

26 August 2021

## **An open letter to the ACT Chief Minister and Cabinet,**

As Chief Executive of the National Electrical and Communications Association, I write to implore the ACT Government to move expeditiously towards a reopening of the construction industry and skilled trade services.

The current working group communicating with the building and construction industry – PACICERG, Chaired by the Chief Planner – is nothing more than a reiteration of the health orders and compliance actions in place. From our perspective insufficient work is being done to achieve a timely reopening of the industry. The business support programs proposed are being increasingly outpaced by real losses incurred. It is not an exaggeration to state that the damage to trade-based businesses is fast approaching catastrophic.

NECA, having worked systematically through building and construction shutdowns and capacity restrictions in both Victoria and New South Wales, suggest the following:

1. A smaller working group is formed comprising building and construction industry associations and unions along with representatives of ACT Government construction delivery agencies;
2. The working group be tasked with developing ACT-specific, COVID-safe measures that meet the requirements of ACT Health to achieve reopening by 1 September at the latest;
3. The reopening plan facilitates all workers such as delivery drivers and manufacturing facilities required as part of the building and construction supply chain;
4. Guidance is issued regarding the process for head contractors and subcontractors to be fairly compensated for losses incurred as a result of the snap decision by the ACT Government to shut industry; and
5. The ACT Government secure additional supplies of vaccine reserved for construction workers, including sufficient supply of Pfizer for apprentices and young adult workers. In other states we have seen this demographic willing and enthusiastic to vaccinate if adequate supply is available.

For the benefit of the Government we share the following two case studies from the ACT:

### **Electrical Contracting Business One**

Has recently won a large project and taken receipt of \$1 million worth of materials. Is unable to claim against construction milestones and is therefore unable to pay for the supplies. Has damaged longstanding relationships with wholesalers and financial institutions. No current option for this business to reduce or mitigate their liability.

### **Electrical Contracting Business Two**

Maintains a large workforce in the hundreds. All workers currently on stand down accruing leave entitlements without generating revenue for the business. Accelerated usage of RDO, annual and long service leave poses cash flow challenges with no revenue being received. Will be forced to make workers redundant if not back to work within the next week.



These are just two typical examples of what is being experienced by electrical contracting businesses generally. The uncertainty is making it impossible for businesses to put in place mitigation strategies to reduce the short, medium and long-term impacts to their businesses. The losses incurred due to plant hire alone sitting unused on work sites will run into the millions.

The experience of productive working groups in other states have resulted in unprecedented levels of collaboration between government, employer associations and trade unions. It has also allowed workers back onto the tools and provided businesses with a path to surviving through the pandemic.

We look forward to your prompt action against the items raised. Feel free to contact me anytime day or night if you would like to discuss further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O. Judd", written in a cursive style.

**Oliver Judd**  
Chief Executive  
Executive Director ACT



## 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/>