

General Manager  
Communications Infrastructure Division  
Australian Communications and Media Authority  
PO Box 78  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

By email: [haveyoursay@acma.gov.au](mailto:haveyoursay@acma.gov.au)

5 March 2021

## **NECA Submission on ACMA Compliance Priorities for 2021-22**

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is pleased to make comments on the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) consultation paper on Compliance Priorities for 2021-22.

Firstly, NECA would like to commend ACMA for its recent statement in response to its *Review of regulation of telecommunications cabling customer cabling consultation*. It is most encouraging that ACMA has announced that it continues to support the cabling registration process and that ACMA will continue to work with the five cabling registrars, including NECA's own Australian Cabling Registration Service (ACRS).

In regard to the ACMA consultation paper inviting comments on the key areas of focus for improved industry compliance, NECA would like to encourage ACMA to initiate a robust compliance audit of the cabling industry, particularly on the grounds of health and safety.

Workplace health and safety is fundamental to the electrical and communications industry. Safety in the workplace is a priority for NECA given the potentially hazardous nature of the work carried out by electrical and communications industry employees engaged in construction, maintenance or repair of properties.

Dangers for electrotechnology and communications workers include exposure to live electricity and loose fill or bonded asbestos; hazards such as slips, trips and falls; sharp objects; asbestos and crystalline silica exposure; gas piping and the risks associated with noncompliant products.

NECA assists its members to manage the WHS risks in our industry through a range of safety managements systems that members can purchase that are tailored to their business size and needs. NECA also provides members with access to WHS information and Australian Standards through our Technical Knowledge Base (TKB) information on the NECA website and through having access to technical and WHS staff to respond to inquiries and to run road shows and workshops.

### **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



While considerable work has been undertaken across the electrotechnology and communications industry to work safer, it is sobering to read that fatalities are still occurring. NECA is a staunch believer that all fatalities can be avoided with adequate planning and risk management and with continual safe work practices.

The Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council (ERAC) recently released a report titled *Electrical Fatal Incident Data Australia and New Zealand 2019-20*. In this report, ERAC noted that in the 20 years from 2000-01 to 2019-20, there were 334 electrical fatalities in Australia (398 including New Zealand). This is an average of 17 fatalities in Australia each year. The number for individual years varies with a low of 5 (in 2017/18) and a high of 37 (in 2000/01). In 2019/20, 8 deaths were recorded in Australia (12 with New Zealand). Of these 12 deaths, 6 were non-electrical workers and 1 was a member of the public. The main contributing factors to these fatalities related to deterioration of equipment or wiring; misuse or interference with equipment or wiring; installation failures; or poor work practices.

Additionally, Safe Work Australia (SWA) releases periodic fatality statistics across all occupations in its report titled *Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities, Australia*. In its most recent report, SWA notes that between 2003 and 2016, in each year there were between 6 and 9 electrotechnology and telecommunications trades worker fatalities.

These statistical reports highlight the fact that our electrotechnology and communications industry still has a lot of work to do to achieve zero harm.

NECA notes that in releasing its statement *Review of regulation of telecommunications cabling customer cabling consultation* that ACMA supports the conclusion that electrical safety risks associated with telecommunications customer cabling work justify continuing cabling regulation. ACMA goes on to say however that AS/NZS3000 was revised to require safety switches in new builds since the year 2000.

While NECA would acknowledge that safety switches or RCD's significantly reduce the risk of electric shock, NECA would like to make it clear that RCD's do not provide protection in all circumstances. For example, an RCD will not disconnect the supply if a person contacts both the active and neutral conductors while handling faulty electrical equipment and the electricity flows through the person's body, unless there is also a current flow to earth. While AS/NZS3000 commenced requiring safety switches be installed in new buildings back in 2000, it was not until the latest version was released in 2018 that it became mandatory to install safety switches on all final sub-circuits in new domestic and residential installations (this includes anywhere that people live, including hotels).

While NECA would like to commend the Wiring Rules Committee for introducing this provision, it must be made clear that this was for new installations only from 1 January 2019. While this is a tremendously positive step, there is no national requirements to retrofit RCD's into domestic and residential installations that were built prior to 1 January 2019. NECA would like to make it clear that this will leave a legacy on domestic and residential premises with many having either none or limited RCD's for many decades to come.



Additionally, when it comes to commercial premises and other workplaces, the legal requirements for RCD's varies considerably. Construction sites are governed by strict laws, including the use of portable RCD's. However, in other workplaces such as office blocks, warehouses, factories and shopping centers the electrical safety obligations require the business to manage the electrical risk of "plug in" equipment by the use of appropriate RCDs in higher-risk environments. This normally means that plug-in electrical equipment is used in conditions that involve exposure to moisture, heat, vibration, mechanical damage, corrosive chemicals or dust.

As such, NECA would like to point out that there are many building locations that telecommunications workers are likely to install cabling, where there are not mandatory requirements around the use of RCD's. This could result in significant ongoing electrical risks to these workers and it is encouraging that ACMA has recognized this risk.

NECA understands that ACMA has not undertaken a comprehensive compliance audit of the data and telecommunications cabling work since 2017, when ACMA found that some 35% of work audited was non-compliant, with the biggest failure being inadequate separation from the LV electrical cables.

It is for this reason that NECA would like to encourage ACMA to strengthen its regulatory controls and to undertake a thorough audit of communications workers as part of the ACMA compliance priorities for 2021-22. In this way ACMA can ensure that the communication industry remains strong and viable.

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.

---

<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/>