

Elders Consultation Special Committee Report

As a reminder, our committee was formed on the basis of the 2025 WHS Consultation Committee report that asked this committee to consult on the potential impact of any proposed changes to eldership.

After considering the feedback given on types of consultation, the capacity of congregations to manage effective consultations and the legal requirements of determining who should be consulted, the committee felt the best course of action to be an online survey as the primary feedback for consultation, with the ability for courts or committees to also provide feedback. At the time of writing the committee has received over 700 responses from over 100 parishes.

In terms of the process itself, we have been overjoyed to hear of many churches having meaningful (though at times difficult) conversations about how to disagree well. This has by far been the most productive outcome of the process, regardless of any future outcomes.

A common question we have been asked is: what about sessions that did not pass on the survey? We would make the following points

- The survey has clearly been shared widely amongst PCNSW/ACT, be that via sessions, word of mouth, Facebook, AP articles and others,
- The WHS act does not require that every individual be consulted, rather that reasonable efforts are made to consult
- We are confident to be able to present to the regulator that we have acted in good faith in accordance with the Act if required.
- Each session has its own legal liability outside the Assembly.

We have also been asked if external discussion outside the consultation process was 'helpful'. This is a question that is somewhat outside the committee's purview (or control). We do not feel that the consultation has been compromised in any way by the external discussions, nor are we aware of any individual or group that has attempted to derail the consultation process in a meaningful way. Again, rather, we have been encouraged by brethren having healthy and loving conversations over the issue.

In terms of the results of the survey, please see our attached appendix for detailed statistics but we feel it useful to highlight the following

- Around 20% of churches currently have female elders, and the proportion of responses from those churches was in line with that number (around 21% of respondents were from those churches)
- Over 90% of respondents reported they always or most of the time felt safe in their local churches (this number rises to around 95% if you remove those that did not report attending a local church). Although we grieve with those that do not feel safe, it is an encouragement that for the vast majority of the flock, safety is the normal state.
- Generally, the types of the responses were not drastically different by gender, age or current role within the church. The greatest concentration of differences was that churches with female elders tended to report higher risks than those without, although the responses were not uniform in either case.
- The main risks identified were broadly a negative impact on culture and a decrease in willingness to report conflict, bullying or harassment.

- A number of people identified that the change could negatively impact their emotional or psychological wellbeing; however, it is worth pointing out that a smaller number stated that *not* changing could have negative impacts.
- A number of respondents wanted the debate to end, generally either because they were strongly opposed to the change and felt it harmful to continue, or they were in favour of the change and felt the issue was so black and white that they wanted no further discussion.
- Overwhelmingly, however, respondents (even those that identified no or low risks) felt that some recognised form of input for women would be helpful if the change was made (indeed, many identified this as being necessary for any change to be done well)
- There was also a clear request for continued biblical discussions and engagement.

It is not this committee's place to recommend a course of action (to do so would be difficult with our current commitment to neutrality) but we can outline 4 broad paths for the Assembly to consider as risk management

Path 1 - End the debate and remain with the status quo. Doing so would minimise the risk for almost all of the respondents, although some care would need to be provided for those that will be distressed by the lack of change.

Path 2 - Link any proposed changes with formal ways to include women's voices to ensure the current standard of safety is maintained or even improved; this might involve linking 2 or more overtures into one single proposal. This would fit with the majority of the respondents' wishes if a change were to be enacted (please note we are not suggesting that the majority of respondents wanted change)

Path 3 - Make a commitment to formalise women's voices being heard in the church courts, but not link such a commitment to the existing overture. This would allow Assembly more time to craft and consider such moves, although the committee feels it needs to be pointed out that over the 20+ years of this debate only a very small change has so far been adopted (granting rights of an associate to deaconesses and committee members to the assembly).

Path 4 - Assess that any such risk can be managed locally by sessions, and that the change can proceed without further work needed.

(also please note that we will be compiling the survey results for the appendix after the closing date, and will have an addendum to the report with any new information)

Deliverances

1. Receive the report and the appendix
2. Thank the Elders consultation special committee (note that we cease to exist at the end of this assembly, however if any of you feel strongly the need to speak on the issue at this assembly then we can add this forthwith to discharge us)
3. Declare that given the range and scope of the responses that a reasonable consultation under the WHS act has occurred

4. Note that some of the respondents raised risk of psychosocial harm as a potential outcome of the proposal to make all future elders male Survey Data from the WHS consultation

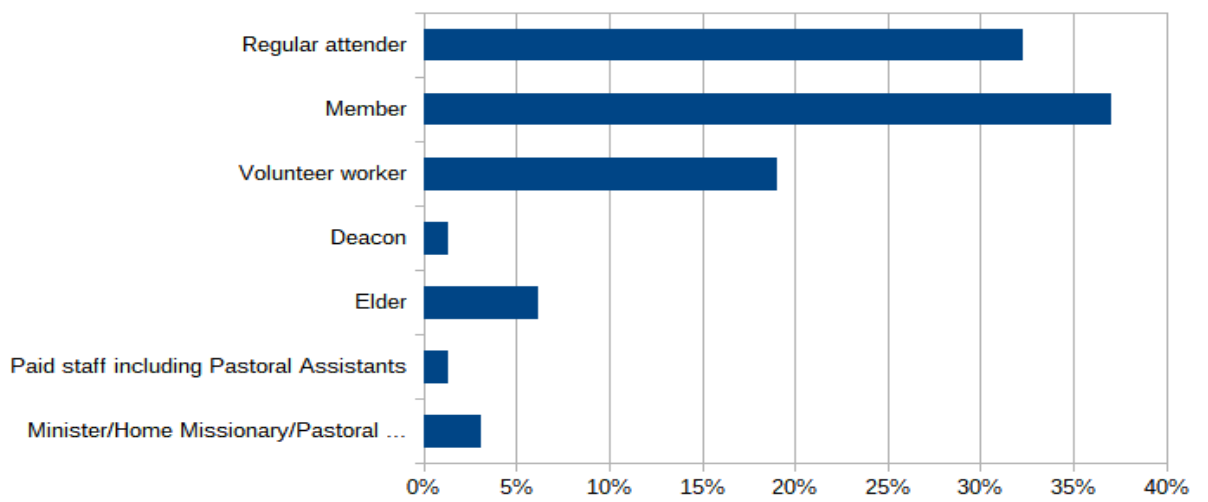
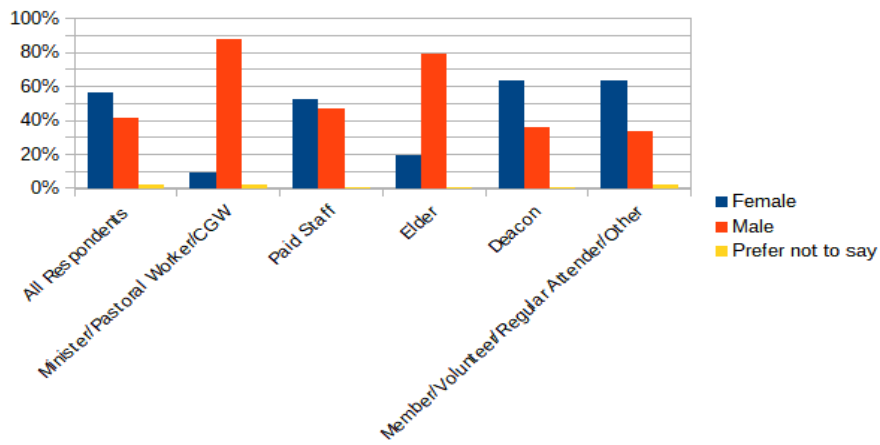
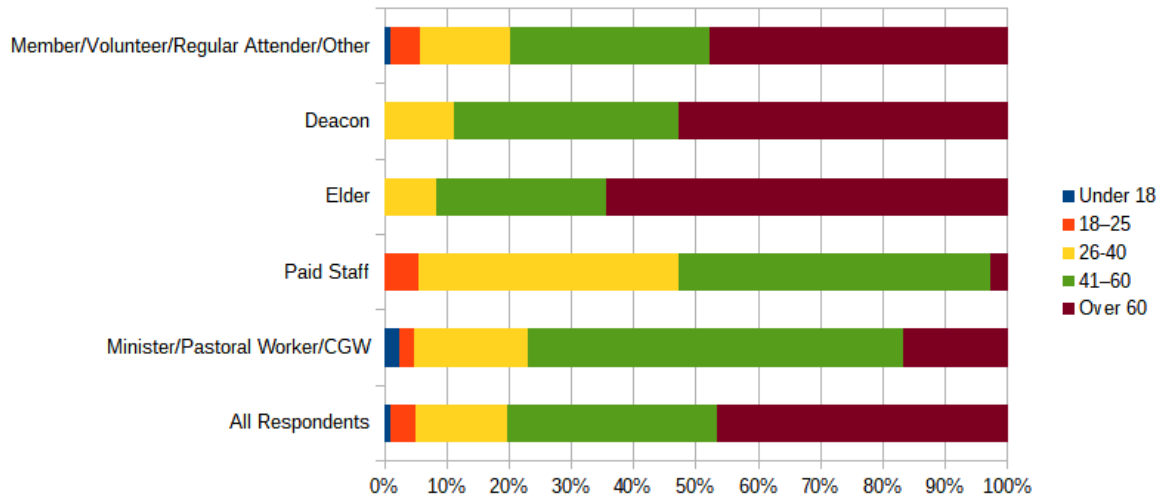
Elders Consultation Special Committee Report (part2)

The Survey closed with 1787 responses from 117 different pastoral charges and home mission stations. Much of the 1st results hold true in terms of percentages with a few updates worth noting.

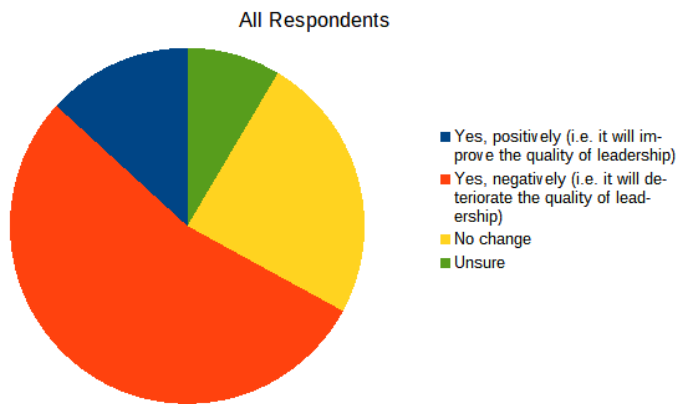
- The number of churches responding with female elders was steady at 20% but the number of responses from those congregations rose as a proportion to 31% of the total responses. (this was mostly from elders and members of those churches)
- The number of people feeling safe either always or most of the time remains steady at 91% (with it being closer to 95% for those who attend a church regularly)
- The responses had no real uniform pattern with age or length of time associated with the presbyterian church, the main differences was foremost if the congregation currently had female elders (generally noting higher risks) and then Minsters/Pastoral workers/GCW tended to note lower risks, although we again stress this isn't true of every response.
- In general Deacon's reported the highest risk across all categories (apart from the safety question)
- 971 of the respondents indicated they would like to receive the summary of the results (which we are in the process of doing)

A detailed breakdown can be found on the following pages

Demographics



Q8. If women are unable to serve as elders, do you feel that quality of leadership will be affected?



Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes, positively (i.e. it will improve the quality of leadership)	27%	17%	14%	3%	12%
Yes, negatively (i.e. it will deteriorate the quality of leadership)	25%	47%	54%	57%	56%
No change	45%	28%	29%	29%	23%
Unsure	2%	8%	4%	4%	10%

Comment types

It will improve the leadership -

Because it brings us into line with biblical teaching (over 90% of comments that responded yes positively gave this style of response)

Minster	Not because women are incapable leaders, but on the basis of obedience to God's Word. The church must actively promote the ability for godly and capable women to love, lead and care for the church under the overarching command of God, as it also should do for godly and capable men.
Elder	I believe, from Scripture, that male only eldership is a position of leadership in the church instigated by God according to His created order for the good of His church.
Member	Bible says only male elders and we must hold to all biblical truths

Because it will stop distractions and debate on the issue (This was a small group of responses compared to the biblical reasoning)

Minster	The move will provide clarity in this disputed area, and allow clearer pathways for gifted women to be involved who don't agree with female eldership.
Elder	It will put this energy sapping divisive issue to bed hopefully I pray. And we can get on (undistracted) with telling people The Good News about the Biblical Jesus.

A very small number of responses stated it would improve leadership due to women being in some way deficient or flawed, there are no examples we feel comfortable reprinting.

It will deteriorate the leadership -

The respondents who answered this were more varied than those in the positive (the following categories are not ordered in a meaningful way), it is worth noting that a number of the responses covered multiple categories listed here, we are simply highlighting some common themes.

There are (or won't be) not enough female voices

Minster	I am concerned that currently there are not sufficient or appropriate structures to enable women's voices to be heard with confidence, nor for them to speak truth without the risk of losing the place of their voice.
Paid Staff	Missing female voices from Session would be detrimental to women (and probably children) within the church, as a flow on effect from the leadership not always considering them in the ways they should when making decisions for the church. No doubt some men would also suffer from not having female perspectives being shared, but it will undoubtedly impact women in a greater way. It is much more likely that "group think" situations will arise among leaders of the same gender, whereas having both genders provides more alternative perspectives to consider, that will be more likely to represent ALL of God's people well.
Volunteer/ Member	I think the female voice is already stifled. I think it would be taking a backward step to remove women from eldership. As it means that women's opinions and ideas are less and less likely to be heard and thought of as important or even bothering to listen to. This then becomes a systemic problem through the whole church.

It's not a biblical change

Minster	The Bible is clear that gifting is not gender-restricted. To arbitrarily shut out over half the church from leadership over a contested opinion will do enormous harm to the cause of Christ and harm women and our churches.
Paid Staff	It depends on what is understood under the term "Elder" In many churches elders are a group overseeing spiritual wellbeing, governance and teaching. My understanding is that we base leadership on Biblical principles. At creation, God created man and woman to care for His creation. The only thing God observed that was not good after creation(before the fall) was for man to do this work alone. Why would we then ask men to care for the church alone- it is not good. Some may feel that after the fall men are mandated to rule alone, but has the work of Christ on the cross not redeemed what was lost at the fall allowing us to use instead the prefall model of shared responsibility? The New Testament model Jesus gives for leadership specifically instructs leaders not to lord it over one another. Peter directly connects this with eldership (1 Peter 5) having only men in leadership creates a gender based discrepancy that can very easily slip into "lording" over whoever is not like them(whoever is not male)
Deacon	Contrary to biblical teaching

Current Female elders have blessed our congregation (This was a strong theme with churches that currently had women elders)

Minster	We benefit greatly from having women on our Session.
Elder	There are women with considerable spiritual and pastoral skills on our Session. The guidance these women provide would be lost to the work of the church. Having spoken to them, they would leave the church if Session became an all male club.
Volunteer/ member	Women on session, as valued co-workers or elders, help accountability, broader thinking & awareness of the safety & well-being of women & children, and bring the impact on women of decision making to light.

Women bring a different perspective (or skillset) that is helpful

Minster	In the way that women's issues aren't often at the forefront of men's minds and can be often over looked, and that the dismissing of gifts and talents due to gender, I feel, is a disservice.
Elder	In a previous congregation where I served as an elder, minister's wife felt unable to bring a marital problem before the session as there were no female elders she could turn to for support, understanding and encouragement. There is enormous value to a leadership team that can call on female wisdom and experience. In the document circulated in defence of the status quo there are

	scriptural references that support the role of elder being open to women.
Member	I strongly believe that women need to be part of the local church leadership to represent the views, issues and concerns of women in the congregation as well as bringing a different perspective on the whole of local church life. This will ensure better decision making and better pastoral oversight. Women also need to hold leadership positions, so the Presbyterian church is seen by those outside as inclusive of women - rather than a place where women are not welcome to participate equally in leading and pastoring the local church. Women also bring significant skills that (sometimes) men lack. Without women as Elders our leadership will be diminished at a local level.

There is not enough men in our current context (this was a smaller subset of responses)

Minster	At our local church this is not a particular issue, but this will negatively affect some churches who have relied upon female elders for a long period of time. Even though they might not be removed from office, their removal will ultimately exclude them and ostracise them further. Also in some country towns and some churches the only people who are suitable for eldership are women and if they are not able to lead as elders then the church would suffer from lack of any leadership.
Member	The choice for elders in country churches is limited. If they are forced to only have men, there will be a lower quality of elder as a result of the pool size we can choose from.

A small subset of responses highlighted that they don't trust current males in leadership (or would not without women in the room), it was more common in people that had left the church and/or marked they don't generally feel safe at their local church.

No change to leadership -

We currently have no female elders so it will have no impact to us

Minster	We currently do not have active women elders
Paid staff	Our church has not had female elders and therefore, there would be no change.
Volunteer/ Member	Current local leadership is male only

We have (would put in place) good avenues for women to engage with session outside of eldership (This was the majority of these responses)

Minster	Our church has a healthy practice of consulting with the women in leadership to make decisions.
Elder	Not if the men serving are understanding of all different peoples needs, both male, female, young, old, struggling or doing well.
Youth Group Leader	We have many strong female leaders and they've been able to serve very well without requiring eldership
Volunteer	Our church would need to ensure the voice of women is heard by other avenues in order for us to continue to work well together in partnership benefitting from each other's input.
Member	We have women deacons which are part of the leadership team which balances out having majority of male elders

Biblical reasons for or against but it will be unlikely to change the leadership

Elder	The issue of whether elders should be both male and female has nothing to do with the quality of leadership. It is a matter of being obedient to God's word. We have elders of both genders and all provide quality leadership. Taking away female elders won't change the leadership quality of our male elders, or vice versa.
Volunteer	We do not need women to act as elders to improve the quality of our leadership. Women have a significant input into our church life in many ways, and their teaching of women, youth and children is excellent, but they also know what the Scriptures say about submitting to the governing authorities, which by OT and NT teaching belongs to men. There is no question of inferiority here - it began in Genesis 3, was confirmed by Jesus, and was adopted by the apostles.
Volunteer	I think that across the denomination the quality of leadership will be negatively affected. Whilst there are no female elders in my local church I believe it is scripturally appropriate for them to exist. Furthermore, I do not believe the Healthy Complementarianism paper produced by the EDC successfully communicated why they confirm that eldership should be for men only. I understand the survey is not about if I agree or disagree with the proposed change, however, the two things are intricately linked. Some people - ministers and elders, male and female, included - believe the EDC's position is incorrect. This divide has practical implications on the ground which are already evident. Namely, by the failure of my local church and presbytery (to

	my knowledge) to: - communicate the Healthy Complementarianism paper when it was initially sent out in 2022 (I was given it by someone in another Presbyterian church) - share and enact any of the recommendations in the On Men and Women in ministry and leadership in the PCA paper produced by the WMPCA for the 2023 GAA or those laid out in the Healthy Complementarianism paper If recommendations are not going to be required in some fashion then proactively encouraging and supporting women's ministry roles will not happen.
Member	I believe women do make excellent church leaders and that it is supported by scripture.

We used to have female elders (or only have a very few now) and haven't noticed a great difference

Elder	We have four Elders, one being a lady who has been an Elder for quite a while originally from the xxxxx Presbyterian church. She has been a great asset to our church.
Deacon	We have only one female elder who is a wonderful godly woman of 90yrs and has been an elder for decades. All the other elders are men.

No change locally but some drawbacks

Paid staff	I do not believe there would be any noticeable change in the day-to-day functioning of the church or the administration of pastoral care. We currently have female deacons who are actively involved in both pastoral care and decision-making within the church. The only potential concern regarding quality would relate to the morale of our female leaders. They may feel disenfranchised by the Presbytery's decision, which could lead some to reconsider or withdraw from their longstanding ties to the denomination as a whole.
Elder	no change for our church, but likely negative in some churches
Member	At xxxxx (and at other Presbyterian Churches that I have attended) the all male Eldership have been deeply respected and deemed to be most competent in their roles as Church Leaders. I believe that gender changes to that role would cause division in the Church, I have observed this happening in several other Protestant Churches. We do not need division in our Church.
Adherent	I cant see it would change as we only have male elders now, however, I understand the younger generation would prefer females as well. Our

	Leadership team takes the role as women leaders, ministering to women only.
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Unsure -

This isn't really about quality

Examples

Minster	I don't think the suggested change has to do with leadership quality, rather its about being obedient to the bible
Volunteer	The quality of leadership generally is not one that hinges on gender or even a formal position in a church. A female can be a natural leader within a church and can effectively lead within a church without a title or elder or for that matter any other formal position delegated by the eldership. Females are co-heirs with Christ and will continue to be used by God irrespective of formal church governance structures. Nonetheless, if women are not elders then the quality of communication with women in local congregations should be prioritised, given their lack of representation at session.

It's hard to see what impacts would be longer term

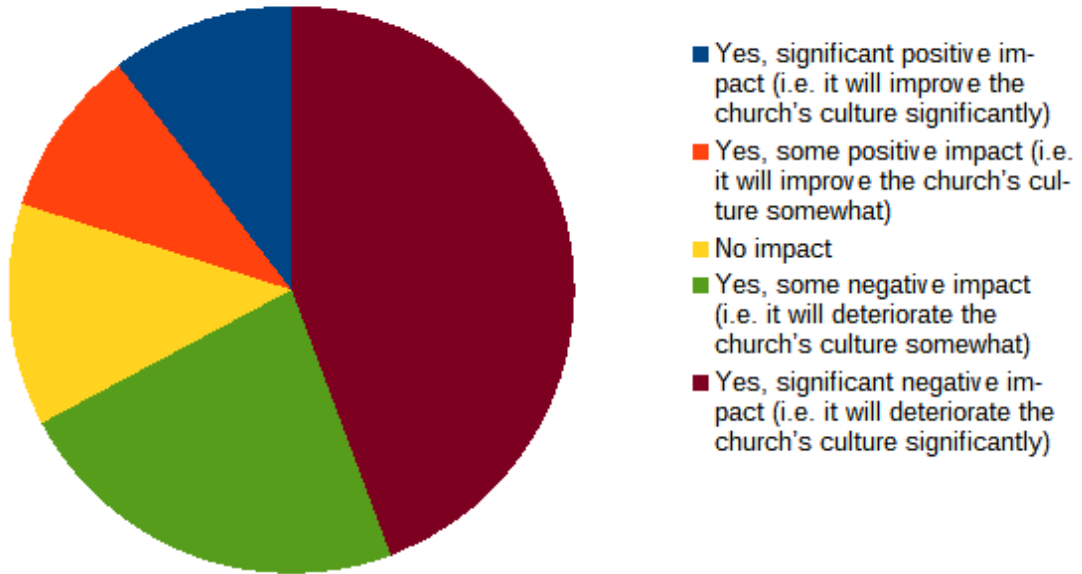
Elder	I know that women leaders have so much to add to church life and wisdom. I'm unsure how this will be impacted in an official Eldership role.
Member	Presently, our leadership and eldership are all males, and women's voices are valued and all members are loved well, so it would make no difference in the current situation. However, I cannot speak to the future, and depending on the leadership at the time, having women unable to serve as elders may be significantly detrimental.
Volunteer/ Member	I am not against women being elders and I am probably for it Either way, actual outcomes of Church health may not result either negatively or positively; outcomes are more likely determined on godliness and Bible knowledge and Bible wisdom.
Volunteer/ Member	There are examples locally (other churches in our Presbytery) of female elders who have not been good examples of what an elder should be, but I am aware of male elders in other Presbyterian churches within NSW who have also not been good examples of what an elder should be. I am not certain that the male gender is always better than female gender in this role and see ambiguity in the scripture that is quoted as reason for male only elders.

It depends on what other things are put in place to allow women to engage (This was the majority of the responses, and tended to come from people outside of sessions)

Deacon	Currently we have no female elders. I would like there to be some way at both local church level & state level for women to be heard & be part of decision making for the Presbyterian church.
Deacon	My concern is that it, in the absence of any further clarity of women's role in church, that this would communicate an immensely unhelpful message to 50% of church members
Deacon	I'm concerned about representation of issues pertaining to women but I understand and support the biblical teaching
Volunteer/ Member	Possibly. Currently our church consults women who are in unofficial eldership roles. It's not a regulated role though, and consultation is at the elder's discretion.
Member	I am not sure about women being elders, there just has to be avenues for women to have a voice in every congregation and be able to contribute to the leadership and culture of a church.
Adherent	I feel biblically it shouldn't make a difference. However, we don't seem to have a culture of hearing women's voices in our various levels of decision making.
Adherent	Women do not necessarily need to be elders but unless there are structures in place which compel leadership to consider the voices of women, it will be ad hoc at best and the worth/value of women is undermined, even if unintentional.

Q9. Do you believe this proposed change (to exclude women from being called as elders) could impact the church's culture?

All Respondents



Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes, significant positive impact (i.e. it will improve the church's culture significantly)	21%	8%	9%	6%	9%
Yes, some positive impact (i.e. it will improve the church's culture somewhat)	21%	14%	10%	8%	8%
No impact	18%	22%	12%	8%	12%
Yes, some negative impact (i.e. it will deteriorate the church's culture somewhat)	15%	28%	28%	17%	21%
Yes, significant negative impact (i.e. it will deteriorate the church's culture significantly)	22%	28%	37%	53%	43%
Unsure	4%	0%	4%	8%	7%

Comment types

Positive impacts

Biblical culture is positive (This was the majority of positive responses)

Minister	We are biblically confessional. Logically, every alternative will harm us.
Elder	It's always positive to follow the teaching of Scripture
Adherent	Because we would be obeying the Word of God.

It would encourage men

Minister	It will encourage men to step up and do their God given role of leading the church.
Volunteer? member	Men will step up more in taking responsibility.
Adherent	Encourage men to better serve in the role

It would stop division or provide clarity

Minister	It will provide clarity and we will be able to move forward, practising the biblical description and prescription for the office of elder. Women are vital to the effective ministry of church and their involvement in church life and ministry is key to the visible and tangible expression that in Christ we as the redeemed people of God are made in His image as male and female. However, the clear biblical teaching is that for the office of elder, this office is male only. The sooner we as the Presbyterian Church in NSW and the ACT clarify this for the qualification of elders in the church the better for life and ministry of the church moving forward.
Paid Staff	We would focus more on having women serve the church as Deacons and other positions, as opposed to continually arguing about this. Getting gospel work done!
Elder	It will hopefully stop the murmurings and suspicion about the Presy Church going Liberal.

Short term pain for long term gain

Minister	There will be initial struggle for some people and in some churches. It will be misunderstood by many people. But, in the long run, I believe we'll be more conscious of what God thinks about us than what people think about us, and a better culture will be formed as result of this.
Elder	I think some people won't be happy, but I believe it would be good biblical leadership from the church. We should follow the word of God, not the world.
Volunteer/ Member	Whilst it may be divisive in some churches, the overall benefit for God's people will be significant as, ultimately, we trust God's authority and Word which instructs us to have men in spiritual leadership.

Negative impacts

Women will feel devalued (This was the majority response)

Minister	Women will be less inclined to contribute to service in church, because this decision would send the message that they are less valued.
Paid staff	An unintended implication that men are valued more highly than women, and that women are less encouraged to develop and exercise their gifts in service and leadership.
Elder	Women will feel they have no voice and little worth.

The bible would not be followed (or debatable things would be set in stone)

Minister	It undermines the clear teaching of scripture, such as Romans 12:4-8, restricting the opportunity for some to minister in accordance with the gift given to them. It will also restrict the capacity of elders in their ability to have compassion and understanding for those in their care. Finally, the complementarian theology behind this does not help people mature, male or female. The idea of being under the 'headship' of another (other than Christ) does not help women to grow to be fully functioning independent women. It also puts men in positions where they demand authority when they have not necessarily reached the appropriate level of maturity.
Minister	I think this is a grey area with strong arguments on both sides. Because of this, and the fact that this is not a matter of first importance doctrinally, I believe this debate will do more harm than good to our denomination.
Paid staff	I believe it promotes controversies rather than God's work and love (1 Tim 1:4-5). It is unprofitable, divisive and foolish (Titus 3:9-11)
Elder	This issue is not a core tenet of our church. We should not be dying in a ditch over this issue. This issue has been a debated and contentious one across Protestant and evangelical denominations for years. Many respected godly scholars with much greater intellect than I have come to espouse a range of perspectives on women's involvement in eldership with biblical justifications for their positions. We are sowing contentiousness and division when we should be unified, setting aside arguments that are not gospel-centred. For churches that presently have women serving as elders, this decision could fracture membership and cause significant distress within the community. For those churches that want to remain men-only as elders, it will serve to have no change. From a broader church perspective, it serves as a distraction from what we should be doing: spreading the good news of what Jesus has done to reconcile us to God's eternal kingdom. I believe we should allow local churches to reach their own conclusions on this issue. I'm not one to say a "significant negative impact" as I believe God is sovereign and greater than our small-mindedness at times. I see no good in what we are doing to ourselves.

It will make evangelism harder or cause people to leave

Minister	I have already witnessed a significant amount of distress that this decision is being discussed at length. I have heard many conversations voicing the concern that there will be a negative impact, in that this decision is taking our denomination's focus away from gospel ministry. Instead it is being turned toward an issue that is secondary and clearly has no agreement and has caused distress for many years. What is the purpose of this effort that is going to this decision for? And why risk undoing the growth many churches have demonstrated in recovering from the effects of Covid?
Elder	I believe the church would struggle to provide the leadership and support to members currently happening. It would have difficulty being relevant to the community we are seeking to win for Christ.
Elder	I reckon rolling back Roles and Privileges to serve can be seen as a signal of distrust and or that the person is not fit to or is not trustworthy. Our present broader social climate will feed off this adding to the gender war. It might cause people to lose sight of our great commission and turn inwards!

It will hamper good teamwork

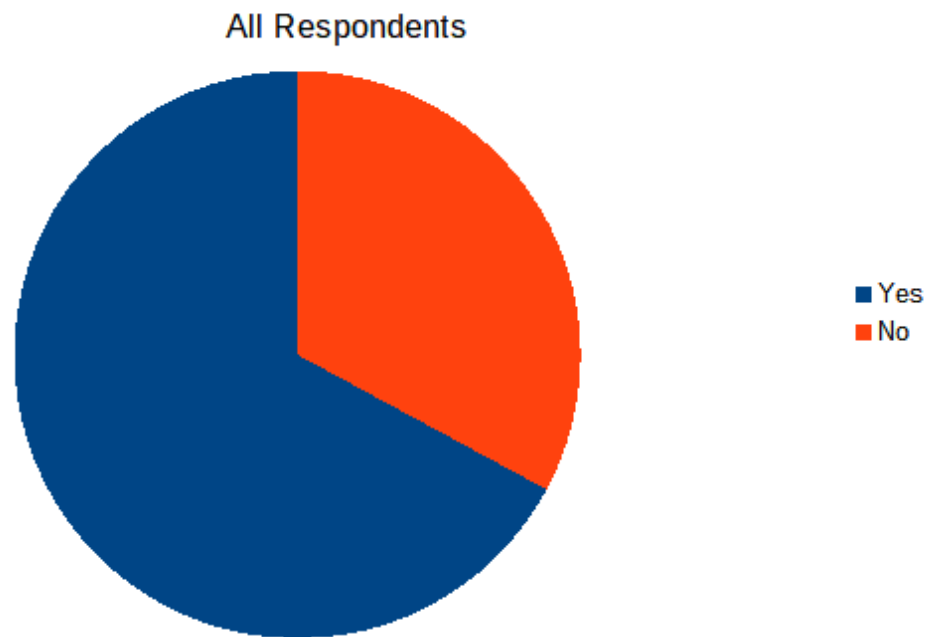
Minister	Women are serving in so many other roles, even as session clerk, and it works.
Paid staff	Session is the point of contact for most church members with leadership. Without women in that space it would make it very difficult, if not impossible for women who have experienced trauma in their interactions with men to approach church leadership. Should there be any incidents of abuse, women are not likely to report it to a male only Session. Our denomination has gone to great lengths to develop safe ministry structures, yet we know that sadly our church is not without incident of abuse. Even abuse at the hands of leaders(elders). We cannot reason that if godly men are appointed to positions of leadership, that they will always act in perfect godliness, unfortunately, history has shown that men cover for one another at the expense of women.
Elder	A caring culture needs both the female and male insights and manifestations
Deacon	Women have a lot to offer when serving, this could impact to some degree if women elders were excluded.
Volunteer/ Member	We are a team and pull together.

A number of responses talked about former trauma or abuse that had happened (both within and outside the church) and the need for female elders during those times. (we have not included examples to ensure such responses are not identified).

No impact and Unsure

Most of these responses mirrored one of the above categories, a number expressed that it would have no impact on their local church but likely more impact on churches with women elders currently (either positive or negative), there was a strong desire for good structures to be put in place if such a change did happen.

Q10. Do you believe the proposed change (to exclude women from being called as elders) could have an impact on interpersonal relationships or team dynamics in your local church?

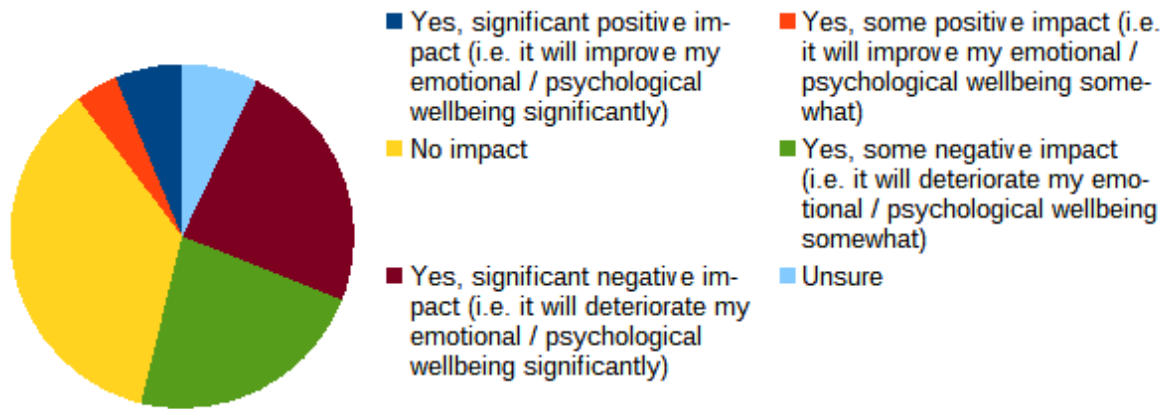


Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes	49%	61%	61%	74%	68%
no	51%	39%	39%	26%	32%

A number of the comments to this question mirrored the responses to the previous questions, however a large number of commenters noted any change would/should be managed well as to not damage existing relationships/teams (mostly via other forms of representation/engagement for women)

Q11. Do you believe the proposed change (to exclude women from being called as elders) will impact on your emotional or psychological wellbeing?

All Respondents



Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes, significant positive impact	16%	3%	7%	3%	6%
Yes, some positive impact	9%	3%	3%	6%	4%
No impact	47%	46%	41%	19%	35%
Yes, some negative impact	9%	20%	16%	33%	25%
Yes, significant negative impact	11%	17%	27%	33%	24%
Unsure	8%	11%	7%	6%	7%

Positive impacts

Most of the positive impacts stated in the comments were by aligning to biblical understanding, Other styles of comments are below

Elder	Yes. I tired of the energy sapping effect and corrosive impact that this totally unnecessary issue has been generating.
Member	Reduce fear of women becoming elders, which I am against.
Women's Ministry team	I confess that I have felt anxiety at times over this issue. I always try to take it to the Lord when I start to worry, but I also believe this proposed change would go some way to alleviating that worry by providing a clear stance and stopping these ongoing discussions.

Negative impacts

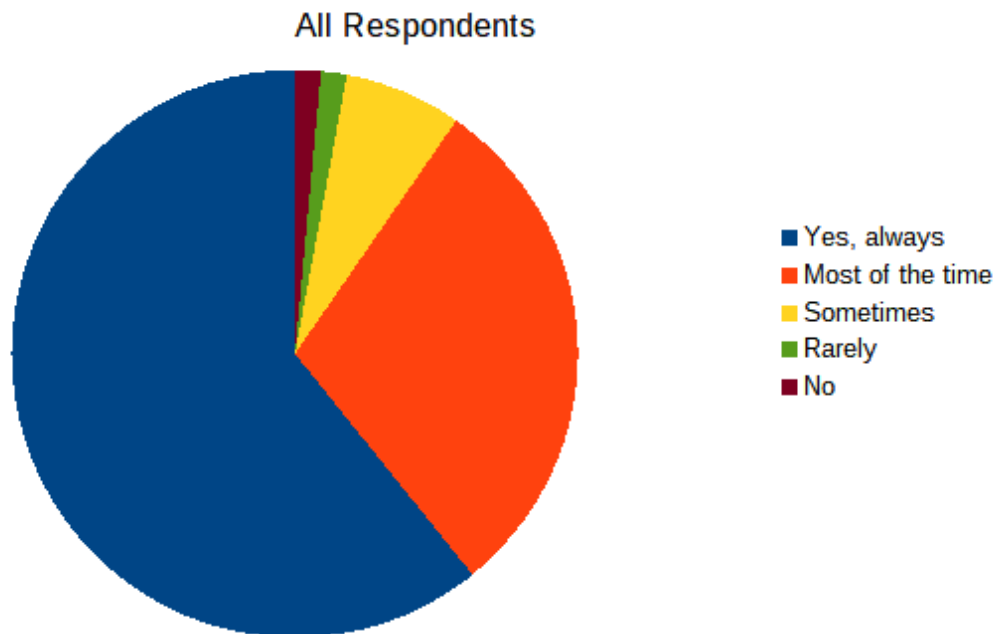
Most of the negative impacts were either men worried about how they would communicate or care for women who were hurt by the decision, people pointing out the debate so far had already had negative impacts.

A number of female elders noted they would feel the denomination would be ruling that their eldership had been unbiblical/evil.

A number of men were concerned that without the aid of female elders their workload would become overburdensome.

Although we only had a small number of people no longer within the church participate in the survey, almost all of the responses that gave a non safety reason for leaving said it was due to their local church having male only elders.

Q12. Do you currently feel safe and supported in your local church environment?



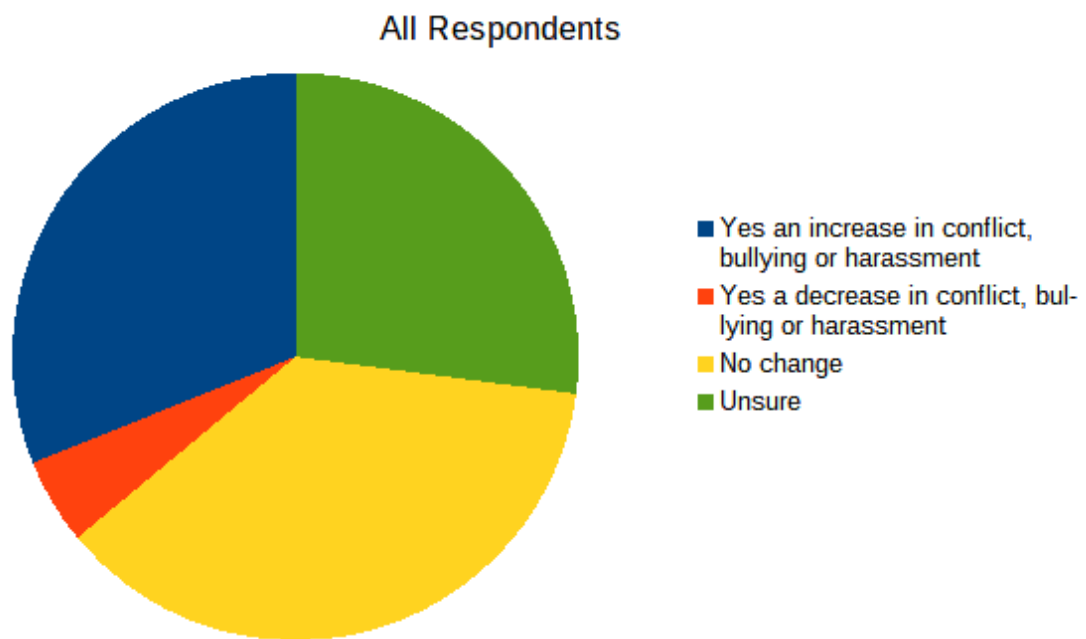
Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes, always	61%	72%	66%	64%	60%
Yes, most of the time	30%	25%	29%	28%	30%
sometimes	7%	3%	4%	3%	7%
Rarely	1%	0%	1%	6%	1%
No	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%

The committee was greatly encouraged by the answers to this question, the responses on safety did not meaningfully change based on if the church currently had female elders or not. A number of males noted they felt safe almost everywhere and acknowledged this could be different for some women, women were slightly more likely to feel less safe.

A large number of comments noted that although they marked the question on 'safeness' they felt less 'supported'.

It is also worth noting how closely Ministers and non office bearers line up with the responses.

Q13. Do you believe the proposed change (to exclude women from being called as elders) could influence the amount of conflict, bullying, or harassment?



Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
Yes an Increase	24%	24%	40%	47%	31%
Yes a decrease	5%	8%	3%	11%	5%
No change	37%	51%	45%	28%	36%
unsure	27%	18%	26%	14%	29%

Yes an Increase

Hard to ensure women are heard/acknowledged (this was the biggest group)

Minister	I believe that without appropriate structures for representation and feedback, the proposed change would make it difficult for women to be sure they will be heard when they speak to elders, because they will perceive themselves to be
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	arguing from the outside, rather than from the inside.
Minister	It will create conflict in the denomination, but also if there is an abuse in the church to a woman there could be difficulty to bring it to the elders if there is previous trauma or fear of dismissal by session if there is no female representative
Elder	I think that all-male sessions are more likely to fail to see bullying or harassment, and more likely to minimize allegations of bullying and harassment. All-male sessions can lack the ability to understand how actions of all-male leaders are perceived by women, particularly where women feel bullied or harassed and there was no intention to engage in bullying or harassing behaviour. I also think all-male sessions may be slightly more inclined to cover up rather than deal with important issues linked to bullying and harassment. In recent church scandals it has at times (far from always) been the voices of women that were persistent for justice against the voices of men in leadership positions who wished to suppress allegations. This is not a blanket statement - the quality of leaders varies by individual session - but I do think we lose an important safeguard when the voices of women are sidelined (even if we have the best intentions of ensuring that they aren't.) As to conflict, I suspect that it may reduce, due to some egalitarian believers leaving the denomination and thereby reducing the opportunity for this issue to be one that causes conflict.
Deacon	Yes I can see this being used by some male leaders to silence input from females within the church. It may lead to a lack of respect for women in the church which may then lead to some of the abuses of women (often emotional) that have been revealed so tragically in recent years

The conflict will increase because of those opposed to the change

Minister	It will be, in the main, by those who do not like the changes. They will use survey's like this to manipulate us, to make us afraid of doing anything they don't wish to happen. I don't really care a great deal of whether we move to male only elders across the state. It is where I am gently leading our people and I can't determine what will happen in your church down the road, but this is the group of people God has given me to look after and I am to do the best with these people that I can, for the good of the gospel, for the glory of God through his people.
Elder	May cause conflict between some members and the eldership/leadership as they could be perceived as sexist.
Elder	It will almost certainly be a cause for people feeling disadvantaged.

Yes a decrease

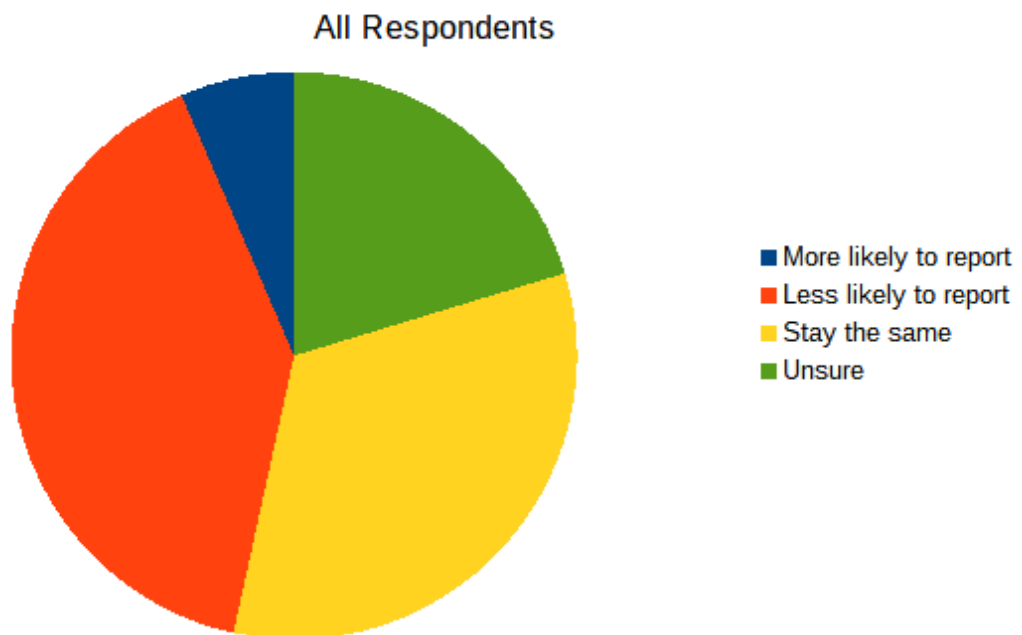
Because it forces men to be more gentle/mindful when dealing with women

Member	The benefit of the topic at hand has caused men in eldership to focus on their responsibility of serving the church Christlike especially in regard to sensitivity, safety and emotional well-being for women
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Conflict will decrease because it 'settles' the issue

Elder	Once again it will hopefully put the issue to bed and we can move on.
Member	There will be a clear boundary.
Youth Group leader	Clear policy with clear definitions and reasoning lowers unnecessary conflict and misunderstanding
Adherent	Yes, I believe the proposed change could decrease conflict, bullying, or harassment if it is implemented with care, prayer, clear communication, and respect. By recognising the gifts and contributions of women in leadership, the church may become more inclusive, balanced, and respectful. This could help reduce feelings of exclusion or marginalisation and encourage healthier relationships within the church. However, it will be important that all members, including those with different views, are treated with kindness, patience, and understanding throughout the process.

Q14. Do you believe that this could impact the willingness of staff or volunteers to report issues such as conflict, bullying, or harassment?



Role	Minster/ PW/ CGW	Paid Staff	Elder	Deacon	Member/ Adherent
More likely	3%	9%	7%	8%	7%
Less likely	20%	31%	33%	53%	41%
Stay the same	58%	43%	43%	31%	30%

unsure	19%	17%	17%	8%	21%
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Q15. What additional support or resources do you believe are needed to cultivate a safe and healthy environment if the proposed change is made?

A number of responses here either just made the case to change or not change, those that engaged with the question broadly fit into the following

A number of responses indicated no change would be needed.

Strengthen Deacons (a few commenters mentioned women's roles in general, but deacons was a consistent theme)

Minister	Greater development of Deacons and other local leadership forums
Minster	Let's champion women serving as deacons in our churches.
Elder	A deliberate addition of women leaders - maybe deacons - would be needed to be available to advise, serve and counsel

Allow formal ways for women to be more involved in the courts of the church (This was the largest group of feedback)

Minister	Additional leadership structures that will allow women to make protected and constructive contributions, where they are free to express godly wisdom without fear of losing their voice in matters of disagreement. Such leadership structures may include service leadership team meetings involving women, pastoral care team meetings involving and even chaired by women, mandated womens ministry worker positions, mandated female employment quotas and mandated annual accountability surveys including specific questions about how safe women feel to voice opinions consistent with God's word and his gospel.
Minster	Additional leadership structures that will allow women to make protected and constructive contributions, where they are free to express godly wisdom without fear of losing their voice in matters of disagreement. Such leadership structures may include service leadership team meetings involving women, pastoral care team meetings involving and even chaired by women, mandated womens ministry worker positions, mandated female employment quotas and mandated annual accountability surveys including specific questions about how safe women feel to voice opinions consistent with God's word and his gospel.

Paid staff	Women need to be included as consultants in many ways if possible. Men and women are different and men don't always understand the complexity of women. Women should be in support roles as God created us. Helping the male Elders where possible but submitting to their authority to be the decision makers.
Elder	New formal roles for women in all courts of the church, time and care to appropriately fill those roles and change the culture of individual churches.
Deacon	Deacons with a voice and a right to vote in assembly would need firm and yet gentle support from church leadership as they gain confidence and respect in the eldership/assembly forum. A strong statement of eldership duties and responsibilities would be helpful too
Member	a way needs to be found to include women's voices in all courts of the church including in every individual church at a bare minimum
Adherent	Some way for women to speak into the decisions of the church and leaders who are willing to listen regardless of the final outcome.

Better communication and teaching on the issue, explain the change (this was the 2nd largest group of responses)

Minister	A clearer denominational statement on the value of men and women in all positions of the church. Greater emphasis on the importance of women representation on staff teams in local churches as well as in other aspects of leadership outside of eldership across the denomination to empower women in Presbyterian churches. Greater resources into conferences or events (or communication about them) for women that have clear denominational backing.
Minster	Further and ongoing MANDATORY training provided by Christ College on enhancing communication skills, conflict resolution, interpersonal management skills and Code of Discipline workshops. Utilise one week study leave for this purpose every 3 years as a minimum.
Minster	People need a concise Biblical argument as to why the change is being made, but freedom to disagree and still be part of our church.
Elder	Grievance Policy review and education plan. Resources to support elders in change management.
Paid staff	Clear, unequivocal, biblical evidence to support this decision would have to be presented in church on Sundays, as well as handouts and online information. Also a helpline for people, most likely women, to be able to debrief and process this change.
Elder	I think it would be critical to articulate how women with leadership and teaching gifts are expected to exercise those gifts in the context of their local congregation and the wider church, and provide specific support for them to do so, alongside with pathways for formal recognition (as we currently have with the role of Deaconess).

Deacon	I believe there would need to be very clear communications about: how women and children will be kept safe in church; how their perspectives, needs and concerns are voiced and heard by leadership; and, what governance structures will be introduced to ensure male leaders do not take advantage of their positions as elders.
Member	Training of elders in this area. Statements outlining a procedure and transparency. Elders who reflect the true characteristics of a Biblical elder.

A number of responses ask that the change be slowed down to allow more time for congregations to engage and/or for counselling be provided for those impacted.