Draft Expectations for Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers

TASMANIA

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MASTER ELECTRICIANS AUSTRALIA

Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is a peak industry association representing electrical contractors across Australia, majority of which are small and medium sized businesses and has been supporting Australia's electrical businesses since 1937. We are 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 welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Tasmanian Government's Draft Expectations for Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers.

Data centre and AI infrastructure investment presents significant opportunities for Tasmania, including new investment, employment and opportunities for local businesses. However, the scale and speed of anticipated development will also create substantial demand for an electrical workforce that is already experiencing significant shortages.

The final Expectations should ensure proponents make a meaningful contribution to expanding the workforce and training capacity required to support their growth, while providing genuine opportunities for Tasmanian electrical contractors and SMEs to participate in these projects. This should be complemented by Tasmanian Government advocacy for national workforce measures where responsibility sits with the Australian Government.

Workforce Capacity

Australia currently employs 201,600 electricians[1], with previous forecasts indicating an additional 32,000–42,000 electricians would be required by 2030 and 85,000 by 2050[2]. More recent modelling indicates workforce demand will be even greater, with housing expected to require an additional 17,000 workers[3] and data centres a further

[1] Powering Skills Organisation "Data Dashboard" <https://poweringskills.com.au/data-dashboard/>

[2] Jobs and Skills Australia "The Clean Energy Generation Workforce needs for a net zero economy" *Australian Government* [3 October 2023], page 15 < The Clean Energy Generation | Jobs and Skills Australia>

[3] "High Load, Short Supply 2026 Targeted Workforce Update" Powering Skills Organisation [September 2026], at page 25 <https://poweringskills.com.au/portal/resources/2026-targeted-workforce-update/>

13,000[4], bringing estimated demand to around approximately 72,000 additional energy trades workers by 2030. Meeting projected workforce demand would require at least 22,000 electrical apprenticeship commencements annually[5] – a level Australia is currently materially short of achieving.

These statistics paint a stark picture of the workforce shortage being experienced across the industry and the contribution that data centres have towards this strain.

Training Levy

To help meet the workforce demands arising from rapid growth in data centres and AI infrastructure, MEA supports the need for training levies on major projects to build the pipeline of skilled workers in Australia. However, MEA notes the existing training levies in place in Tasmania and urges caution in duplication of programs. While it is imperative to ensure adequate training of skilled workers occurs, programs crossing over each other would not be ideal.

MEA would like to see training funds used for the engagement of as many first year apprentices as possible on data centre builds and collaboration between governments adn industry to consider the pipeline of training required for those apprentices to continue their training on other sites.

Apprenticeship Requirements

MEA also recommends that State Government's procurement framework be amended to ensure a minimum proportion of apprentices engaged on these projects are first-year apprentices.

This is important because members regularly report that major projects attract later-stage apprentices and recently qualified electrical workers, rather than investing in the recruitment and training of first- and second-year apprentices. This results in large projects competing for the same limited pool of skilled workers without making a

4 *Ibid*, page 41.
5 Ibid, at page 5.

sufficient contribution to growing the future workforce. Given the scale and resources of major data centre projects, they should play a meaningful role in developing new entrants and expanding the overall skills pipeline.

Skilled Migration

MEA has also advocated to the Federal Government that skilled migration should form part of the workforce response to growing data centre demand. Recognising that migration settings are a Commonwealth responsibility, the Tasmanian Government should advocate for migration pathways that support the additional workforce requirements generated by major data centre investment in the State.

For electrical work, migration pathways must continue to operate within applicable licensing, competency and safety requirements, supported by appropriate skills assessment, gap training and supervision arrangements.

Procurement

Local procurement requirements should be structured to provide genuine opportunities for Tasmanian SMEs, including electrical contractors, rather than opportunities being concentrated among large national or multinational contractors. SMEs play an important role not only in Tasmania's economy but in training and developing the electrical workforce. Procurement and workforce settings should therefore avoid creating circumstances where major data centre projects draw skilled workers and apprentices away from local contractors without providing corresponding opportunities for those businesses to participate in the projects or contributing to workforce growth.

Proponents should engage with relevant industry associations and local supplier networks early in project planning to identify capable Tasmanian businesses, communicate upcoming procurement opportunities and workforce requirements, and identify opportunities to build local business capability.

Conclusion

Data centre and AI infrastructure investment presents significant opportunities for Tasmania, but it will also place additional pressure on an already constrained electrical workforce. It is important that this growth contributes to expanding workforce capacity rather than simply competing for the existing pool of skilled workers.

MEA encourages the Tasmanian Government to ensure the final Expectations deliver meaningful investment in apprenticeships and training, support access to additional skilled workers, and provide genuine opportunities for Tasmanian electrical contractors and SMEs to participate in the growth of the sector. These measures will help ensure data centre investment delivers lasting benefits for Tasmania and contributes to building the workforce required to support future growth.