

## A word from the CEO

In my first *Electrical Connection* column, I thought I would bring you up to speed on where we stand at NECA regarding current developments in the industry.

### Infinity cable

We welcomed the decision of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to establish a taskforce – including state electrical safety regulators, to determine how best to resolve the issue of any proposed removal of in situ Infinity branded cable.

We believe most of the cable on the shelves of distributors, or in the vans of contractors, has now been returned. However, any remaining in situ cable poses a challenge, therefore the focus is now on resolving the in situ matter, and with the taskforce in place, we hope the ACCC will be able to assist our industry in finding the right solution to this complex and contentious matter.

### Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program

We were pleased to see the Royal Commission commence proceedings and are confident it will lead to a positive outcome that ensures future governments learn from this tragic mistake.

NECA has been summoned to produce documentation for the Commission, where we will attend in person and cooperate fully.

### Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption

As the national voice of the major electrical and communication contractors in the Australian building and construction industry, we endorsed the government's decision to proceed with the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption.

Just as businesses are not permitted to act outside of the law, we believe registered organisations, including trade unions, must also respect the law and abide by it.



Transparency and lawfulness should be a given in any industry, including the building and construction industry.

NECA will cooperate and play our part in this process.

### Australia's building industry watchdog

At this time of turmoil and uncertainty for the building and construction industry it is encouraging to see a bipartisan approach to the supporting and reinstatement of the industry watchdog. When the former head of one of Australia's major unions is backing an initiative of this nature – just when the unions themselves are in the spotlight, it demonstrates that we have reached a turning point and that the current landscape must change for the benefit of the industry and all who work within it.

Like most other sectors linked to the building and construction industry, the electrical and communications sector has been through a few tough years. If history is to be any guide, a return to the ABCC would also include a return to transparency, probity and business confidence. We encourage parliament to embrace Martin Ferguson's support of the industry watchdog and look forward to the prompt reinstatement of the ABCC.

### Literacy and numeracy are the key to success

In the electrical contracting industry, good literacy and numeracy skills are essential for

anyone wanting to become an electrician. We therefore welcome the government's commitment to raising the bar in this regard and endorse its focus on the Trades pathway for people striving for a career in our industry.

NECA employs approximately 2,000 apprentices directly and trains a further 8,000 people annually across Australia. As a result we attract a huge number of applications for apprenticeships – but unfortunately find many otherwise excellent candidates are let down by their poor literacy and numeracy skills.

We are working with all the key bodies involved in education to develop an industry-recognised national benchmark for recruitment as an electrical apprentice – including promoting our industry in schools. We run a number of scholarship and award programs aimed specifically at people still at school.

The importance of ASBAs and pre-apprenticeships should not be overlooked. They are key entry points for new entrants into the industry. ASBAs enable school students to continue the development of their literacy and numeracy skills while undertaking an apprenticeship on a part-time basis. This process provides an invaluable introduction and understanding of industry requirements. Pre-apprenticeships allow a student to experience the work of an electrical contractor before committing to a four-year apprenticeship. We also encourage schools to be more flexible with their timetabling to allow students to gain vital work experience if they are to enter a trade.

NECA is keen to formulate policy and programs with government for the benefit of industry.

I look forward to updating you of our progress in the next edition of *Electrical Connection*.

Best regards,  
Suresh Manickam  
NECA CEO

## Flexibility in quality off-the-job training delivery

One of NECA's goals in our training provider arms is to provide flexibility in program delivery at the same time maintaining quality, industry relevant training. The E-OZ Project assists Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) with support for online learning and assessment tools. The pilot will develop a suite of interactive learning resources covering the core units of the electrical trade qualification. These will assist RTOs to manage varied progression, providing students with the opportunity to move ahead or consolidate their learning, based on their individual circumstances. Professional development will be provided to technical trainers to help them manage individual needs in a classroom environment. It is important that online tools are simply that – to assist in teaching not to replace the process.

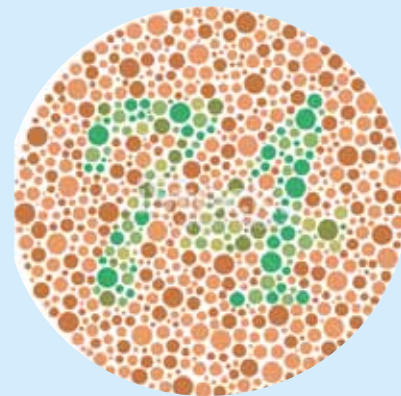
NECA will work with E-OZ and other important stakeholders to ensure that these materials are of an excellent standard and meet the needs of the industry for the benefit of the industry at large. It is still a work in progress at the moment and we will need to ensure that all the materials satisfy this test by the end of 2014. ■

## Does colour blindness disqualify WA apprentice electricians?

The eligibility requirements for an electrical work licence in Western Australia do not specify medical fitness nor is the possession of an eligibility requirement overturned by a person having a medical condition. However, a medical condition whose characteristics prevent a person from achieving an eligibility requirement could prevent them from gaining a licence.

The decision is left to the supervising registered training organisation and the employer to consider and make the decision based on the suitability of a potential apprentice's eye condition as to whether it will prevent them from gaining the technical qualifications, experience and on/off job competencies needed to meet eligibility criteria for an electrical licence.

Prior to signing the apprentice's training agreement the medical condition and the potential consequences it could have on the



apprentice gaining a completion statement should be considered.

EnergySafety accepts completion statements as evidence of competency for an electrical work licence. If in doubt members should discuss the condition with the relevant training organisation.

To discuss this or any other matter further, please contact NECA WA's Technical team on 1300 NECA WA (6322 92) or via email at [technical@necawa.asn.au](mailto:technical@necawa.asn.au).

## NECA and the changing face of apprenticeships for the electrotechnology industry

Over many years, NECA has been actively engaged in the reforms to the national training system and has been a strong and public supporter of an industry-led and responsive education and training system. NECA has undertaken a significant amount of work in addressing skill shortages, developing innovative ways to deliver training and providing detailed policy advice to all governments and other stakeholders.

We employ directly around 2,000 apprentices through our group training companies which operate in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. We also deliver formal, nationally-recognised training to over 10,000 apprentices and tradespersons each year in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. We also have good partnerships

with other industry focused employment and training providers in other parts of the country. One of our success stories is that we have retention rates in our group training organisations above 90% – easily among the best figures in any industry across Australia.

As part of this reform process, NECA is working with E-OZ Energy Skills Australia, our national Industry Skills Council, to explore ways to establish some realistic and practical measures to address retention rates across the industry, promote some of the best practice used by NECA training providers and group employers, and trial some approaches to raising the bar of the quality of training provided across Australia and the standard of young people entering our industry.

NECA is engaging up to 25 mentor/

advisors across the country. These mentor/advisors all have extensive industry experience and expertise in helping employers and apprentices to address issues as they arise through the apprenticeship. A day a week is dedicated to promoting the industry to schools and other education and training providers and to talking with employers on industry friendly employment and training options. The other four days involve mentor/advisors working with apprentices, employers, training providers and other stakeholders involved in the Mentor/Advisors Project (MAPS) which forms part of the Energy Industry Apprentice Progression Management System operated by E-Oz Energy Skills Australia. It is expected around 1,500 apprentices will be involved in the NECA MAPS project in 2014. ■

## LEDs... The future is now

**Rob Fletcher returned to Australia in December 2013 after 30 years abroad, to take up the position of General Manager – Australia and New Zealand for Philips Lighting. In a recent interview with Barry Jackson, Rob shared some of his first impressions of being back in Australia.**

When asked what it was like being back 'home' Rob replied: "In some ways I feel a bit like a foreigner – even though Australia is where I grew up. After being away for such a long period, it was a bit of a culture shock in many ways. The life-work balance is very impressive, as is the amount of urban greenery. Plus we're spoilt for choice in terms of great restaurants, beaches and excellent coffee. So in terms of lifestyle, it certainly exceeded my expectations."

From a business perspective it's not all quite so rosy though.

"I'm simply amazed at the sheer volume of lighting brands – particularly in the LED arena, that are on offer in Australia. When I left Australia in the '80s, it was white goods and television sets that people had to be



only focus on the safety element, this statistic is something that everyone – consumers, regulators, wholesalers and manufacturers ought to be very concerned by. In many of our neighbouring countries, where I have spent the bulk of my time away, this would simply not be tolerated."

When I left Australia in the '80s, it was white goods and television sets that people had to be careful around when purchasing. But now it is definitely lighting.

careful around when purchasing. But now it is definitely lighting that causes the most concern. And that is not what I was expecting to find. I'm actually quite shocked to be honest," says Rob.

A recent government study revealed that over 98% of white goods and television sets on sale in Australia are registered products, whereas some 48% of lighting brands surveyed in retail outlets were found not to be registered.

"This is not good news for anyone. If you

In most major markets in the world you tend to find a number of global manufacturers and a handful of local boutique specialist serving the lighting market. Generally these are the companies that are prepared to invest in technology, quality and innovation, and so it's logical that they lead the way. Cheaper alternatives – often imported, are always on offer as well. But this needs to be very well regulated to ensure compliance – and more importantly, to be safe. LEDs have ended up with a bad reputation here in Australia where

in most other countries they are seen as the way forward. "The energy saving can be up to 80% on LED lighting and the maintenance benefits are enormous. In some cases there is a 10- to 20-times greater lifespan in an LED light source compared to the old incandescent light bulb and as the technology evolves this is increasing. So for commercial businesses the maintenance value-add often becomes the key driver," Rob explains.

"It's also interesting that there isn't a major retailer here in Australia using LED lighting throughout their store(s) to help enhance the way produce is presented. The light levels and colour rendering is a big issue in food and apparel presentation, for example, and LED has an amazing ability to enhance what's on offer, in addition to reducing operational expense and maintenance costs. In some cities in the US like Los Angeles, New York and Seattle, they have significantly reduced the maintenance costs of their street lighting by introducing LED. In fact the saving from reduced maintenance is often greater than the savings from energy reductions. We really are missing a trick or two here."

LED lighting has some amazing benefits like having its own IP address. That way a smart user can remotely control the colour of the lights, intensity and switching from an app that is downloaded to a smart device. Similarly lights at work, or at home, can be set to only come on, and remain on, only when there's movement in the room. Moreover, the harvesting of daylight via the use of smart sensors to further reduce energy bills is also available, yet not widely implemented. As energy and maintenance costs continue to increase there has never been a better time to embrace these new and innovative solutions that will enhance the user experience.

"It would be great to see more innovation in Australia around how people use LED lighting and combat non-compliant products. And that's the challenge for me in my new role. I'm confident LED can be as significant here in Australia as it is in other markets. But we must put a stop to the non-compliant options being so readily available. So all I can say is: watch this space!" concluded Rob. ■

## 89% of electrical contractors put safety before price

A year on the national initiative between Voltimum and NECA to stamp out non-compliant products is demonstrating its true value. The awareness of the dangers of using non-compliant products has jumped from 28% to 89% in just a year. And what's more, the awareness of there being a new regulator to manage the investigation process, the Electrical Equipment Safety System (EESS), is now at over 75% - up from zero over the same period.

