



Submission to the Review of the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO)

January 2025

National Electrical and Communications Association

About NECA

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak body for Australia's electrical and communications sector, which employs 359,211 workers and turns over more than \$91bn annually.

NECA represents over 6,500 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.

NECA helps the industry operate businesses more effectively and represents member interests to all levels of government, regulators, and within 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 the industry is critical to all tradespeople, consumers, and the community.

NECA is integral to the next generation of electrical contractors.

Through its Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and Group Training Organisations (GTOs), it offers employment and skills development to some 4,800 apprentices nationally.

Its success is clear: proudly boasting 90% completion rates across its courses.

NECA helps attract entrants to the industry through holistic, high-quality, industry-relevant programs.

It proactively seeks diverse workforces, supporting female, indigenous and mature aged apprentices, and promoting career paths for school students and school leavers.

It also operates the industry wide NECA Annual Excellence Awards, which acknowledge and celebrate achievements and distinguished electrotechnology projects, and NECA's Apprentice Awards, recognising future industry leaders.

NECA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government's Treasury in response to call for submissions regarding priorities for the 2023-24 Budget.

NECA's submission is focused on the following key priorities:

- small business support
- unlocking infrastructure for job creation
- taxation and regulatory reform
- training for the future
- greater female participation in the sector.

Submission

Small business and family-owned enterprises (SMEs) are the lifeblood of Australia's economy and dominate the electrical and communications contracting industry.

Overwhelmingly the electro-tech sector is made up of businesses that employ fewer than 20 staff, and national trends show the number of small businesses across the country is increasing.

NECA's SME members now cite unfair contract and commercial terms along with labour shortages as an ongoing issue.

It is critical that recovery efforts are led by SMEs working in their local areas to rebuild local economies.

NECA acknowledges the critical role that the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) plays in supporting small and family businesses across Australia. ASBFEO's understanding of the unique challenges faced by small business owners and its ability to provide tailored advice, conduct research, and advocate for policy improvements is invaluable to the sector.

In addition to its core advocacy and dispute resolution functions, ASBFEO offers crucial resources that address broader challenges, such as access to mental health support and guidance through complex regulatory environments. These services reflect ASBFEO's holistic approach to ensuring the sustainability and success of small and family businesses that underpin Australia's economic prosperity, community wellbeing, and national identity.

NECA further commends the Ombudsman personally and his professional team's direct engagement with the construction and electrotechnology sectors, specifically his commitment to addressing the issues faced by small business contractors and subcontractors.

Through regular forums, submission requests access to office resources, and personal meetings, the Ombudsman has provided an invaluable platform to identify and explore sector-specific challenges. This level of accessibility and targeted focus has proven critical in ensuring that the unique needs of contractors in these industries are understood and addressed effectively.

We also appreciate ASBFEO's commitment to its guiding principles, which underpin its work and ensure that its services are delivered with integrity, respect, and purpose. These values resonate strongly with our membership, who value not just the outcomes of ASBFEO's work but also the collaborative and empathetic way it engages with stakeholders.

The personal and economic contributions made by Australia's small and family businesses cannot be overstated. They form the backbone of our communities, drive innovation, and create opportunities in every corner of the nation. ASBFEO's role in elevating these contributions and addressing the barriers they face is vital, and we fully support its ongoing efforts to enhance the operating environment for these businesses.



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