

**NECA CALLS FOR RANGE OF MEASURES TO SUPPORT BUSINESS AND REBUILD THE ECONOMY**

COVID-19 has had an extraordinary impact on the all of us. Throughout this time, NECA has been advocating on behalf of the industry to all levels of government for initiatives that will support business, protect and encourage jobs and drive positive change now, and in the long term.

While no industry has been immune to the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, it has however been encouraging that the building and construction sector, which includes the electrical and communications contracting industry, has been identified by government as a critical industry that can create jobs and support business affected by this crisis.

NECA's Federal and State pre-budget submissions, which call for a range of measures to support business and rebuild the economy, are based on NECA's Four Point Plan for Powering Up the Economy which includes:

- **Backing small business** through targeted economic stimulus – supporting local businesses to work in local areas to rebuild local economies and local communities;
- **Unlocking a pipeline of infrastructure** to generate jobs and economic activity;
- **Taxation and regulatory system reforms** to ensure a sustainable and self-sufficient economy that encourages consumer confidence and investment; and
- **Energising the future** through supporting a diverse workforce, labour mobility, training and development.

NECA is engaging government to present our proposals and work together to achieve reforms that will put the electrical contracting industry on a strong-footing.

*All NECA submissions are available for view at [www.neca.asn.au](http://www.neca.asn.au)*

**PAYMENT TIMES REPORTING SCHEME NOW A REALITY**

NECA has welcomed the Federal Government's Payment Times Reporting Scheme saying it is an important step in ensuring small medium enterprises (SMEs) get paid in full and on time but cautioned that it must not mire business in red tape.

NECA has long called for improved policy to strengthen security of payment for SMEs, and its efforts were acknowledged in the Senate's Payment Times Reporting Bill 2020, which introduced the new Scheme.

Under the Scheme, large businesses and applicable government enterprises with a total annual income of over \$100 million will have to report publicly on how and when they pay their small business suppliers. This Scheme will provide unprecedented transparency and will show Australians how big

businesses pay their suppliers.

NECA said the Scheme will bring much needed transparency to business payments and help hard working SMEs, but warned it must be simple for businesses to report so it does not become a barrier to big business working with SMEs. NECA will be working with government to ensure the Scheme is not an unnecessary burden on larger businesses while ensuring it fulfils its aim of protecting payments to smaller businesses.

The Scheme is a positive sign of progress and NECA will continue to advocate for additional protections including further improvements to security of payments, trust account schemes for construction industry project work and enhanced unfair contract term protections.

The Scheme will begin on 1 January 2021.

**NECA RESPONDS TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IR REVIEW**

Industrial Relations system reforms are a key focus for the Federal Government in response to the challenges faced by Australian business during COVID-19.

As part of the Government's JobMaker plan to get workers back in jobs, five Industrial Relations Working Groups have been set up and tasked with finding ways to urgently regrow jobs lost as a result of COVID-19.

NECA has made a formal submission to the working groups convened by the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, the Hon. Christian Porter MP. The submissions address matters concerning:

- Casuals and fixed term employees
- Award simplification
- Enterprise agreement making
- Compliance and enforcement
- Greenfields agreements for new enterprises.

**MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF CONTRACTOR LICENCES ON THE CARDS**

NECA has praised the State and Federal Treasurers for agreeing at National Cabinet to harmonise their laws so qualifications are recognised nationwide with the aim of having the barriers removed by 1 January 2021.

This will allow tradespeople and vocational workers to cross inter-state borders more easily and offer increased business opportunities.

Different licence requirements in different states has been a major

burden for contractors and NECA has long called for harmonisation of licensing to support labour mobility. NECA's Pre-Budget Submission called for a single national occupational licensing scheme for electrical and communications subcontractors, which would ensure the ability and freedom for them to work freely across Australia and would remove significant red tape.

We welcome the National Cabinet's decision and urge State Governments to expedite the legislative changes required to make this a reality for hardworking tradies across the country.

**NECA RESPONDS TO APPRENTICE TRAINING NEEDS**

One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is Australian businesses having to face varying degrees of challenges and managing apprentices is just one of them.

The way Australia 'recovers' from the pandemic has the potential to affect current apprenticeships and future career opportunities for those wanting to move into the electrical and communications industry. NECA's Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and Group Training Organisations (GTOs) across the country are focused on ensuring that the great work over recent years to increase the number of apprentices entering the trade, is not eroded.

While many training providers have closed their doors due to COVID-19, leaving apprentices and their employers in limbo, NECA RTOs have been praised for having quickly modified schedules so that learning could continue. This includes moving theory lessons online and reducing the number of apprentices attending practical lessons to adhere to social distancing requirements.

The approach taken by NECA RTOs has meant minimal disruption to apprentice learning and also means NECA members and GTO apprentices are on track to complete their training on schedule.

Electrical contracting businesses familiar with the many benefits of partnering with a GTO appreciate that during difficult times, these training models can be of great value to both the hosts and apprentices by providing that safety net for ongoing sustainable apprentice employment.

NECA's GTO facilities are able to assist via apprentice rotations between its many valued host partners.

This is the safety net that can help host businesses maintain work flexibility and that all-important labour mix within their business. It allows the host to better coordinate daily work activities between busy and quiet periods, taking out some of the stress while meeting business needs. At the same time apprentices can continue in work, which ensures that they are actively engaged and continue to gain the broad range of skills required.

It is important that we continue to keep all apprentices in the training system so that we do not lose future tradespeople and have a situation where opportunities for the uptake of new apprentices cannot occur.

Any employer of apprentices having difficulty in managing workflows and staff numbers should consider the options that GTOs provide.

Contact your local NECA Branch to find out more about local NECA GTO options near you.

**UPCOMING 2020 NATIONAL NECA APPRENTICE AWARDS**

Some of the industry's best and brightest electrical apprentices will be recognised on 9 December 2020 when NECA announces the winners of this year's National Apprentice Awards.

For more than three decades the NECA awards have recognised and rewarded apprentices and their employers for outstanding performance and commitment to the electrotechnology industry.

The awards present an opportunity for those nominated and winning

apprentices to stand out from the crowd and be recognised for their dedication, hard work and commitment in this challenging industry.

These awards are also an opportunity for employers who have dedicated time, effort and resources to the future of our industry by nurturing and supporting their workers, to gain recognition from their peers and the community.

The 2020 Apprentice Awards will recognise apprentices across three categories - Commercial/ Domestic, Communications and Industrial.

**COMMITMENT TO ELECTRICAL TRAINING IN TASMANIA WITH NEW TRADES AND WATER CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

The Tasmanian government recently announced plans for the development of TasTAFE's new Trades and Water Centre of Excellence.

The State and Federal funded project will see the construction of a new state-of-the-art training facility that will deliver training across electrical, plumbing and water, refrigeration and air conditioning and smart buildings technologies in order to meet industry demands.

Over the past two years, NECA has been working with Federal and State Government to train more qualified electricians and meet the demands of the Tasmanian construction sector.

This is a great opportunity for the electrotechnology industry, as the facility will have a strong focus on electrical trades including refrigeration and air-conditioning, as well as access to upskilling in renewables and hydrogen technologies.

There are currently more than 500 electrotechnology apprentices at TasTAFE and the new site at Clarence will expand capacity and see more tradespeople trained in this industry.

NECA CEO Suresh Manickam says apprentices are the real winners and they will have the opportunity to learn in a purpose-built world-class facility.

"This is critical because the trades are becoming more technically demanding and sophisticated, therefore we need a learning environment that reflects the technical demands of the trades.

"Now more than ever is the right time to be investing in apprenticeships because when the economy starts booming again in a few years, we will be able to pump out qualified tradespeople to match the skills demand in the Tasmanian economy. This should also mean that Tassie won't need to import skills from the mainland; it'll be self-sufficient and sustainable."

## CONSIDERING A CHANGE IN BUSINESS DIRECTION? FIRST CHECK THAT YOU'RE COMPLIANT.

2020 has proven to be an unusual year and not one we are likely to forget in a hurry. One of the unexpected outcomes, has been businesses planning and making decisions that will shape the future direction of our careers and businesses.

If you're thinking about a move into data and communications as a way to diversify your contracting business there are a few critical questions to ask before you make a start on that new cabling project. Not being registered to undertake the work is definitely not worth the risk.

### Q: Am I registered to do the work?

**A:** In Australia, all cabling work, including telephone, data, fire and security alarm systems cabling that connects with the telecommunications network must be performed by a registered cabler or under the direct supervision of a registered cabler.

### Q: What is required to become a registered cabler?

**A:** In order to get registered, there are training requirements to ensure that you are competent to perform the cabling work according to the Australian Standards as set out in the Wiring Rules [Australian Standard AS/CA S009].

To become a registered cabler you must complete the appropriate training course for the type of cabling registration that you require – Open or Restricted.

If you want to work in commercial and domestic premises, you must have an Open Registration. If you only want to work in domestic premises you are only required to obtain a Restricted Registration. Most electrical contractors choose Open Registration to keep their options open.

There are a number of Registered Training Organisations [RTOs] around Australia that provide the training. In addition to completing a training course, you must also have a minimum of 80



hours cabling experience for Restricted Registration and 360 hours cabling experience for Open Registration.

Holding an electrical licence, Security licence or enAble™ NBN Card will suffice for the experience hours.

### Q: Once I've completed the training, who do I register with?

**A:** There are a number of Cabling Registrars in Australia, including ACRS, that can verify a cabler's eligibility for registration.

Cabling Registrars are authorised by the Australian Communications and Media Authority [ACMA], the Australian Government statutory authority that regulates, sets and manages rules about telecommunications in Australia.

### Q: Do all my staff need to be registered?

**A:** No. To ensure compliance with the ACMA guidelines, cabling must be either registered to work in the cabling industry or, directly supervised at all times by a cabler who is registered for the type of work you are doing. Supervising cabling work means taking full responsibility for the standard of the work completed.

### Q: What are the consequences of doing cabling work without being registered?

**A:** The ACMA has a range of options available to enforce compliance. This includes:

- issue a formal warning;
- issue a non-compliance notice to the telecommunications carrier, which may result in disconnection from the network;

- issue a telecommunications infringement notice (on-the-spot fine of \$2,040); and
- if the matter is serious enough, take court action, which may result in a conviction and/or a fine of up to \$20,400.

Under the Telecommunications Act 1997 [the Act], there are several offences that apply to the supply or installation of cabling. Under Section 411 and 413 of the Act, the maximum penalty that a court could impose upon conviction is \$13,200 or \$11,000 respectively.

The biggest consequence of not being registered to undertake cabling work is that, should anything go wrong or your work is found to be faulty, your business insurance is unlikely to cover you for the work you have performed, because you were not registered to perform the work. This could lead to litigation and substantial financial loss for your business. It's just not worth the risk.

### Q: What should I do if my cabling registration has expired?

**A:** If your cabling registration has expired within 12 months, you can renew your registration without any additional requirements. If more than 12 months have lapsed, contact your Cabling Registrar to discuss your circumstances and possible next steps.

*For more information on cabling registration contact the Australian Registered Cabler Service on 1300 667 771 or visit [acrs.com.au](http://acrs.com.au)*

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