Feedback on Tasmania Draft Expectations for Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers

Prepared by NECA Education and Careers and NECA Tasmania

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1. Executive summary

NECA strongly supports responsible investment in data centres and AI infrastructure in Tasmania. The sector can create significant construction, employment and training opportunities. However, the draft Statement of Expectations does not yet treat workforce capacity with the same discipline applied to electricity, water and network capacity.

Tasmania and Australia already face a substantial shortage of electricians, technicians and related trades. Data centres will add demand at the same time as the stadium, housing, renewable energy, transmission and other critical infrastructure projects. Without explicit workforce requirements, major projects may draw experienced electricians and later stage apprentices from small and medium electrical contractors without increasing the overall supply of qualified workers.

NECA recommends that the final Statement requires major proponents to prepare and report against a project specific Electrical Workforce Development Plan. The plan should demonstrate net additional workforce growth, new apprenticeship commencements, retention and completion, mature-age pathways, local contractor participation, broad trade exposure and investment in proven training capacity. For applicable government funded projects, this should include a requirement for first year apprentices to comprise at least 5 per cent of the project workforce, supported by measures that enable employers to create and sustain those positions.

2. Key recommendations

2.1 - Recognise workforce as enabling infrastructure
Add electrical workforce capacity alongside electricity, water, telecommunications and other infrastructure considerations throughout the Statement.

2.2 - Require an Electrical Workforce Development Plan
Before approvals and project delivery, require major proponents to quantify workforce demand by occupation, project phase and year, identify local supply constraints and set measurable workforce-development commitments.

2.3 - Measure net apprenticeship increases
Distinguish new apprenticeship commencements from apprentices transferred from existing employers. Workforce commitments should increase the total pool rather than redistribute a constrained workforce.

2.4 - Prioritise completion as well as commencement
Require retention, progression and completion measures, supported by structured mentoring, pastoral support and quality training partnerships.

2.5 - Protect local training capacity
Require practical support for small and regional electrical contractors to retain and employ apprentices, including targeted incentives, and structure procurement so local contractors can participate. Adult

apprentice subsidies should also be considered to address the higher employment costs that can otherwise constrain mature-age pathways.

2.6 - Broaden recognised training partners
Explicitly include group training organisations, industry training providers and relevant registered training organisations, alongside TasTAFE and the University of Tasmania. Greater use of group training organisations would help align apprentice recruitment with Tasmania's infrastructure pipeline, coordinate rotations across employers and projects, and provide apprentices with the breadth of capabilities required for an unrestricted electrical licence that supports mobility across multiple sectors.

2.7 - Require transparent reporting
Publish non-sensitive workforce outcomes covering local employment, apprentice commencements, transfers, retention, completions, training investment and local contractor participation.

3. Why stronger workforce expectations are needed

- NECA notes that a recent Powering Skills Organisation report estimates Australia will need an additional 72,000 electricians, technicians and related tradespeople by 2030, compared with a previous forecast of 42,000 energy workers.
- Data centres will compete for electrical workers while Tasmania is also delivering the stadium, housing, renewable generation, transmission and other critical infrastructure.
- Small and medium electrical contractors undertake much of the recruitment and early training of apprentices. Losing second, third or fourth year apprentices after making this investment can reduce their capacity and willingness to recruit the next cohort.
- A narrow data centre placement may not expose an apprentice to the full breadth of industrial, construction, housing and renewable energy work needed for a well-rounded trade outcome.
- NECA advises that approximately 80-90 per cent of apprentices supported through its training model complete and qualify. NECA's model combines structured training, mentoring, employment and support throughout the apprenticeship. The latest NCVER figures put the national six year completion rate for electrician apprentices at 71.7%. This reinforces the importance of funding models with demonstrated completion outcomes, not only higher commencements.

4. Recommended amendments to the draft Statement

Draft section	Gap	Recommended change
Scope and principles	The draft treats workforce largely as a benefit, rather than a delivery constraint.	Add a workforce principle requiring proponents to grow local trade capacity and avoid merely shifting the existing workforce between projects and employers.
Expectation 1a **Jobs skills and innovation**	The commitment to apprentices and training is positive but broad and not measurable. It names the University of Tasmania and TasTAFE but omits group training organisations and industry training providers.	Require a project specific Electrical Workforce Development Plan; apply a 5 per cent first-year apprentice workforce requirement to applicable government-funded projects; and explicitly include group training organisations, industry training providers and relevant RTOs as delivery partners. Use these partnerships to align recruitment with Tasmania's infrastructure pipeline and coordinate broad trade exposure.

Expectation 1c **Supply chains**	Local procurement is encouraged, but the draft does not address whether package size, contracting terms or labour practices will exclude smaller electrical contractors.	Require an SME participation strategy, early publication of work packages, fair payment terms, workforce-development criteria in tenders and practical pathways for local subcontractors. Consider targeted incentives for small and regional employers that train apprentices, together with adult apprentice subsidies.
Expectation 2 **Early engagement**	Industry workforce organisations are not expressly identified among stakeholders.	Require early engagement with electrical industry bodies, employers, group training organisations, training providers and relevant workforce agencies before development applications are submitted.
Expectation 3 **Government engagement**	OCG coordination includes skills agencies but no workforce capacity assessment.	Make workforce demand, training capacity and cumulative project demand part of the OCG early-project assessment and cross-agency coordination.
Expectation 6 **Approval pathways**	Existing processes list physical infrastructure requirements but not workforce readiness.	For significant projects, require proponents to submit workforce demand forecasts and an Electrical Workforce Development Plan as part of coordinated project information, proportionate to project scale.
Expectation 7 **Transparency and reporting**	Employment reporting is encouraged but lacks defined indicators and could overstate benefits if transfers are counted as new opportunities.	Require reporting against agreed workforce indicators and separate new entrants from workers or apprentices recruited from existing Tasmanian employers.

5. Proposed wording for Expectation 1a

Insert the following after the existing paragraphs on apprentice, trainee, graduate and cadet opportunities:

> For significant projects, proponents are expected to prepare and implement a project specific Electrical Workforce Development Plan in consultation with industry, employers, group training organisations, registered training organisations and relevant government agencies. The plan should quantify workforce demand by occupation, project phase and year, assess local workforce and training capacity and set measurable commitments that increase the supply of skilled workers rather than simply transfer workers and apprentices from existing Tasmanian employers. For applicable government-funded projects, first year apprentices should comprise at least 5 per cent of the project workforce. Commitments should address new apprenticeship commencements, retention and completion, adult apprentice subsidies, targeted incentives for small and regional employers that train apprentices, mentoring and support, local contractor participation and investment in training capacity. The plan should also make greater use of group training organisations to align recruitment with Tasmania's infrastructure pipeline and coordinate rotations that give apprentices the breadth of capabilities required for an unrestricted electrical licence and mobility across multiple sectors.

6. Recommended workforce indicators

Indicator	Suggested measure
Workforce demand	Forecast and actual workforce by occupation, project phase and year, including peak electrical labour demand
Local employment	Number and proportion of workers, ordinarily residents of Tasmania, reported separately for construction and operations
Apprenticeship commencements	New apprenticeship commencements created through the project, separately identifying existing apprentices transferred from other employers
Retention and completion	Apprentice retention, progression and completion outcomes, with reasons for withdrawals where available
Training investment	Financial and in-kind investment in training delivery, facilities, mentoring and apprentice support
Trade breadth	How apprentices will receive planned exposure across the competencies and work environments required for a broad electrical trade outcome
Local contractor participation	Value and proportion of electrical work awarded to Tasmanian businesses, including small and medium contractors

7. Implementation considerations for Government

- Apply requirements proportionately, with stronger obligations for projects that create material electrical workforce demand.
- Assess cumulative demand across concurrent data centres, housing, energy and infrastructure projects rather than reviewing each proposal in isolation.
- Link Government facilitation and any non-financial project support to agreed workforce commitments and reporting milestones.
- Direct public and proponent investment toward training models and facilities with evidence of apprentice retention and completion.
- For applicable government-funded projects, require first year apprentices to comprise at least 5 per cent of the project workforce. Apply the requirement with safeguards so it drives genuine commencements rather than short term recruitment or transfers from existing employers. For other projects, use proportionate, project specific targets covering commencements, retention, completion and net workforce growth.
- Review workforce settings regularly with industry because labour demand and project sequencing can change quickly