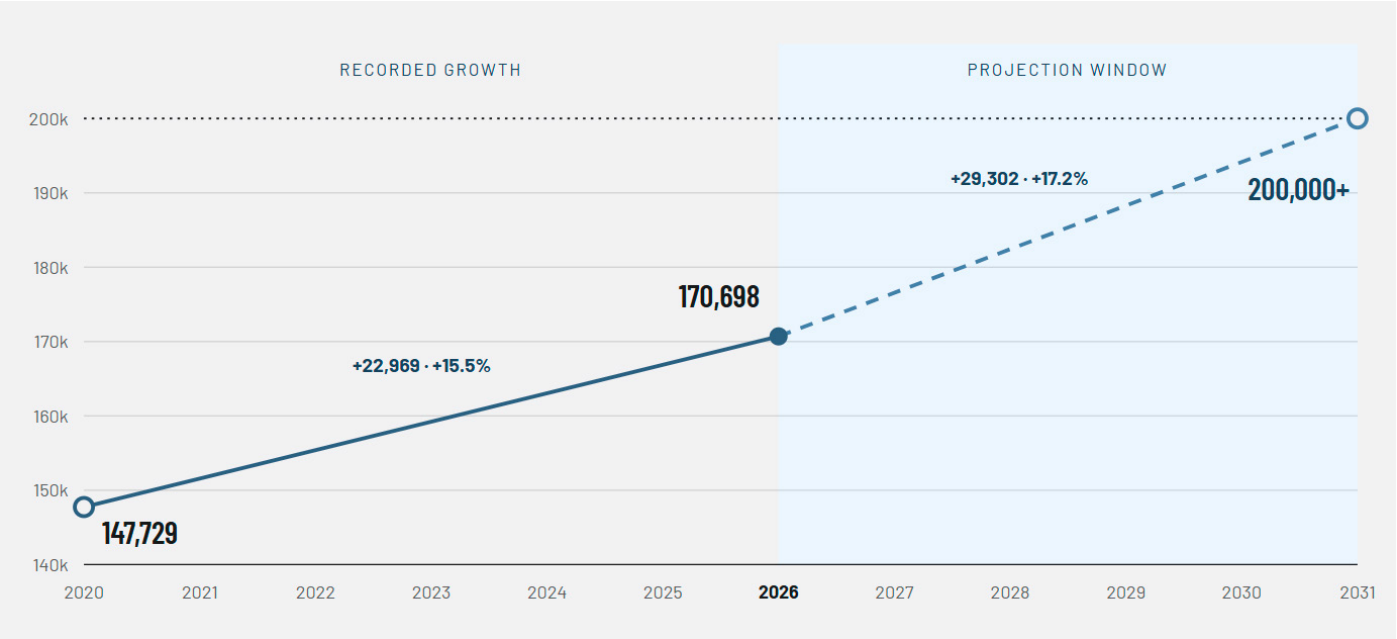
ASPI's 2018 report called for better integration of private guarding into counterterrorism planning.[28] The same workforce question now has a procurement dimension: which capabilities are specified, supported and verified across the life of a contract?

Industry licensing figures compiled from state and territory returns record 147,729 individual licence holders in 2020 and 170,698 in 2026—a rise of about 15.5%, with a projection above 200,000 by 2031 (Figure 1). These are two observed endpoints and a projection, not an annual time series, and the treatment of people licensed in more than one jurisdiction needs confirmation before these totals can be treated as a measure of unique workers.[29]

A count of licence holders is a measure of potential supply, not an available-hours schedule. Some people may work part time, hold more than one licence, be inactive or lack the site-specific competence needed for a contract. Workforce planning should distinguish licences, active employees, deployable hours, skills, location and surge capacity, none of which the headline series provides. Framework 1 (Figure 2) turns the licence count into a sequence of questions for planning, tender evaluation and contract management; there's no defensible national conversion rate between stages. The vital evidence is whether a role-qualified person can serve this contract at this site on this shift, with verified relief when absent.

Availability must also be measured against competing demand. Qualified personnel may have already committed to hospitals, transport, events or another government contract, so an apparent surge may simply move risk from one client to another. A worker may be eligible in one state but not yet authorised in another, trained in crowd control but not inducted for a Defence site, or cleared for one post but unable to cover a different one. An efficient supplier may resolve these constraints through planned recruitment and rostering, but a buyer can't distinguish that from an optimistic tender by counting licence holders. Procurement should request evidence of deployment and test it during delivery.

Figure 1: Licensed security personnel and projection



Source: ASIAL licensing series, 2026; see endnote 2. Only the two observed endpoints and projection are established by the available data.

Figure 2: Framework 1—from a licence count to a verifiable protective service



Source: ASIAL licensing series, 2026; see endnote 2. No national conversion ratios to deployable personnel are available.

Skills must follow the task

Entry qualifications, state or territory licensing, employer induction and specialist learning perform different functions. A Certificate II in Security Operations and a licence aren't substitutes for site induction or competence in a higher risk role, and a qualification doesn't itself authorise every activity in every jurisdiction.[30]

Procurement should specify what a guard needs to do at a particular site, then ask for proportionate evidence. A reception desk might need only routine access control and escalation protocols; a complex event can require crowd movement, screening, incident command and reliable relief staffing; a higher risk government site may add personnel security requirements and a managed interface with electronic systems. A contract should identify who provides training, the time allowed before deployment, supervision ratios, and how relief staff will meet the same standard.

Security clearances require precision. An ordinary state security licence isn't an Australian Government security clearance, which AGSVA assesses through approved sponsors; a tender should request a clearance only where the role genuinely requires one and plan lead time accordingly.[31] Calling every guarded site a 'security-cleared' task would shrink the available pool without necessarily improving safety.

The capability argument also applies after contract award, when actual site coverage can drift from the tendered supervisor and a training plan. A contract can require a current roster, evidence of qualifications and induction, incident reports, replacement protocols and a buyer's right to inspect records. Those provisions don't create capability, but they make departures from the evaluated service detectable. Buyers should set the assurance burden to the risk of the site so that smaller providers can compete.

Training and accreditation

The Certificate II in Security Operations is the national entry qualification, but each regulator decides what satisfies its licence, and NSW and WA add their own requirements. Unlike policing, corrections and aviation security, the industry has no national framework for specialist competencies, so officers holding the same licence can have very different capability.

Mobility and the limits of a national headcount

State and territory licensing systems differ in activities, business permissions and routes for interstate work. Table 1 compares selected requirements; it isn't a substitute for checking the applicable licence and recognition pathway before deployment.[32]

Table 1: Selected licensing arrangements relevant to workforce mobility

Jurisdiction	Verified current arrangement	Practical planning question
NSW	Master licence for supplier; Class 1 or 2 operative licence for worker	Does the interstate role map to the required subclass?
Queensland	Crowd control requires a security provider Class 1 licence	Is the worker licensed for the specific function?
Victoria	Mutual recognition considers equivalent activities; temporary visitor permit available for special events	Which recognition route applies to the event role?
Western Australia	Agent licence to supply; separate operative authorisation for the activity	Are both supplier and worker authority in place?
Northern Territory	Separate security firm and officer or crowd-controller licences; automatic mutual recognition pathway	What conditions apply before interstate deployment?

Sources: Jurisdictional regulator guidance, September 2026; see endnote 24. This is a comparison of selected rules, not a full statement of the law.

The practical question is how a qualified worker moves into a defined role during a surge: whether an existing licence is recognised, whether notice or registration is necessary, whether the activity matches, and whether a local condition applies. Mutual recognition can remove some barriers while preserving legitimate probity and role requirements, but it doesn't solve the problem everywhere. A common operational mapping, written for the roles a major event will actually procure, is an achievable first step.

Automatic mutual recognition helps only in part. Queensland hasn't adopted it; NSW has a five-year exemption for security occupations; and it covers individual licences but not business licences. Firearms licences sit outside mutual recognition altogether.

Wages, costs and workforce sustainability

Security wages are set by the Security Services Industry Award (SSIA) 2020. The structure is compressed: the gap from Level 1 to Level 5 is $2.78 an hour, or about 9.8% (see Appendix 6), so extra qualifications and responsibility bring little reward. Casual employment, multiple job-holding, turnover and licensing delays further weaken continuity.

Because labour is most of the cost of guarding, these pressures are linked to procurement. Once award wages and statutory on-costs are covered, there's little room to cut a rate without cutting training, supervision or retention, and a price weighting that ignores the cost of compliant employment pushes competition onto wages. Workforce sustainability is therefore largely a product of how services are bought.

Procurement policies, practices and models

Value for money and price weighting

Every Australian framework defines value for money as more than lowest price; the difference lies in application.

Agencies usually set their own price and non-price weightings (Appendix 5), and the formula used to convert price into points can itself decide the outcome. Only two jurisdictions address the workforce directly: Victoria's security services contract sets a wage floor 6% above the award, and the ACT's Secure Local Jobs Code requires contractors to demonstrate compliant labour practices before they can bid.

Compliance and capability delivery

Compliance requirements are necessary, but the effort is front-loaded. In the survey, 61% of respondents said more than half their bid effort goes to compliance rather than operational capability, 77% said tender commitments are verified only rarely or occasionally once a contract begins, and 61% said capability above the minimum is rarely rewarded.

Where contract delivery can weaken

The Victorian hotel quarantine inquiry is a sharp example of what poorly controlled deployment can mean. It identified risks arising from extensive subcontracting, casual labour and insufficient attention to training, supervision and monitoring in that particular emergency program, although it didn't establish that subcontracting is intrinsically unsafe.[33] The policy consequence is to make the chain of delivery visible and assign responsibility for worker competence and performance at every level.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's local-government inquiry found underpayments in a defined sample of 23 councils. Fourteen councils had a noncompliant security labour supply chain, and 54 of 464 workers whose records were assessed were underpaid. The inquiry reported higher observed noncompliance among

subcontractors than among principal contractors in that sample.[34] This is stronger evidence of an assurance failure than industry perception alone, but it can't estimate national incidence; purchasers should use it to justify compliance checks and information rights, not to label every provider noncompliant.

Contract terms allocate risk. A fixed fee for a multi-year labour service may create pressure after contract award changes, while a fully open-ended pass-through can weaken incentives for efficiency. A specified adjustment mechanism tied to identifiable wage or statutory changes, with review rights for material service changes, balances the two. An apparently cheap contract with repeated unfilled shifts or weak reporting doesn't produce low whole-of-life cost.

Large national firms, specialist providers and regional firms each offer different strengths. Bundled contracts may deliver scale and a single point of accountability but can reduce the number of viable prime bidders, and a tender process that evaluates a national prime but sees little of its delivery chain can misread both capacity and risk. There's no robust concentration series from which to infer that smaller providers are disappearing. A procurement pilot should record bidder numbers, reasons for non-participation, subcontracting structure and delivery performance, including whether the assurance burden excludes capable firms.

Price, value and evidence

Commonwealth procurement rules require a broader value-for-money judgement than price alone.[35] A 2026 survey of security providers conducted as part of this research project shows why suppliers question how that judgement is made in practice. Among those who responded, 78% said the lowest conforming tender almost always won, 67% said buyers treated value for money as the lowest conforming price, 84% said buyers rarely or never tested price realism, and 89% reported declining or withdrawing from a tender at least once because they considered the work unsustainable at a competitive price. The sample size and recruitment method aren't available, so Table 2 reports these as indicated by respondents' perceptions, not the prevalence of price-led awards across the market.[36]

Table 2: Selected responses from a 2026 provider survey

Question addressed	Response among respondents	What this can show
Lowest conforming tender almost always wins	78%	Provider perception of award practice
Value for money means lowest conforming price	67%	Provider view of buyer behaviour
Buyers rarely or never test price realism	84%	Perceived gap in evaluation
Declined or withdrew from an unsustainable tender	89%	Reported participation decision

Source: ASIAL survey chart; see endnote 13. Percentages describe respondents; respondent count and sampling method are unavailable.

The survey also indicates a potential market response. When capable suppliers withdraw because they believe an honest staffing plan can't compete, a public buyer may receive fewer credible options. This is testable: record how many firms requested tender documents, submitted bids, withdrew and explained why, and compare those figures with contract outcomes.

Providers report a coherent problem: compliance paperwork is highly visible at tender, while the workforce can be harder to verify. Published tender weightings offer some independent evidence: the recent NSW Whole of Government Integrated Security Services Contract (RFP-2007486),[37] a mandatory panel covering guarding, patrol, alarm monitoring and electronic security across the state from June 2026, and a weighted price at 80%. Although it's a state arrangement rather than a federal one, a weighting of that size is consistent with providers' reports that price dominates, and because panel rates operate as ceilings, price can come into play again when agencies buy under the panel. The direct way to test the claim of price dominance is to review a sample of evaluation plans, weightings, tender outcomes, rejected-bid reasons and contract performance records under suitable confidentiality controls.

An illustrative roster of 8,736 hours combines weekday, night, weekend and public holiday work. Applying the relevant July 2026 Level 2 award rates to its five shift categories gives approximately $339,754 in direct wages before leave, superannuation, workers' compensation, payroll tax and other costs.[38] The scenario compares bids of $395,000, $465,000 and $514,180. As the roster represents 364 days, and on-costs haven't been independently validated, it demonstrates an evaluation question, not a legal minimum price or the actual cost of a year-round contract.[39]

Table 3 isolates the price-scoring arithmetic; as no non-price score is assigned, the table can't identify a winning bid. A purchaser should first ask how a tenderer will meet the specified roster, the applicable award, lawful employment costs, supervision and relief commitments, and payroll specialists must verify any complete cost benchmark before it's used to judge a bid.

Table 3: Illustrative bid prices and price-component arithmetic

Bid	Price	Price score	At 70%	At 40%
A	$514,180	76.8	53.8	30.7
B	$465,000	84.9	59.4	34.0
C	$395,000	100.0	70.0	40.0

Source: Illustrative ASIAL scenario; arithmetic recalculated as lowest bid divided by each bid price. The 8,736-hour roster isn't a full-year benchmark. Values exclude GST.

At a 70% price weighting, the $395,000 illustrative bid earns 70 price points, compared with about 53.8 for the $514,180 bid; at 40%, the price components are 40 and about 30.7 points. Without actual non-price scores neither weighting identifies the winning bid. The lowest offer may warrant an explanation once full cost obligations are established, but price alone doesn't demonstrate noncompliance.

Different employment models, payroll-tax positions and rostering efficiencies can change the answer. Requiring disclosure of the

model and a fair opportunity to reconcile an apparent gap is more rigorous than either reflexively choosing or excluding the cheapest tender.[40]

International and adjacent-sector comparisons

Other governments have faced the same tension. The UK's Procurement Policy Note 025 (2026) warns that a narrow, short-term cost view of value for money can ignore resilience, continuity and market sustainability; although limited to strategic sectors, it treats procurement settings as a national-security issue.[41] In the US, Congress restricted 'lowest price, technically acceptable' contracting for services where quality matters, and contracted security officers earn less than those employed directly.[42] Canada gives the Corps of Commissionaires a right of first refusal for federal guarding, trading price competition for workforce stability.[43]

Adjacent Australian sectors show outcome-based alternatives. Defence sustainment ties payment to capability availability rather than hours, and Defence's base services contracts combine outcome-based contracting with competitive tension across national, site-based services.[44] Hybrid models pair a stable core workforce with a contracted surge layer, while hotel quarantine exposed the cost of engaging a casualised guarding workforce without capability requirements or oversight.

From buying posts to assuring a service

A better contract begins before tender release. The purchaser identifies the threat and operating environment; defines what personnel should detect, deter, report and respond to; and specifies outcomes that can be checked, alongside minimum hours where fixed coverage is genuinely necessary. It asks whether a different combination of technology, procedures and staffing could meet the purpose.

At a Defence site entry, for example, a buyer can specify what an officer may approve independently, what triggers a call to military security, how a suspected drone or unauthorised visitor is reported, which shifts need screened or cleared personnel, and who can cover an absence without losing that standard. Before accepting a relief officer, the buyer can check that person's licence, induction and access approval; if the post is left uncovered, the contract can require immediate reporting or a remedial plan. The example is illustrative and makes no claim about arrangements at a named base.

The evaluation should then examine a bidder's actual method: named responsibility for supervision, training and relief, evidence of licence and role compliance, deployment capacity, incident management, subcontracting controls and a credible roster. Price analysis should use applicable wage obligations and a realistic view of operating cost without setting a government-sanctioned rate or allowing an incumbent to dictate market prices. Bidders should be able to explain legitimately low costs, and officials should record why an explanation is accepted or rejected. The approach can fit within existing value-for-money rules.[45]

This approach changes the incentives of the competition. A tenderer that invests in induction, supervision and a credible relief pool can explain those costs against a common service specification, while a leaner bidder remains free to show how a different method achieves the same outcome. A small regional or specialist firm can demonstrate its actual strength without imitating the paperwork of a national prime contractor.

Delivery assurance closes the loop. The contract should specify what changes need consent, how a buyer checks qualifications and staffing, how incidents and missed shifts are reported, and what happens when the promised service is absent. A short monthly exception record of uncovered posts, unapproved substitutions, delayed inductions, and corrective actions would expose a deteriorating service before the next tender cycle. Procurement teams also need access to people who understand security operations and industrial obligations; a numerical scoring sheet can't substitute for that expertise.

Price discipline remains necessary. Mandating a low maximum price weighting could obscure trade-offs or invite nominally elaborate promises, and mandating a single minimum price could exclude efficient suppliers. A risk-based specification, an explainable price, verifiable service commitments and measured performance form a more defensible value test, and pilots comparing contract cost with actual outcomes should inform any later national guidance.

European industry and union guidance offers buyers practical questions about staff quality, supervision and management alongside price.[46] Australia can use those questions within its existing procurement framework. A single national licensing institution, mandatory price weighting or prescribed minimum bid would need a separate case and is unnecessary for the immediate task of defining and verifying the service purchased.

The controls should also be tiered by consequence. A low-risk reception contract may need straightforward licence checks, a clear escalation contact and periodic roster review; a sensitive base or major-event command point may justify induction records, relief approvals, supervisor coverage and exercises with the site operator. Making every contractor complete the most demanding paperwork could reduce competition without buying better security.

Evidence for the next decision

A national account of procurement practice requires actual transactions. A sample across jurisdictions and risk levels should record the stated service, evaluation criteria and weights, tender outcomes, reasons for exclusion, contract changes and delivered performance, comparing like services within their own groups. Those records would test whether suppliers' reports of price dominance correspond to purchaser decisions.

Industry workforce statistics also need to distinguish licences from active participation, location, available hours and role competence, and to resolve cross-jurisdictional duplication, inconsistent categories, privacy and commercial sensitivity before supporting surge planning.[47] Survey reporting should disclose respondent numbers, recruitment, and question wording; the percentages in this report are provisional until those records are checked, and purchaser interviews would provide an independent check on provider perceptions.[48]

A payroll specialist should validate a full-year roster and applicable on-costs before any illustrative cost model is used as a benchmark. The model here prompts a bidder to explain an apparent mismatch but can't establish a universal minimum price or that any real tender underpays workers.[49] Pilots should measure administration costs so that additional paperwork isn't mistaken for additional protection.

Conclusion

Australia can count security licences and award guarding contracts, but neither act alone establishes who can perform a specified role at a particular site or maintain that service when conditions change. Defence's widening protective task, the different demands of AUKUS and the fixed planning horizon of Brisbane 2032 make that gap worth resolving.

The purpose is measurable: a purchaser should be able to identify the people, supervision and relief it bought, verify what arrived, and judge whether the contract provided value through its life.

The evidence suggests current settings constrain more than they optimise:

- ***Capability:*** Contracts buy hours at the licence minimum rather than specified, verified capability.
- ***Capacity:*** Licence counts overstate deployable supply, and fragmented licensing and concentrating contract models limit surge.
- ***Resilience:*** Fixed multi-year pricing and layered subcontracting leave providers absorbing cost shocks with limited assurance.
- ***Value for money:*** Price often dominates, and credibility and delivery are rarely tested.
- ***Workforce sustainability:*** Compressed margins and a flat award structure limit investment in training and retention.
- ***National-security outcomes:*** Officers are first responders across most crowded places and a growing share of critical infrastructure, major-event and Defence protection, so these constraints carry national-security consequences.

These constraints are well understood, and most of the tools needed to address them already exist; what remains is the decision to use those tools. Within the next 12 months, the Department of Finance should issue risk-tiered guidance that links site duties due to the personnel, supervision and relief offered at tender, while procuring entities begin now to test materially low bids and verify what's delivered.

Defence should pilot the same approach at selected bases and AUKUS-related facilities and carry the lessons into Submarine Rotational Force – West. Regulators, purchasers and industry should publish a baseline measure of deployable capacity alongside a common map of licensed activities and recognition pathways.

Brisbane 2032 delivery partners should build a role-based workforce plan and test it through a mobilisation exercise before 2030. Finance and major purchasers should then publish what those changes cost and achieve, so that requirements that add burden without improving delivery can be removed.

ASPI warned in 2018 that it would be unfortunate if reform came only in the wake of a crisis. Eight years later, that warning still applies, and AUKUS and Brisbane 2032 now set a fixed timetable for acting on it.

Appendix 1: Survey results

INDUSTRY SURVEY

Security Industry Contracting Perspectives

AUGUST 2026

100% say the lowest conforming price usually or almost always wins

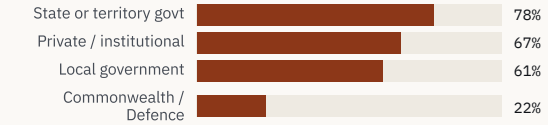
94% say the mandatory minimum is the ceiling — or worse, a penalty

89% declined a tender or withdrew because the work wasn't sustainable at price

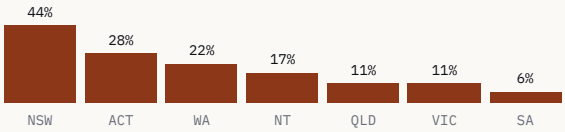
89% are never or rarely offered a debrief when unsuccessful

01 Respondents

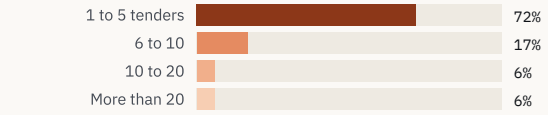
Q1 · Buyer segments tendered to



Q2 · Jurisdictions of delivery



Q3 · Competitive tenders responded to in the period

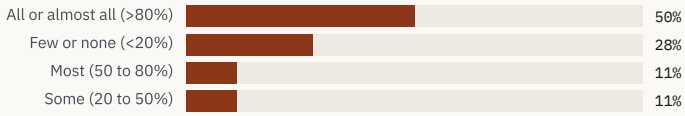


Where the work sits

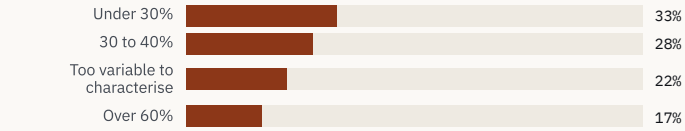
State and territory government is the single largest buyer segment at 78%, and most respondents deliver across several jurisdictions at once — but 72% still chase only a handful of tenders (one to five) a year.

02 Evaluation Criteria

Q4 · Were criteria weightings disclosed in the tender documents?



Q5 · Typical weighting applied to price, where disclosed



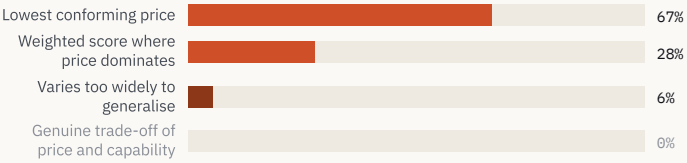
Q6 · How often does the lowest-priced conforming tender win, irrespective of stated weightings?



Almost always · More often than not

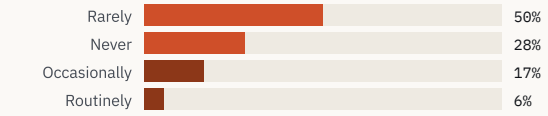
No respondent chose "sometimes", "rarely" or "never".

Q7 · How "value for money" is applied in practice

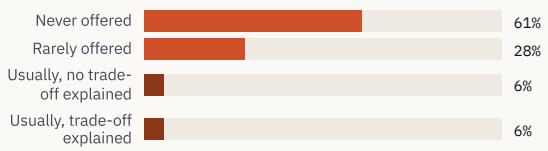


03 Safeguards and transparency

Q8 · Buyers testing whether tendered prices sustain award-compliant wages, supervision and training



Q9 · Debriefs offered when unsuccessful — and do they explain the price / capability trade-off?

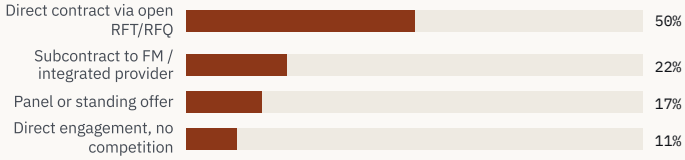


Reading the signal

89% of firms are never or rarely offered a debrief when unsuccessful — leaving no visibility into why price beat capability.

04 How the work is contracted

Q10 · Largest share of government-funded guarding revenue



Q11 · Panel work allocation

44% OF RESPONDENTS HOLD PANEL POSITIONS

Unclear or inconsistent	22%
Secondary competition for quotes	17%
Direct allocation to a preferred panellist	6%
Rotation or even distribution	0%
Not applicable	56%

Panel dynamics

44% of respondents hold a panel position, but most describe how work is allocated within it as unclear or inconsistent.

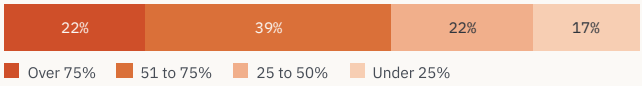
05 Compliance versus capability

Q12 · Contracting tiers between buyer and the guard's employer

72% OF RESPONDENTS SUBCONTRACT

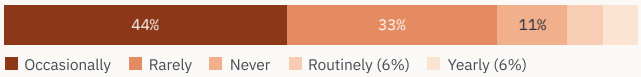
One — direct to head contractor	56%
Two	11%
Three or more	6%
Not applicable	28%

Q13 · Share of tender response effort consumed by compliance content rather than operational capability

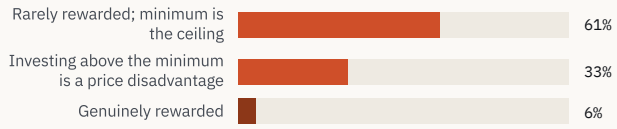


61% of respondents spend more than half their bid effort on compliance paperwork.

Q14 · Are tender compliance commitments verified during delivery?



Q15 · Does evaluation reward capability above the mandatory minimum?



Q16 · Declined to tender or withdrew because requirements couldn't be delivered sustainably at competitive prices



ON PRICE REALISM AND WALKING AWAY

> "Very low tender prices should be assessed carefully to ensure they can realistically support Award-compliant wages and the level of service promised in the tender."

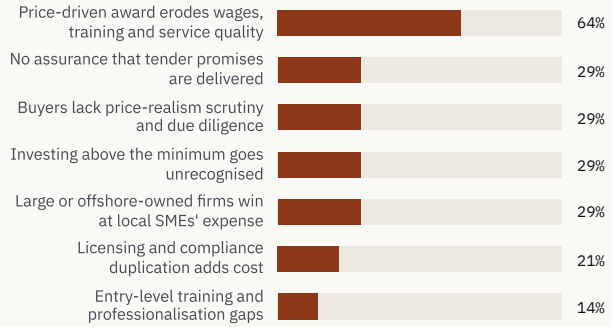
> "Awarding contracts primarily on the lowest price can create value-for-money risks when rates do not support appropriate staffing, training, equipment, supervision and compliance."

> "Too many companies underbid simply to undercut their competitors, only to underperform once the service begins."

06 In respondents' own words

Q17 · Open comment on value for money, contracting models, and the compliance / capability balance

78% OF RESPONDENTS WROTE A COMMENT · THEMES AS A SHARE OF THOSE COMMENTS



> "Once the mandatory requirements are met there can be limited recognition for providers that invest above the minimum standard."

> "Tender responses require extensive compliance documentation, but once contracts are awarded there appears to be limited verification that the promised staffing, training and supervision are actually delivered."

> "Unless you spend time, effort and money internally training your staff to differentiate from others — for which clients do not want to pay — price is a race to the bottom."

> "Large firms almost exclusively get major contracts — work given to multinational companies and not locally owned Australian ones."

> "If the government wants a cheaper rate, start with cutting red tape and duplicated licensing — labour hire and firm licences, when we should only need one."

> "Training is very focussed on having pieces of paper completed, not on skill development. Consequently, they enter the industry under-trained."

> "Transparency is the key to successful contract negotiations. Once a client is satisfied with the service, they tend to stay with the provider."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Price consistently overrides capability: all respondents say the lowest conforming bid usually or almost always wins, 94% treat the mandatory minimum as a ceiling rather than a benchmark, and 61% spend more than half their bid effort on compliance paperwork alone. In respondents' own words, the result is a market where sustainable wages, training and service quality are hardest to protect once price decides the outcome.

Appendix 2: State and territory legislative arrangements

Australia's private security industry operates within a complex regulatory environment in which licensing requirements are established separately by each state and territory. While every jurisdiction regulates both security businesses and individual licensed security personnel, there's no nationally consistent approach to how those requirements are administered. Instead, eight separate legislative regimes have evolved over more than a decade, each with its own governance arrangements, licensing architecture, probity requirements and compliance obligations.[50]

Jurisdiction and regulator	Key arrangements	Licensing structure and notable features
Access Canberra (Australian Capital Territory Government)	*Security Industry Act 2003* Security Industry Regulation 2003	Master licence for employers and employee licences by sub-class. Fingerprint-verified national police check required. Licences issued for 1 or 3 years. First-aid certification required for several sub-classes.
New South Wales Security Licensing and Enforcement Directorate (New South Wales Police Force)	*Security Industry Act 1997* Security Industry Regulation 2016	Master licence for employers (graded by number of persons provided); Class 1 and Class 2 employee licences by activity. Only master licence holders may employ or provide licensed personnel.
Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (Northern Territory Government)	*Private Security Act 1995* Private Security (Crowd Controllers) Regulations 1996 Private Security (Security Officers) Regulations 1998 Private Security (Miscellaneous Matters) Regulations 2006	Separate licences for crowd controllers, security officers and security firms. Ministerially approved codes of practice attach as licence conditions. No qualification requirement for a firm licence, but key staff must meet individual probity criteria.
Office of Fair Trading (Queensland Government)	*Security Providers Act 1993* Security Providers Regulation 2008 Crowd Control Code of Practice Regulation 2008 Security Firm Code of Practice Regulation 2008 Security Officer (Licensed Premises) Code of Practice Regulation 2008	Firms must belong to an approved security industry association and undergo a compliance audit every three years—a co-regulatory model unique to Queensland. Labour hire licensing applies in addition where personnel are supplied to another provider.
Consumer and Business Services (SA Government)	Security and Investigation Industry Act 1995 Security and Investigation Industry Regulations 2011	Combined security and investigation agent licensing. Individuals, each partner in a partnership, and bodies corporate (with a nominated licensed manager) must all hold licences.
Department of Justice (Tasmania Government)	Security and Investigations Agents Act 2002 Security and Investigations Agents Regulations 2015	Combined security and investigation agent licensing framework administered through the consumer affairs portfolio rather than the police.
Licensing and Regulation Division (Victoria Police)	Private Security Act 2004 Private Security Regulations 2016	Two-tier structure: licences for higher risk manpower activities (crowd control, guarding, bodyguards) and registration for advisers and equipment installers, at both business and individual levels. Labour hire licensing applies in addition.
Licensing Enforcement Division (Western Australia Police Force)	*Security and Related Activities (Control) Act 1996* Security and Related Activities (Control) Regulations 1997	Agent (business) licences and non-agent (operative) licence classes; agent licence holders may supply but not personally perform other licensed activities without the corresponding operative licence.

Appendix 3: Licensing structures

While all jurisdictions distinguish between different security functions and activities, they adopt markedly different approaches to structuring licences—ranging from class-based and activity-based models to licences differentiated by the relationship between the business supplying services and the individual performing them. Some jurisdictions layer endorsements onto a single licence, while others require a separate licence for each function.[51]

Those differences have implications for how security workers are trained, licensed and able to move between roles and jurisdictions. A worker's licence in one jurisdiction might not map neatly onto an equivalent category in another, and providers operating nationally must manage multiple, non-aligned licence schemes.

Model	Jurisdictions	How it works	Workforce implications
Class-based	ACT, NSW	Numbered classes and sub-classes; e.g. ACT Class 1A unarmed officer, 1B bodyguard, 1C crowd controller, 1D guard dog handler, 1E monitoring centre operator, 1FC/1FP armed officer. NSW Class 1 covers manpower roles; Class 2 covers technical and advisory roles.	Granular and clear, but class codes are jurisdiction-specific and don't translate directly elsewhere.
Activity-based	Vic., Qld, NT	A named licence for each function; e.g. investigator, bodyguard, crowd controller, security guard, trainer, equipment installer, security adviser (Vic.). Victoria adds risk tiering: licensing for higher-risk manpower roles, registration for advisers and installers. NT licenses security officers and crowd controllers only.	Intuitive to understand, but workers performing several functions may need several licences.
Business / operative split	WA (and NSW master licence)	Agent licences to supply services; non-agent licences to perform the work (security officer, monitoring officer, bodyguard, crowd controller, consultant, installer, investigator). Agents can't perform licensed work without the corresponding operative licence.	Separates commercial accountability from individual competence and probity.
Combined licence with endorsements	SA, Tas.	A single security and investigation framework. Licence categories carry activity endorsements; e.g. guarding, crowd control, monitoring, bodyguard, dog, firearm, baton (Tas.); SA adds security systems work and sales/advice.	Flexible for multiskilled workers, but bundles investigation with security in ways other jurisdictions don't.

Appendix 4: State and territory procurement frameworks

Procurement of guards is generally considered a service-based contract, typically tendered under a standing panel or open tender. Buyers must operate within the procurement framework of their own jurisdiction, alongside security-specific obligations that shape how guarding services are specified, staffed and delivered.

Framework and legislative basis	Intent/objective
Commonwealth Commonwealth Procurement Rules (CPRs)[52]	The CPRs aim to ensure that procurement across the Commonwealth is conducted in a way that's: • focused on value for money (the core rule) • ethical, efficient, effective and economical • transparent and accountable • supportive of broader government objectives.
Commonwealth Protective Security Policy Framework (PSPF)[53]	Prescribes what Australian Government entities must do to protect their people, information and resources, domestically and internationally. Sets mandatory requirements across security domains—security governance, information, personnel and physical security, and (from Release 2024) separate risk and technology domains. Relevant to guarding through physical security controls and personnel security / vetting standards that flow into contracted security arrangements.
Commonwealth SOCI Act[54]	Establishes a national framework to identify, manage and reduce security risks to critical infrastructure across 11 sectors. Imposes risk-management program, asset-register and incident-reporting obligations on responsible entities, including managing physical and personnel security hazards—which extends to how security and guarding services for critical assets are specified, staffed and delivered.
Commonwealth Security Contracts Guiding Principles (ANZCTC Crowded Places Sub-Committee, 2023)[55]	Provides best-practice guidance for government and crowded-place owners and operators procuring and managing private security contracts. The non-binding checklist covers eight principles, including due diligence, legal compliance, workforce supervision, training, subcontracting, transparency, reporting wrongdoing and performance standards. It identifies procurement risks including ghosting, sham contracting, phoenixing, multilevel subcontracting, accessorial liability under section 550 of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and the risks of lowest cost tenders. Importantly, it reinforces that buyers retain responsibility for risks that can't be transferred to contractors and links procurement practices to workforce quality, compliance and counterterrorism preparedness.
Australian Capital Territory Government *Procurement Act 2001* & Government Procurement Regulation 2007[56]	ACT entities must pursue value for money—the best available outcome that maximises overall benefit to the territory—having regard to probity and ethical behaviour, risk management, open and effective competition and whole-of-life cost. The Charter of Procurement Values, Secure Local Jobs Code and Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation apply, placing explicit weight on ethical labour standards relevant to guarding contracts.
New South Wales Government Procurement Policy Framework[57] (December 2024) and *Public Works and Procurement Act 1912* (NSW)[58]	Sets five procurement objectives: • best value for money—a balanced assessment of financial and non-financial factors, not the lowest price • fair and open competition • transparency and probity • easy to do business with government • economic, social and sustainability outcomes.
Queensland Government Queensland Procurement Policy (QPP)[59] Buy Queensland approach; current QPP 2026 (building on QPP 2023)[60]	Value for money is the best available outcome for money spent, assessed against relevant government economic, ethical, social and environmental objectives (responsible/purposeful public procurement), whole-of-life cost and non-cost factors. Buy Queensland embeds ethical supplier requirements and local benefit through the QPP's procurement principles, meaning price is expressly not the sole determinant.
Victorian Government Victorian Government Purchasing Board[61] (VGPB) supply policies and *Financial Management Act 1994*[62]	Positions procurement as a core business function underpinned by value for money (financial and non-financial factors), probity, accountability, and a scalable approach matched to risk and complexity. Note: The VGPB was discontinued in 2025 (functions transferred to the Minister for Government Services / Department of Government Services); existing VGPB policies continue to apply until replaced.
SA Government SA Government Procurement Framework and Treasurer's Instruction 18[63] (Procurement), *Public Finance and Audit Act 1987*[64]	Procurement must achieve value for money—the optimal balance of whole-of-life cost and quality—while maximising opportunity for SA business participation (jobs, apprentices and trainees, innovation) consistent with the SA Industry Participation Policy. Probity, transparency and accountability apply across the life cycle. (This framework replaced the former State Procurement Board and *State Procurement Act 2004*.)
Tasmanian Government Procurement Treasurer's Instructions[65] and *Financial Management Act 2016* (Tas.)[66]	Procurement Principles (TI PF-1) require value for money, open and fair competition, and ethical, non-discriminatory conduct. The Buy Local Policy and a 25% weighted economic and social benefits test give explicit weight to Tasmania's economic and social outcomes in competitive processes.

Western Australian Government *Procurement Act 2020* [67](WA) and Western Australia Procurement Rules—General Procurement Direction 2025/07[68]	The *Procurement Act 2020* objects are to: • promote best value for money delivering sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits • reduce barriers to SME participation • strengthen integrity and ethical, accountable practice • enable coordinated whole-of-government strategy with devolved accountability • provide a responsive legislative scheme.
Northern Territory Government *Procurement Act 1995*[69] (NT), Procurement Regulations and Northern Territory Procurement Rules[70]	Five procurement principles: • value for the territory—overall benefit to the Northern Territory, not just price • ethical behaviour • open and effective competition • enhancing the capabilities of local enterprise and industry • environmental protection. The Buy Local Plan and Aboriginal Procurement Policy shape how local content and participation are weighted.

Appendix 5: Evaluation weightings, by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Value-for-money position	Mandated or typical non-price weighting	Security-sector-specific evidence
Commonwealth	Value for money is the core principle of the CPRs; explicitly not lowest price, requiring consideration of financial and non-financial costs and benefits, fitness for purpose, experience and whole-of-life costs.[71] From 17 November 2025, ethical conduct is an explicit value-for-money factor and agencies must make reasonable enquiries into suppliers' labour, WHS and environmental compliance for all procurements.[72]	No mandated numeric price / non-price weighting. Agencies set and disclose their own criteria and relative importance per procurement.	Guarding is bought through AusTender panels and standing offers. Contract details are published on AusTender, but evaluation weightings aren't. No disclosed guarding weighting located.
New South Wales	The overarching consideration; not the lowest price nor the highest quality, but a balanced assessment of quality, cost, fitness for purpose, capability, risk and whole-of-life cost.[73]	Goods and services over $3 million: minimum 10% of non-price criteria for SME participation and a further 10% for economic, ethical, environmental and social priorities. Over $7.5 million: 1.5% Aboriginal participation target.[74] A proposed 30% tender weighting (local content, jobs, small business, ethical supply chains) remains under consultation and isn't yet in force.[75]	Whole of Government Integrated Security Services RFP-2007486 (closed Sept 2025): panel arrangement; weighting stated as an estimate, subject to change.[76]
Victoria	Governed by the Victoria Government Purchasing Board principles; value for money rather than lowest price.	Social Procurement Framework: a scored social-value criterion (indicatively 5%–15% of the evaluation for higher value contracts).[77] Local Jobs First: weighted local-content and job-outcome criteria apply to designated strategic projects.[78]	Security Services State Purchase Contract (closed panel, approx. $100 million over three years) embeds a wage floor of 6% above the Security Services Industry Award and a 'no less favourable' mechanism protecting pay and conditions.[79] The Department of Government Services is running a request for information inform the next security services tender.[80]
Queensland	Buy Queensland approach; value for money balanced with local economic and social benefit.	Under the Queensland Procurement Policy 2026, significant procurements must apply purposeful evaluation criteria weighted at 10%–20%.[81] Targets of at least 30% of procurement value from Queensland SMEs and 3% of addressable spend with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses (indicative).[82]	Guarding is bought via standing offer arrangements (e.g. Queensland Police Service). These are subject to Right to Information disclosure, but weightings aren't routinely published.
Western Australia	Governed by the Western Australia Procurement Rules; value for money rather than lowest price.[83]	No mandated numeric non-price weighting. Evaluation reports are required for procurements of $50,000 and above; the Buy Local Policy applies regional price preferences.	Guarding is delivered across agencies (e.g. TAFE, transport, cemeteries). Evaluation weightings aren't published.
South Australia	South Australia Government Procurement Framework: the lowest price doesn't always represent best value; a balanced judgement of whole-of-life cost and qualitative factors.[84]	The South Australia Industry Participation Policy sets a minimum industry-participation weighting in evaluation criteria (indicatively around 15%). The Evaluation Planning Guideline treats cost/price as a weighted criterion.[85]	Guarding is delivered via agency contracts. Evaluation weightings aren't published.
Tasmania	Value for money assessed through a published weighted-criteria methodology rather than lowest price.[86]	Tender evaluation using weighted criteria: the lowest price is scored 10 and other offers are ranked proportionally.[87] Buy Local applies an economic and social benefits test (indicatively around 30% on higher value work).	Guarding is delivered via agency contracts. Evaluation weightings aren't published.

Australian Capital Territory	Charter of Procurement Values Direction 2020 applies to all procurements regardless of value; value for money is the best overall benefit to the territory, not the cheapest bid.[88]	No fixed numeric non-price weighting. Security is a named covered category under the Secure Local Jobs Code; tenderers must hold a Code Certificate (a pass/fail eligibility gate).	The Secure Local Jobs Code directly targets security (with cleaning, construction and traffic management). Security contracts of $25,000+ require a Labour Relations, Training and Workplace Equity Plan; the code applies to services of $200,000+ where labour is the highest cost.[89]
Northern Territory	Value for Territory: the overall benefit to the Northern Territory, not just price. Price is included through a normalisation formula, and the Northern Territory doesn't necessarily choose the cheapest offer.[90]	Value for Territory is a heavily weighted criterion, published per tender in the RFT annexure (indicatively around 30%). The Building Northern Territory Industry Participation Policy requires a local participation plan for procurements over $5 million.[91]	Guarding is delivered via agencies and standing offers, with weightings set per RFT rather than centrally published.

Appendix 6: SSIA cost schedule

Table 4: SSIA minimum hourly rates, by classification[92]

Classification	Typical roles	Minimum hourly rate
Level 1	Entry-level guard, static guarding, gatehouse	$28.42
Level 2	Cert II, alarm response, crowd control, patrol	$29.24
Level 3	Cert III, dog handler, senior guard	$29.73
Level 4	Control room operator, supervisor	$30.23
Level 5	Manager, advanced specialist	$31.20

Note: These rates apply to employees (full-time, part-time, casual) under the Security Services Industry Award 2020, not independent contractors, who aren't covered by any statutory minimum.

The wage structure is highly compressed, which leaves guards little financial incentive to gain further certification or take on higher risk roles:

- Across the entire career ladder, from entry-level guarding at Level 1 to management at Level 5, the gap is $2.78 an hour—a differential of about 9.8 %.
- The step from Level 1 to Level 2 typically requires a Cert II and higher risk duties of alarm response, crowd control, and patrol. It's worth $0.82 an hour (2.9%).
- The step from Level 2 to Level 3 typically involves a Cert II to Cert III and often involves specialised skills such as dog handling. It adds $0.49 an hour (1.7%).
- Promotion into supervision (Level 3 to Level 4) adds $0.50 an hour (1.7%).
- The final step into management (Level 4 to Level 5) adds $0.97 an hour (3.2%).
- Permanent Level 2 security officer (SSIA, effective 1 July 2025).

Table 5: Permanent Level 2 security officer (SSIA, effective 1 July 2026)[93]

Cost component	Monday–Friday (day)	Monday–Friday (night)	Saturday	Sunday	Public holiday
Hourly rate	$29.24	$35.59	$43.86	$58.48	$73.10
Annual leave (8.6957%)	$2.54	$3.09	$3.81	$5.09	$6.36
Personal leave (4.3478%)	$1.27	$1.27	$1.27	$1.27	$1.27
Superannuation (12%)	$3.51	$4.27	$5.26	$7.02	$8.77
Portable LSL levy (1.8%)	$0.53	$0.64	$0.79	$1.05	$1.32
WorkCover (avg 3.844%)	$1.12	$1.37	$1.69	$2.25	$2.81
TOTAL minimum cost	$38.21	$46.23	$56.68	$75.16	$93.63

Table 6: Casual Level 1 security officer (SSIA, effective 1 July 2026)

Cost component	Monday–Friday (day)	Monday–Friday (night)	Saturday	Sunday	Public holiday
Hourly rate (+25% loading)	$36.55	$42.90	$51.17	$65.79	$80.41
Superannuation (12%)	$4.39	$5.15	$6.14	$7.89	$9.65
Portable LSL levy (1.8%)	$0.66	$0.77	$0.92	$1.18	$1.45
WorkCover (3.844%)	$1.40	$1.65	$1.97	$2.53	$3.09
TOTAL minimum cost	$43.00	$50.47	$60.20	$77.39	$94.60

These totals are the statutory floor only. ASIAL's footnotes list further costs that sit on top:

- Payroll tax: Victoria 4.85%, NSW 5.45%, Queensland 4.75%–4.95%, South Australia 4.95%, Western Australia 5.5%, Tasmania 4.0%–6.1%, ACT 6.75-8.75%, Northern Territory 5.5-6.5%.
- Incidental costs: equipment (phones, iPads), uniforms, licence fees, ASIC, legal and accounting fees, public liability insurance, induction and training, and office overheads.
- GST of 10 %.

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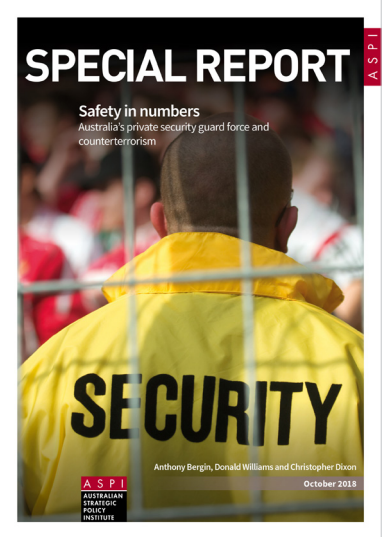
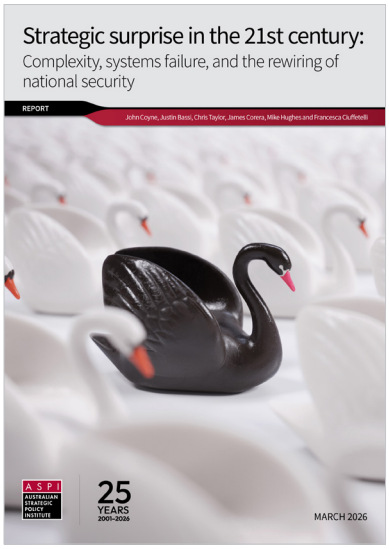
Acronyms and abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AGSVA	Australian Government Security Vetting Agency
CPRs	Commonwealth Procurement Rules
DISP	Defence Industry Security Program
Finance	Department of Finance
PSPF	Protective Security Policy Framework
QPP	Queensland Procurement Policy
SIA	security industry authority
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
SOCI Act	*Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018*
SSIA	Security Services Industry Association
VGPB	Victorian Government Purchasing Board
WHS	work health and safety

Some relevant ASPI publications

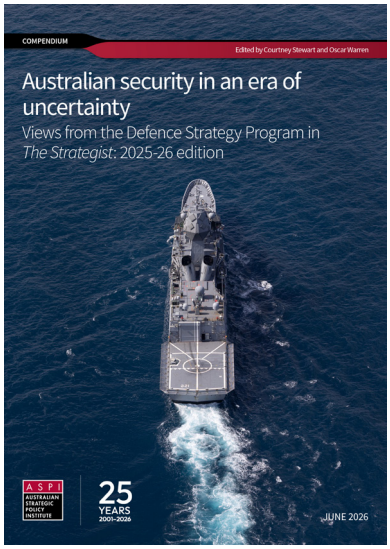










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