

Through the Window — in brief

A reading of the PCNSW WHS Elders Consultation Survey. This is an argument about impact, not the theology of eldership. Make the change if the church discerns it must — but the survey suggests the structures to do it well should be built first.

Written on the assumption that faithful Christians may reach different theological conclusions about eldership. It looks only at what the consultation appears to say about implementation.

~1,787

RESPONSES

117 / 183

CHARGES REPRESENTED

~1 in 8

ADULT ATTENDERS

12%

OF ELDERS ARE WOMEN

WHAT THE RESPONSES SHOW

- 1 **A serious, denomination-wide response.** Around 1,787 people answered, across 117 of 183 charges — roughly one in eight adult attenders. The volume is high enough that the result is hard to dismiss as a small mobilised faction, though it remains a self-selected sample, not a random one.
- 2 **Concern is real, consistent, and structural.** Among respondents, a majority in every non-minister role expects the change to have a negative effect on leadership, culture and relationships. The same ordering recurs across five differently-worded questions, which makes it hard to put down to isolated variation. The concern attaches to mechanisms — reporting, conflict, the loss of a safeguarding voice — not moods.
- 3 **The people who decide read it differently from the people who'd live it.** The ministers who answered report the lowest concern; elders, deacons, members and paid staff report a real expected cost. One possible reading: some are answering a question about obedience while others answer a question about cost. At Assembly, ministers and elders vote as equals — and the elder half is among the most concerned.
- 4 **A reporting result a safety process most needs to see.** A plurality across several roles (around 53% of deacon respondents, 41% of members, 33% of elders, 31% of paid staff) expects people to become *less likely to report* conflict, bullying or harassment if the change is made. Respondents repeatedly distinguished feeling *safe* from feeling *supported* — even though 91% reported generally feeling safe today.
- 5 **Near-unanimous on the remedy.** Respondents who support the change and those who oppose it converged on one point: it cannot be done well without deliberate structures — protected avenues for women's voices in the courts, reporting paths that don't depend on an all-male session, strengthened diaconal roles, and real support for those most affected.

THE SINGLE RECOMMENDATION

Build the structure first. The survey was not a referendum on the theology, and neither is this. A church can hold that male-only eldership is right *and* that the survey describes a real expected cost falling hardest on women, on paid staff, and on the congregations living the arrangement now. The concern is evidenced; the harm is contingent; what it is contingent on is whether the structure gets built. Deciding in obedience is one thing; doing it well is another — and building what the change requires is obedience too.

This is a one-page summary of a longer analysis; the full paper sets out the data, methods, and limitations in detail, including the statistical basis for reading small samples directionally and the corrections applied to the female-elder over-representation. All figures are partial returns read as "of those who answered," not population proportions. Some of this analysis was prepared with the assistance of AI tools, used for research, data-checking and drafting; the argument and judgements are the author's own. Full paper and sources at andrewyager.com.