

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Lodged electronically

2 March 2021

## **Inquiry into and report on Australia's skilled migration program**

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration regarding the Inquiry and report on Australia's skilled migration program.

NECA is the peak body for Australia's electrotechnology sector, which employs 170,000 workers and turns over more than \$23bn annually. We represent almost 5,500 businesses performing works including the design, installation and maintenance of electrical and electronic equipment in the building, construction, mining, air conditioning, refrigeration, manufacturing, communications and renewables sectors.

NECA, and our affiliate training organisations make a considerable contribution to the assessment, and where required, upskilling of migrant electrical workers seeking to continue their careers in Australia.

We note the requests of the Committee to provide submission to the inquiry Terms of Reference in parts, and provide the following commentary against sections 1.a).

### **The purpose of the skilled migration program and whether it is meeting its intended objectives, including: 1a) if any immediate adjustments are necessary in the context of the future of work and pandemic recovery**

Australia's skilled migration program is designed to support individuals who want to make a significant contribution to our economy in industries and occupations where labour is in short supply.

There is undoubtedly a skills shortage across the electrotechnology industry. While the long-term aim should be increased support for employers and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector to create more electrical apprenticeships for citizens, we appreciate a robust and practical skilled migration program is needed to meet current workforce demands.

#### **NATIONAL OFFICE**

Level 4,  
30 Atchison Street,  
St Leonards NSW 2065  
Locked Bag 1818,  
St Leonards NSW 1590

**T** +61 2 9439 8523  
**F** +61 2 9439 8525  
**E** [necanat@neca.asn.au](mailto:necanat@neca.asn.au)  
**W** [www.neca.asn.au](http://www.neca.asn.au)

ABN 78 319 016 742



NECA supports the current process of Offshore Technical Skills Assessments in accordance with Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) requirements. NECA and our affiliated training businesses are proud to provide these services in each state and territory jurisdiction to ensure the highest standards of competency and safety across the industry. This includes verifying completion of an equivalent apprenticeship in the country of origin, interviews, assessments and course work where needed in order to obtain an Offshore Technical Skills Record. We believe this is the appropriate process for all migrants to follow who are seeking to obtain a Certificate III Electrotechnology qualification, and subsequent electrical and electrical contracting licenses.

We wish to alert the Committee to a potential loophole which has been created with the abolition of the TRA Trades Recognition Service, the process for migrant electrical workers already in Australia. They may be living in Australia on a spousal or other form of sponsored partner visa and are therefore excluded from the TRA process – Offshore Skills Assessment Program (OSAP) and Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) Skills Assessment. The pathway for these workers to a licence is through the state or territory's system of licence recognition, which in turn, falls to Registered Training Organisations (RTO) who may not perform the critical checks required for a robust licensing system. Previous experience has shown that candidates will have non-trade qualifications 'reverse engineered' to achieve a Certificate III Electrotechnology, apply for a licence in a less regulated jurisdiction, and then claim mutual recognition in another jurisdiction. This weakens the whole licensing system.

NECA recommends reinstating the offshore TRA process for all migrant workers, regardless of being located in Australia or still overseas, maintaining the integrity and necessary safeguards to ensure only truly competent and assessed individuals become authorised to perform electrical work.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further or request a NECA representative appear before the Committee please contact me on 0439 707 101 or via email [peter.mccabe@neca.asn.au](mailto:peter.mccabe@neca.asn.au).

Yours sincerely,

**Peter McCabe**

**Director Policy and Government Relations  
NECA**



## About NECA

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak body for Australia's electrical and communications sector, which employs 170,000 workers<sup>1</sup> and turns over more than \$23bn annually.<sup>2</sup> We represent almost 5,500 businesses performing works including the design, installation and maintenance of electrical and electronic equipment in the building, construction, mining, air conditioning, refrigeration, manufacturing, communications and renewables sectors.

NECA has advocated on behalf of the electrotechnology industry for over 100 years. We help members and our industry operate their businesses more effectively, and represent their interests to all levels of government, regulators and other bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Standards Australia.

NECA members make an essential economic contribution – connecting businesses, homes and infrastructure – encouraging investment, improving reliability and energy security, and delivering affordable, environmentally sustainable outcomes. The safety and reputation of our industry is critical to all tradespeople, consumers, and the community.

NECA is integral to the next generation of electrical contractors. Through our Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and Group Training Organisations (GTOs), we offer employment and skills development to some 4,800 apprentices nationally. Our success is clear: we proudly boast 90% completion rates across our courses, with roughly one in three licensed electrical workers starting their career as a NECA apprentice.

NECA helps attract entrants to our industry through holistic, high-quality, industry-relevant programs including our scholarship program, the NECA Foundation, and the Women in Electrical Trades Roadmap. We proactively seek diverse workforces, supporting female, indigenous and mature aged apprentices, and promoting career paths for school students and school leavers. We also operate the industry-wide NECA Annual Excellence Awards, which acknowledge and celebrate achievements and distinguished electrotechnology projects, and NECA's Apprentice Awards, recognising future leaders in our industry.

NECA continues to monitor and respond to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis on behalf of our members and the electrotechnology sector, and is working with industry, government and the community to achieve a COVID-19 safe economy and swift national recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government 'Job Outlook'. (July 2020) (Telecommunications Trades Workers) <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=3424> and (Electricians) <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=3411>

<sup>2</sup> Ibis World 'Electrical services in Australia Industry Statistics (May 2020) <https://www.ibisworld.com/au/industry/electrical-services/325/>