MASTER ELECTRICIANS AUSTRALIA

VICTORIAN ELECTION PRIORITIES 2026



MEA VICTORIAN ELECTION PRIORITIES 2026



Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is a peak industry association representing electrical contractors and is recognised by industry, government and the community as a leading business partner, knowledge source and advocate. You can visit our website at www.masterelectricians.com.au

MEA calls on electoral parties to commit to policies that enhance the operational, regulatory, and financial conditions for electrical and construction businesses, delivering broader benefits to the Victorian economy.

INDUSTRY

Reducing the cost and complexity of doing business.

- Work From Home
- Construction Worksites
- Workplace Surveillance
- Security of Payment
- Unfair Contract Terms
- Electrical Product Sales

SMALL BUSINESS

A safer, fairer and more productive construction industry.

- Payroll Tax Threshold
- Compliance Support

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

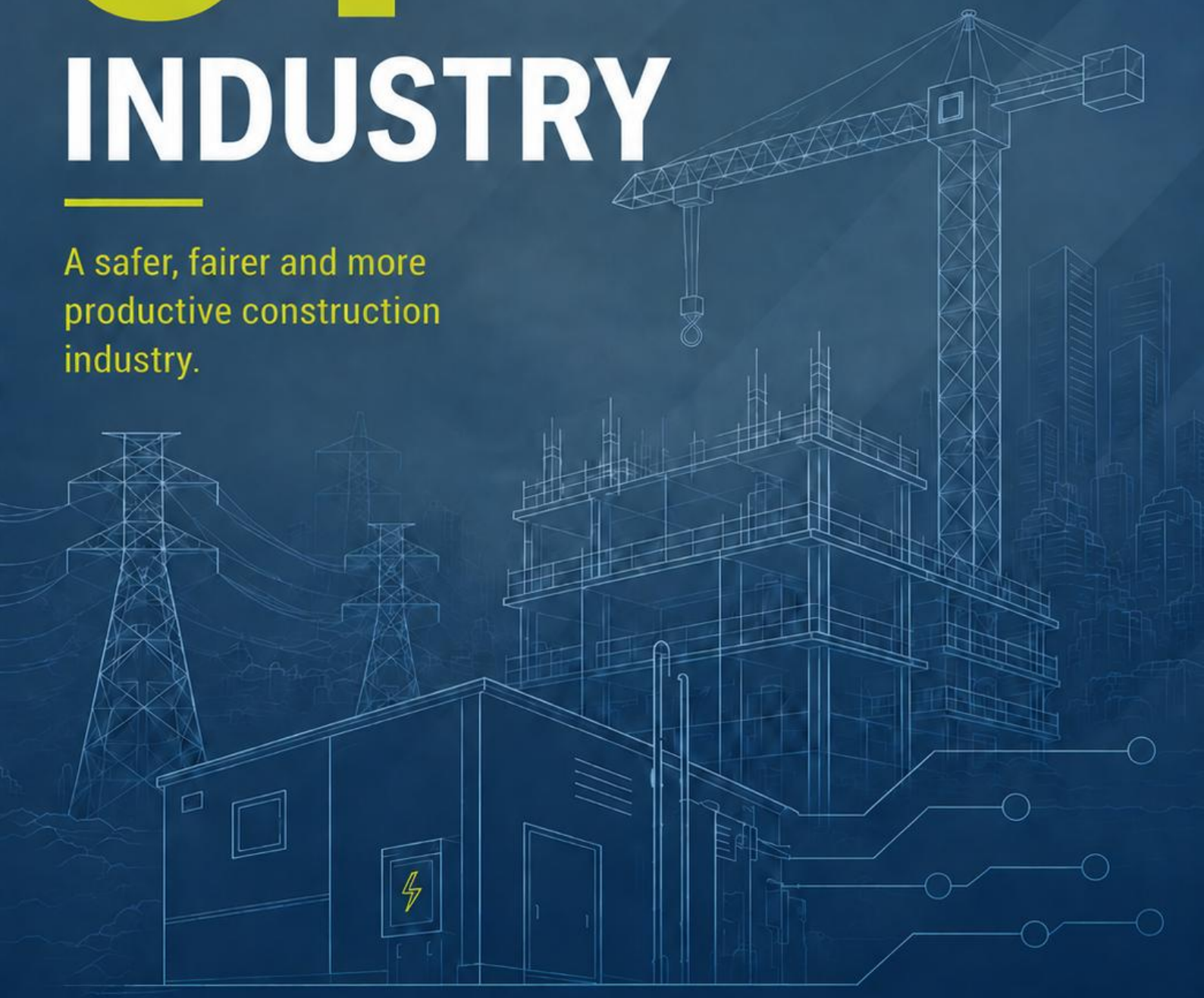
Building the electrical workforce Victoria needs.

- Employer Support
- Apprentice Employer Regulation
- Diversity
- Continued Professional Development
- National Occupational Licensing
- Skilled Migration
- Supervision Ratio

MASTER ELECTRICIANS AUSTRALIA

01 INDUSTRY

A safer, fairer and more productive construction industry.



IN THIS SECTION

WORK FROM HOME • CONSTRUCTION WORKSITES • WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE • SECURITY OF PAYMENT • UNFAIR CONTRACT TERMS • ELECTRICAL PRODUCT SALES

1.1 Work From Home (WFH)

> *A fair and workable WFH framework that recognises the practical capacity of small businesses.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to a small business exemption from Victoria's Work-From-Home framework.

THE POLICY ISSUE

For small electrical contractors, WFH obligations can create disproportionate costs, compliance requirements and risks. Of particular concern are requirements that may expect small employers to fund WFH-related expenses or assume responsibility for an employee's home working environment, despite having limited practical ability to oversee or control that environment.

It is MEA's understanding that employers are not unreasonably refusing WFH arrangements on arbitrary or discriminatory grounds, but despite this, all employers are now at risk of liability under General Protections claims (not involving dismissal) where refusal occurs.

The framework must also recognise that electrical contracting is inherently operational and site-based. Employers need to retain the ability to refuse WFH arrangements where they cannot reasonably be accommodated within the requirements of the business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduce a small business exemption from the WFH framework.

If this is not adopted, small businesses should, at a minimum, be -

- exempted from funding WFH-related expenses;
- have limited employer responsibility for matters within an employee's home working environment that the business cannot reasonably oversee or control; and
- preserved ability to refuse WFH requests where it is unreasonable to accommodate them.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ A more proportionate framework would reduce unnecessary cost, compliance and risk for small employers while maintaining appropriate access to flexible working arrangements for employees.

✓ Allow Victoria's small electrical contractors to continue investing in their workforce and businesses and contributing to the State's housing, energy transition and infrastructure priorities.

1.2 Construction Worksites

> *Ensure every Victorian construction business and worker can operate in a safe, lawful and productive workplace, free from intimidation and misuse of workplace powers.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to strengthening protections for businesses and workers across Victoria's construction industry against unlawful conduct, intimidation, coercion and misuse of workplace rights or powers.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Small contractors often operate as subcontractors within complex construction supply chains, where they can have limited bargaining power and little practical influence over site-wide industrial arrangements.

Recent concerns within Victoria's construction industry have highlighted the risks that arise when intimidation, coercion, inappropriate industrial pressure or misuse of workplace powers affects who can work on a project or how businesses operate. Subcontractors face potential disruption, lost productivity, increased costs or loss of work simply for seeking to operate their business lawfully and independently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen protections and reporting pathways for contractors, subcontractors and workers which protect subcontractor independence, ensuring businesses are not excluded, disadvantaged or pressured because of their lawful industrial arrangements, associations or business decisions.
- Provide clear, confidential reporting pathways and protections against reprisal for contractors and workers who report intimidation, coercion or unlawful conduct.
- Ensure workplace, right-of-entry and safety powers are used only for their legitimate purpose and do not become a mechanism for inappropriate industrial pressure.
- Require the highest standards of lawful and respectful conduct on Victorian Government-funded construction projects.
- Ensure there are meaningful and proportionate consequences for unlawful conduct, regardless of whether it is committed by a contractor, union, official or other project participant.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Safer and more respectful workplaces, where legitimate workplace and safety rights can be exercised without intimidation or coercion.

✓ More productive construction projects by ensuring workplace powers and industrial arrangements are used.

1.3 Workplace Surveillance

> *Protect employee privacy while preserving employers' ability to keep their people, property and business safe.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to a balanced and practical workplace surveillance framework that protects employee privacy while recognising employers' legitimate need to protect their workforce, assets and business operations.

THE POLICY ISSUE

An appropriate balance must be maintained between employees' right to privacy and employers' legitimate need to protect people, vehicles, tools, property and other business assets and meet safety obligations.

In addition, as reforms progress, employers should not be held responsible for matters outside their reasonable control. This is particularly important for small businesses relying on third parties to provide surveillance technology, collect or store data, or operate within workplaces where reasonable due diligence has been conducted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's *Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance* report published last year, MEA seeks the following -

- Ensure surveillance remains available where it is lawful, reasonable and objectively justified, including for workplace safety, incident management and protection against theft, fraud or damage.
- Ensure obligations relating to third-party surveillance, data collection and storage are reasonable and proportionate. Small employers that have undertaken appropriate due diligence should be able to rely on reputable third-party providers and not be held responsible for conduct or failures they could not reasonably prevent or control.
- Education and support: work with employer organisations to provide plain-English guidance, model policies, templates and practical support before new obligations commence.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Protect employees from inappropriate or intrusive surveillance while recognising legitimate and necessary uses of surveillance by employers.

✓ Promote responsible handling of workplace surveillance data without making small employers effectively liable for failures by reputable external technology or storage providers outside their control.

✓ Improve compliance by giving employers clear, accessible and practical guidance rather than simply imposing additional legislative obligations.

1.4 Security of Payment

> *Protect small construction businesses from non-payment and ensure money owed for completed work is paid promptly and securely.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to continuing to strengthen Victoria's Security of Payment framework to better protect subcontractors from non-payment, insolvency and the unfair withholding of retention money.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Electrical subcontractors can face significant losses when builders become insolvent or simply fail to pay for completed work or return retention money. Small businesses are particularly exposed, as even small amount unpaid can have a significant impact.

Recent reforms are a great step in the right direction, and continuing the trajectory of reform is vital to ensure trade businesses are paid for work completed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen retention and security protections by establishing a central authority to hold construction retention money and security, similar to a rental bond scheme, with simple processes for lodging and reclaiming.
- Extend the rapid adjudication framework to debts owed by homeowners.
- Strengthen enforcement of payment obligations, including allocating appropriate resources to suspend builder licences in instances of failure to pay legitimate debts owed to subcontractors.
- Advocate through national forums for a harmonised Security of Payment framework, drawing on effective protections already operating across Australian jurisdictions.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Greater protection for subcontractors from insolvency and non-payment, improving cash flow, business viability and confidence across the construction supply chain.

✓ Reduced ability for retention money and securities to be unfairly withheld and shift the burden away from subcontractors having to pursue costly recovery action.

✓ Support a more financially sustainable construction industry capable of delivering Victoria's housing and infrastructure pipeline.

1.5 Unfair Contract Terms

> *Create fairer construction contracts by ensuring subcontractors are not forced to carry risks they cannot reasonably control or manage.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to stronger oversight and enforcement of unfair contract terms affecting small business subcontractors in Victoria.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Subcontractors continue to face contracts that transfer disproportionate risks and liabilities to them, including risks outside their reasonable control. This can leave businesses responsible for significant costs they are neither best placed to manage nor financially equipped to absorb.

Existing unfair contract term protections are important, but stronger oversight and proactive enforcement are needed to deter prohibited terms and improve contracting practices across the construction sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen regulatory auditing and oversight of construction contracts to identify and address prohibited unfair contract terms.
- Lead by example by ensuring Victorian Government construction contracts and subcontracting arrangements promote fair and proportionate risk allocation.
- Support the principle that contractual risks should sit with the party best placed to not only manage and control them but also responsibility for costs.
- Advocate to the Commonwealth for a stronger proactive enforcement role for the ACCC, including auditing construction subcontracts and pursuing unfair contract terms without relying solely on individual small businesses to make complaints.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

- ✓ Fairer allocation of contractual risk and greater protection for subcontractors from liabilities outside their reasonable control.
- ✓ Reduce the financial and administrative burden associated with unfair contracting practices and improve business confidence and project productivity.
- ✓ Encourage fairer and more sustainable contracting practices throughout Victoria's construction supply chain.

1.6 Electrical Product Sales

> *Reduce unsafe DIY electrical work by restricting the sale of specified electrical products to appropriately licensed persons.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to regulating the sale of specified electrical products that require installation by a licensed electrical worker. For example, by requiring sellers at point of sale to a consumer to verify an appropriate licence before completing the sale of restricted products.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Products such as electrical cable, RCDs and circuit breakers can currently be purchased by consumers despite requiring licensed electricians to install.

While restricting sales will not eliminate deliberate unlicensed electrical work, requiring licence verification would create an additional safeguard against homeowners inadvertently purchasing products for DIY electrical installation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a restricted-sale category for prescribed electrical products requiring licensed installation and seek national harmonisation of requirements.
- Require consumer-purchasers to provide proof of licence at the point of sale.
- Maintain existing RCM and EESS requirements alongside the restricted-sale framework.
- Develop the prescribed product list with industry, and seeking national harmonisation, and ensure legitimate purchasing arrangements are accommodated.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ An additional barrier to unsafe DIY electrical work.

✓ Improved confidence for electrical workers that unlicensed work is being appropriately regulated.

✓ Improved electrical safety for homeowners and the broader community.

02

SMALL BUSINESS

Reducing the cost and complexity of doing business.



IN THIS SECTION

- PAYROLL TAX THRESHOLD
- COMPLIANCE SUPPORT

2.1 Payroll Tax Threshold

> *Reduce the payroll tax burden on growing businesses to support investment in jobs, skills and business growth.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to a significant increase in Victoria's payroll tax-free threshold to better reflect wage growth, inflation and the increasing cost of employing workers.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Victoria's $1 million payroll tax-free threshold is equal-lowest nationally, despite sustained wage growth and increasing employment costs. As payroll tax applies to nominal wages, these pressures are pushing more businesses into the payroll tax net without a corresponding increase in their real capacity to pay.

For small businesses, this can discourage employment and growth, diverting funds that could otherwise be invested in workers, training, equipment and business expansion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Significantly increase the payroll tax-free threshold, having regard to cumulative inflation, wage growth and increasing employment costs.
- Seek to make Victoria's threshold more competitive with other Australian jurisdictions.
- Establish a mechanism for regular review or indexation so the threshold maintains its real value over time.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Greater resource capacity towards employing and training workers, equipment and business growth.

✓ Reduced tax disincentive associated with taking on additional employees or increasing wages as businesses approach the payroll tax threshold.

✓ Improved Victoria's competitiveness as a jurisdiction for business investment and employment, while supporting the workforce needed to deliver the State's housing, energy and infrastructure priorities.

2.2 Compliance Support

> *Make it easier for small businesses to comply and operate with regulatory and compliance obligations.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to reducing unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens on small businesses and providing increased practical support to help them efficiently meet their compliance obligations.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Small construction businesses must navigate extensive workplace, safety, licensing, taxation, insurance and other regulatory obligations, often without dedicated legal, finance, human resources or compliance resources.

Frequent regulatory change, duplication and unnecessary administration divert small business owners away from productive work and increase operating costs. Applying the same compliance approach to small businesses as large organisations can also create a disproportionate regulatory burden.

While the Victorian Government provides valuable advisory support, small businesses also need practical financial assistance to meet the growing cost of compliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Apply a small business lens when developing and reviewing regulation, including consideration of whether simplified or proportionate requirements are appropriate.
- Identify and remove duplicative or unnecessary administrative requirements.
- Provide clear, practical guidance and sufficient transition periods when regulatory requirements change.
- Provide targeted financial support to help small businesses meet compliance costs, including safety equipment, compliance software and training.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Reduced time and cost spent administering compliance, allowing greater focus on productive work, employment and business growth.

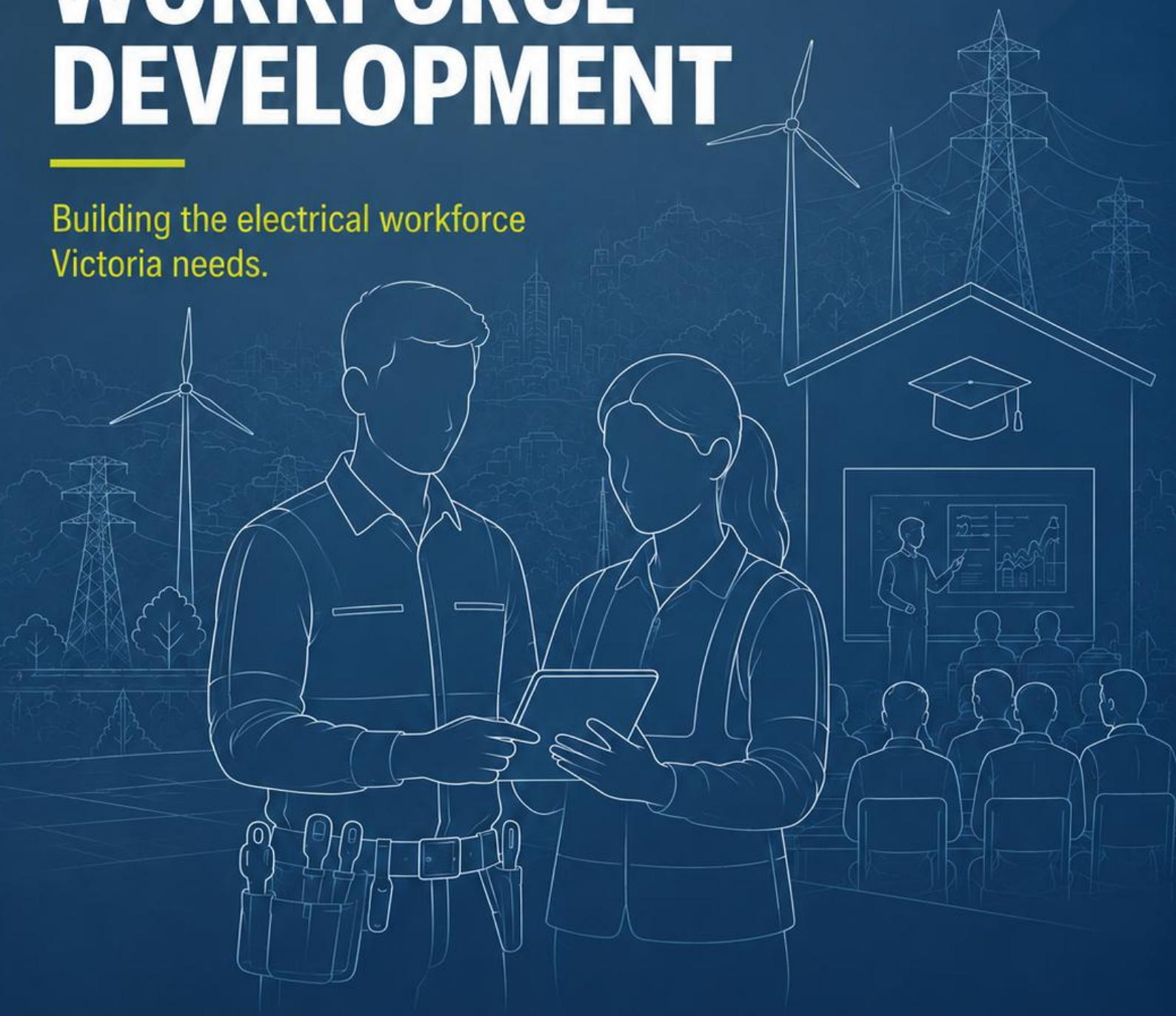
✓ Improved compliance by making regulatory requirements easier for small businesses to understand and implement effectively.

✓ Support for a more productive and sustainable electrical contracting sector capable of contributing to Victoria's housing, energy and infrastructure priorities.

03

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Building the electrical workforce Victoria needs.



IN THIS SECTION

EMPLOYER SUPPORT • APPRENTICE EMPLOYER REGULATION • DIVERSITY • CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT • NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING • SKILLED MIGRATION • SUPERVISION RATIO

3.1 Employer Support

> *Support employers to hire, train and retain the apprentices needs for its future skilled construction workforce.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to providing employers with at least $10,000 in financial support per apprentice, delivered across the apprenticeship and including a completion payment to encourage retention. Support should recognise the substantial cost and responsibility employers carry in training apprentices and complement existing Commonwealth assistance.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Small businesses are critical to apprentice training, with electrical businesses employing fewer than 20 people facilitating half of apprentice training positions nationally [1].

However, training involves significant costs beyond apprentice wages, including lost supervisor productivity, administration and time at trade school. With Commonwealth employer support reducing from $5,000 to $4,000, stronger Victorian support is needed to help businesses not only take on apprentices, but retain them through to qualification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide employers with at least $10,000 in total support per apprentice throughout entirety of apprenticeship.
- Provide free TAFE training to apprentices including electrical apprentices and not limit funded training to apprentices from a particular background as it is the employer typically paying for training.
- Include a completion payment to incentivise retention through to qualification.
- Review and redirect existing skills and apprenticeship funding towards employers carrying the cost and responsibility of training.
- Work with the Commonwealth to ensure State and Federal incentives operate together effectively.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Help small businesses take on and retain more apprentices, supporting ongoing sustainability of the construction workforce.

✓ Better acknowledgment of the cost, productivity impact and responsibility employers assume when training the next generation of electrical workers.

✓ Alleviate skilled workforce pressure.

[1] Workforce Development Data Dashboard *Powering Skills Organisation* <Data Dashboard - Powering Skills Organisation>

3.2 Apprentice Employer Regulation

> *Stronger apprentice safety through targeted regulation that supports, rather than burdens, responsible employers.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Pause implementation of the new apprentice employer requirements to undertake meaningful industry consultation. Replace blanket regulatory requirements with a proportionate, risk-based approach focused on stronger enforcement and better coordination within the existing framework.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Without thorough industry consultation, the Victorian Government recently announced new apprentice employer obligations, including annual licensing for apprentice employers and replacing the VRQA with a new Apprenticeship and Traineeship Commissioner.

While MEA members prioritise apprentice safety, regulatory requirements must be proportionate to the risks being addressed and demonstrate a clear safety benefit that justifies the additional cost and compliance burden. MEA does not believe this threshold has been met. These unnecessary burdens risk discouraging employers from training apprentices -further exacerbating Victoria's electrical skills shortage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pause the new legislation requirements to allow for thorough industry consultation.
- Replace annual employer license renewals with a risk-based approach targeting poor actors and focusing on genuine safety and compliance concerns.
- Avoid duplication with existing electrical supervision, safety and employer requirements.
- Strengthen enforcement, information sharing and coordination between existing regulators.
- Improve supervisor competency and support as a targeted means of improving apprentice safety.
- If reforms proceed, provide educative and proportionate implementation for employers.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Strong apprentice safety protections focused on identified risks.

✓ Reduce likelihood that employers will hire less apprentices (which will lead to further exacerbation of the industry's critical skills shortage).

✓ Better coordinated and more targeted regulatory enforcement.

3.3 Diversity

> *Grow Victoria's electrical workforce by removing barriers for women and mature-age apprentices to enter and complete electrical apprenticeships.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to targeted measures that increase the number of women and mature-age workers entering and completing electrical apprenticeships in Victoria.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Women and mature-age workers represent significant sources of untapped talent that could help address Victoria's electrical skills shortage.

However, mature-age apprentices can be more costly for employers and face financial barriers when changing careers, while women remain significantly underrepresented in electrical trades and can face barriers including industry stereotypes, discrimination, harassment and inadequate workplace amenities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mature-age apprentices

- Apply additional training funding for mature-age apprentices.
- Provide targeted employer funding or wage subsidies for mature-age apprentices to offset higher employment costs and encourage additional apprenticeship positions.

Women

- Introduce an ATAR-scaled senior secondary subject focused on areas such as electrotechnology, sustainable energy and relevant engineering application which could be named something like "sustainability, engineering & technology". This would expose more students, including girls, to the concept of an electrical apprenticeship or electrical engineering.
- Provide practical employer education and support to help address workplace barriers and improve retention.
- Introduce targeted employer and apprentice incentives designed to increase female apprenticeship commencements and completions.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Increase the number of women and mature-age workers entering and completing electrical apprenticeships, expanding the electrical workforce to achieve housing, infrastructure and electrification targets.

3.4 Continued Professional Development

> *Maintain a skilled and safe electrical workforce through accessible, flexible and effective professional development.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to reforming Victoria's mandatory CPD framework for electrical licence holders to make training more accessible, flexible and cost-effective while maintaining rigorous competency standards – including through online options.

THE POLICY ISSUE

MEA supports mandatory CPD for electrical licence holders given the high-risk nature of electrical work and rapidly changing technologies and requirements.

However, the current delivery model is inflexible and limits who can provide the CPD units. The model can impose significant costs on employers through travel, accommodation and lost productive time, particularly in rural and regional Victoria. Last-minute course cancellations can compound these costs, leaving businesses with employees unable to undertake planned billable work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand CPD delivery to all approved training providers and not limit delivery to RTOs. CPD should not be accredited training.
- Permit online and recorded CPD modules, where appropriate, providing greater flexibility for licence holders and employers. Online learning should include assessment and engagement mechanisms.
- Ensure the CPD framework considers the cost and accessibility impacts on small, rural and regional electrical businesses.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

- ✓ Reduce unnecessary travel, accommodation and lost productivity costs.
- ✓ Improve access to CPD for electricians in rural and regional Victoria and reduce reliance on limited face-to-face course availability.
- ✓ Increase training capacity and flexibility while maintaining meaningful competency and assessment requirements.

3.5 National Occupational Licensing

> *Enable electricians to move more easily across state borders while maintaining high and consistent licensing and safety standards.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to advocating for a nationally harmonised electrical licensing eligibility framework that improves workforce mobility while preserving Victoria's control over licensing administration, compliance and enforcement

THE POLICY ISSUE

Electrical workforce shortages are being compounded by inconsistent licensing requirements across state borders, limiting the ability of qualified electricians to move efficiently to areas of greatest demand.

Existing mutual recognition and mobility arrangements have not fully resolved these barriers and can create complexity, duplication, delays and uncertainty for electrical workers and businesses operating interstate. This restricts access to an available skilled workforce at a time of significant demand for housing, energy and infrastructure delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Commit to a national occupational licensing framework for electrical workers, with one high-standard set of eligibility requirements for electrical licensing across Australia.
- Stronger and more consistent auditing and enforcement of RTOs and Capstone assessments.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Allow qualified electricians to work in Victoria more efficiently when their skills are needed most.

✓ Reduce duplication, delays and administrative complexity for electricians and electrical contractors working interstate, and for regulators.

3.6 Skilled Migration

> *Increase Victoria's immediate electrical workforce by attracting qualified overseas electricians and removing unnecessary barriers to unsupervised workforce participation.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to supporting skilled migration reforms that increase the number of competent, qualified electricians able to work in Victoria.

THE POLICY ISSUE

Skilled migration is essential to addressing Victoria's immediate electrician shortage, as domestic training alone cannot rapidly increase supply when an electrical apprenticeship typically takes four years to complete.

However, overseas-qualified electricians can face lengthy pathways before being permitted to work independently. A blanket 12-month supervised employment requirement, irrespective of an electrician's experience or the comparability of their overseas qualifications, can delay workforce participation and impose additional costs on employers. In addition, costs to complete local courses are reportedly very high.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advocate to the Commonwealth for a skilled visa allocation for qualified electricians.
- Allow electricians from recognised comparable jurisdictions (such as the United Kingdom) to work unsupervised once they have completed required Australian gap training and been assessed as competent, rather than requiring a fixed 12-month supervision period (QLD provides a comparable framework for consideration).
- Review the cost and accessibility of required local training and courses for overseas-qualified electricians, with a view to removing unnecessary financial barriers while maintaining appropriate competency standards.
- Adopt a migration strategy to facilitate more skilled electrical workers in Victoria, including a state-wide DAMA and employer support.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

✓ Increased supply of qualified electricians while Victoria continues to build its domestic apprenticeship pipeline.

✓ Reduced financial burden associated with mandatory local training and prolonged supervision, making Victoria a more attractive destination for skilled migrant electricians.

3.7 Supervision Ratios

> *Maintain safe apprentice supervision without unnecessarily restricting Victoria's capacity to train the next generation of electricians.*

THE POLICY REQUEST

Commit to reviewing Victoria's electrical apprentice supervision ratios and replacing overly restrictive ratios with a more flexible, risk-based approach.

THE POLICY ISSUE

While MEA supports appropriate supervision of electrical apprentices, ESV's mandated direct supervision ratio of 1:1 can unnecessarily restrict the number of apprentices electrical contractors are able to train.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review the mandated 1:1 direct supervision ratio and allow greater flexibility where the work can safely support supervision of more than one apprentice.
- Retain 1:1 supervision where warranted by the risk or complexity of the task, including appropriate high-risk electrical work.
- Establish criteria for the supervision ratio to increase where the supervisor has completed a non-accredited supervisor course to ensure quality mentoring – this would focus regulation on the quality and effectiveness of supervision, rather than relying primarily on prescribed numerical ratios.

WHAT THIS WOULD DELIVER

- ✓ Strong electrical safety and apprentice supervision standards while allowing requirements to reflect actual workplace risk.
- ✓ Increased capacity of electrical contractors, particularly small businesses, to employ and train apprentices – supporting workforce development.
- ✓ Reduced unnecessary pressure on businesses already experiencing difficulty accessing qualified electricians to undertake supervisory roles.