

Annual Report

2007/2008





ELECTRICAL WORKERS AND CONTRACTORS LICENSING BOARD

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The Honourable Chris Burns
Minister for Justice
GPO Box 3146
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Minister

In pursuance of Section 17A of the *Electrical Workers and Contractors Licensing Act*, I herewith provide a report into the operations of the Electrical Workers and Contractors Licensing Board for the year ending 30 June 2008.

The members and I look forward to another year and to the opportunity to further raise the profile and function of the Board. I trust this report meets with your approval.

Yours faithfully

Colin Freeman
Chairman
Electrical Workers and
Contractors Licensing Board

27 October 2008

ELECTRICAL WORKERS & CONTRACTORS LICENSING BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2008

INTRODUCTION:

The Northern Territory Electrical Workers and Contractors Licensing Board is a statutory authority established under the *Electrical Workers and Contractors Licensing Act*. It exercises the powers conferred upon it by this Act relating to the licensing of electrical workers and electrical contractors to enhance electrical safety.

The main objective of the Board is to ensure the safety of consumers, the general public, electrical workers and other workers.

This is achieved by:

- ensuring that electrical work is carried out by persons who have demonstrated their competence at both the issue and renewal of their electrical licences,
- ensuring that electrical workers and contractors working in the Northern Territory are properly licensed through a licensing and regulatory system that recognises local as well as equivalent licenses issued in other states and New Zealand, and
- investigating and conducting hearings into complaints relating to electrical work and taking disciplinary action where appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Determining the skills and knowledge required for licensing of electrical workers and electrical contractors, and ensuring those licence holders have the ability to carry out safe electrical work, is one of the Board's main objectives. To this end the Board continues to participate in the development of training packages and address issues with apprentice training and skills maintenance as they arise.

The dissemination of information, receiving and dealing with complaints from industry, the general public and NT WorkSafe Electrical Safety group also form a significant portion of the Board's activities.

In early October 2006, the Board's administrative personnel were moved with Electrical Safety staff from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, to the NT WorkSafe division of the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Throughout the year the Board has continued to make extensive use of NT WorkSafe's resources, in particular the services of the Electrical Safety group, to carry out investigations into complaints. Most of these investigations will result in disciplinary action being taken. The availability of NT WorkSafe's resources allows the Board to function without having to directly employ staff.

The Board has continued to maintain communication with industry and the general public over the past year by its use of:

- Monthly Board meetings
- Annual forum meetings in Alice Springs, Darwin, Gove, Tennant Creek and Katherine directly following Board meetings held in these centres, open to all interested parties but in particular to local electrical contractors and electrical workers to give out information and listen to their concerns
- MITAC meetings and working groups
- Addresses to trade training groups
- Frequent mail outs
- Territory Construction Association publications and forums
- Trade seminars
- NT WorkSafe's involvement in various functions

The Board continues its liaison with other government departments, especially the Electrical Safety unit and other related functional departments like the Power and Water Corporation, NT WorkSafe and the Mines group.

The Board has integrated itself within the electrical industry, interacting with agencies such as the Territory Construction Association, mining industry and the various training organizations throughout the Territory. Through the previously mentioned channels it has raised public and industry awareness of its activities. It continues to participate in introducing procedures to assist uniformity of licensing with other states and territories through consultation with the licensing agencies in those jurisdictions.

We are moving towards changes to the legislation the Board administers, the Electrical Workers and Contractors Act, and have been involved in developing the changes required by the National Competition Policy review. The Board looks forward to participating in the general review of the Act.

Special thanks to all the Board members and administrative staff for their contribution to the smooth operation of the Board.

COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD:

The Minister appoints the Members and Deputy Members to the Board under the provisions of the Electrical Workers and Contractors Act. These members are drawn from various representative groups within the electrical industry and have continued to make available their services for the benefit of the Northern Territory Government, and industry in general. The functions of the Board are set out under section 17C of the Act.

The membership of the Board during 2007/08 comprised:

Chairman:

Mr Colin Freeman

40 years experience in government/private/consulting employment. Fellow Institute of Engineers of Australia; past President of the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia, NT Branch representing Electrical Engineers.

Members:

Mr Stephen Gray

Electrical Course Coordinator/Instructor for Electrotechnology at Centralian College/Charles Darwin University in Alice Springs since 2002. Technician/Technical officer/Engineer with Overseas Telecommunications Commission for 15 years. Engineer with Jindalee project in Alice Springs 14 years (Appointed 26 April 2007). Member representing registered training organisations.

Mr Ken Kernich

30 years as an Electrical Contractor in the NT. Member of NECA, NT Chapter. Director of Major Industries Training Advisory Council. Chair of Electrical Industries Skills Council, Member of Apprentice Capstone Assessment Committee representing Territory Construction Association, Member representing electrical contractors on Electrical Licensing Board.

Mr Patrick Nolan

Principal Electrical Safety Officer, NT WorkSafe. 37 years experience in the electrical industry encompassing involvement in electrical contracting and government service. Northern Territory representative on various committees specific to the electrical industry. Member representing NT Government.

Mr Alan Paton

Northern Territory Organiser for the Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union. Chair/Director of Major Industries Training Advisory Council, Chair Electro-Tech and Utilities Training. Board member of NT Build. Member representing electrical workers.

Deputy Members

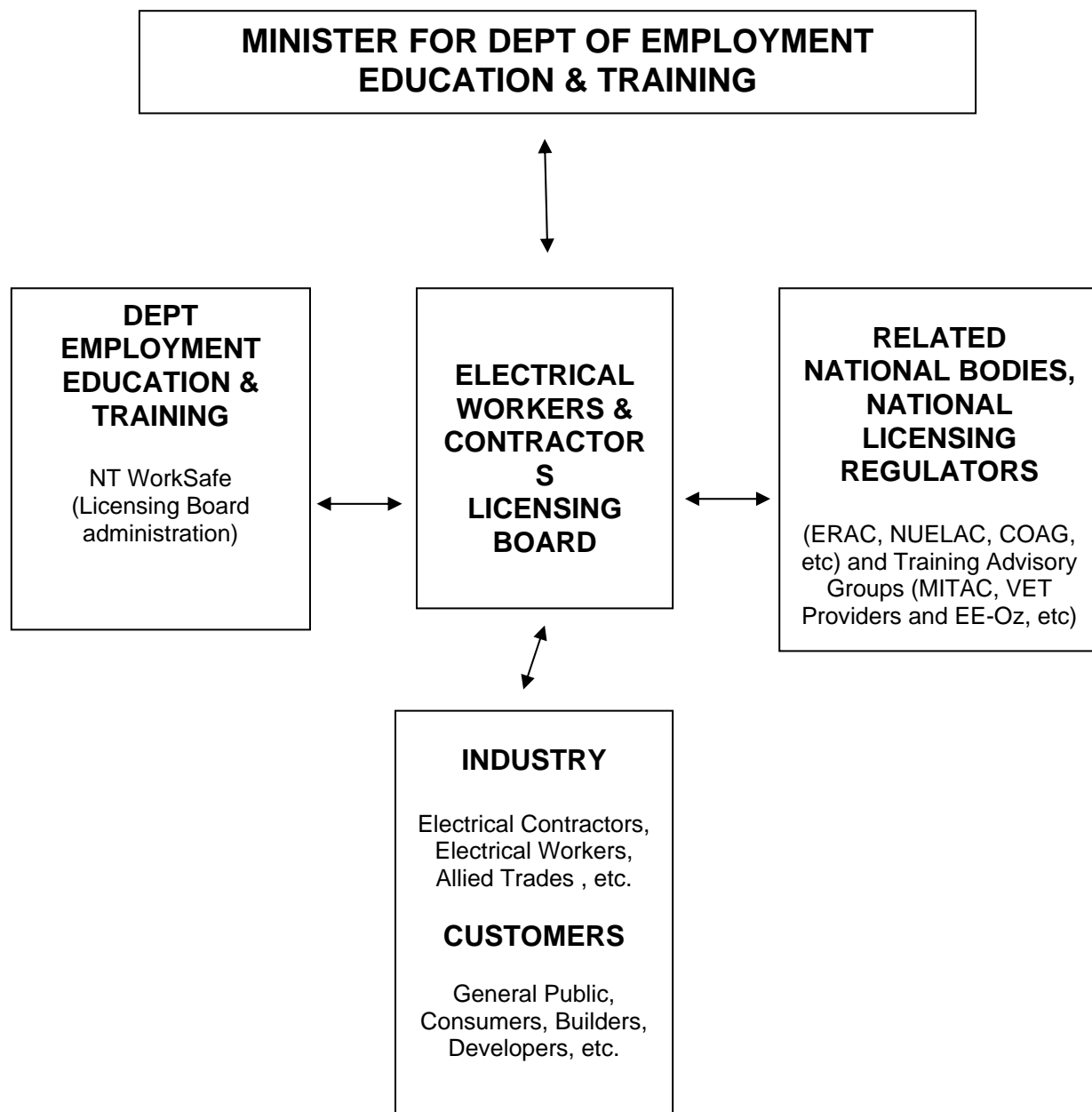
Mr Darryl Byerley

Works Coordinator Power and Water Authority, Alice Springs, Deputy Member representing electrical workers for 22 years. (Resigned on 16 October 2007 due to retirement effective from 1 November 2007).

Mr Geoffrey Cowie

33 years as an Electrical Contractor in the NT principally in the field of Power Generation and Control Systems. Eight years as an Electrical Contractor in WA. Committee member of NECA, NT Chapter since its formation. Deputy Member representing electrical contractors.

The diagram below shows the Board's context and the environment in which it operates.



MEETINGS

The Board convened for general meetings on ten (10) occasions during the last year and on another occasion outside normal hours to facilitate a disciplinary hearing. The Board maintains an open door policy and invites any electrical worker, contractor, or employer, who wishes to attend a meeting to clarify or discuss any matter of concern or the Board's administration relating to the Act. In an effort to maintain this policy and to assist the industry, the Board periodically meets in regional centres outside of Darwin.

The Board met in Alice Springs in August 2007, in Katherine in November 2007 and in Nhulunbuy in April 2008. These meetings were followed by open forums where those involved in the electrical industry were sent an invitation to attend and discuss their views and concerns with the Board. On all occasions there was a healthy representation of industry and discussions covered a range of topics such as skills maintenance, trade training, apprentice supervision electrical safety, review of the Wiring Rules and restricted licensing.

COMMUNICATIONS TO THE ELECTRICAL TRADES

The Board endeavours to maintain a flow of information to the electrical industry through:

- meetings
- mail outs
- open forums
- Board's Newsletter "Closed Circuit"
- Board's website, www.electricallicensing.nt.gov.au
- Territory Business Centres
- Territory Construction Association

NATIONAL LIAISON

The Board maintains a working relationship with licensing bodies throughout Australia and New Zealand and participates in mutual recognition of licenses issued by those organisations.

It is also represented on the Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council, (ERAC) a national body that sets the standards for minimum qualifications and requirements for licensing with a view to achieving national uniformity.

Board staff participate in a national forum of licensing managers working on uniformity of licensing management practices. The forum meets on a bi-annual basis.

Board members and staff have been involved in the COAG Skills Recognition Taskforce for harmonisation of trade licences and are now involved in the COAG National Licensing System consultation process.

WEB SITE

The Board's website has proved to be a popular source of information for the electrical industry and community in general, averaging 11,000 hits per month.

The site contains information for the electrical industry such as the Board's information bulletins, application forms, frequently asked questions, links to legislation and other information of benefit to both industry and consumers.

The website can be accessed at www.electricallicensing.nt.gov.au.

PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

Through its membership of the Major Industries Training Advisory Council (MITAC) the Board is represented at Northern Territory regional workshops when reviewing national electrotechnology training packages for the electrical industry.

The Board was consulted and contributed to the revision of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) resulting in the AQTF 2007 currently in use.

The Board continues to monitor the training package for apprentice electricians and was involved in the process of introduction of the new training package to be introduced in January 2009. It also supported the introduction of profiling as a means of recording apprentice work experience which was adopted to address concerns regarding levels of competence being achieved. Addressing issues in regards to maintaining the scope and depth of on-the-job training required for the issue of a licence is an ongoing activity.

The maintenance of skills is viewed by all jurisdictions as most desirable for electrical workers to keep abreast of the latest trends and requirements to create and maintain safe, compliant electrical installations. In supporting this view, the Board has a skills maintenance requirement that necessitates electrical workers, at the time of renewal of their licence, to evidence that they have maintained their skills and knowledge.

Some people have had reservations about attending the course and indeed, why they had to, but not one person of the now several hundred who have attended, have had a negative comment, either in writing or verbally, about the course content or presentation. The course has been held in many places across the Territory, including Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, major mines and throughout the Darwin and Palmerston area.

With the current version of the Wiring Rules released in November 2007, the skills maintenance course ensures that people who attend are made aware of these changes when they happen.

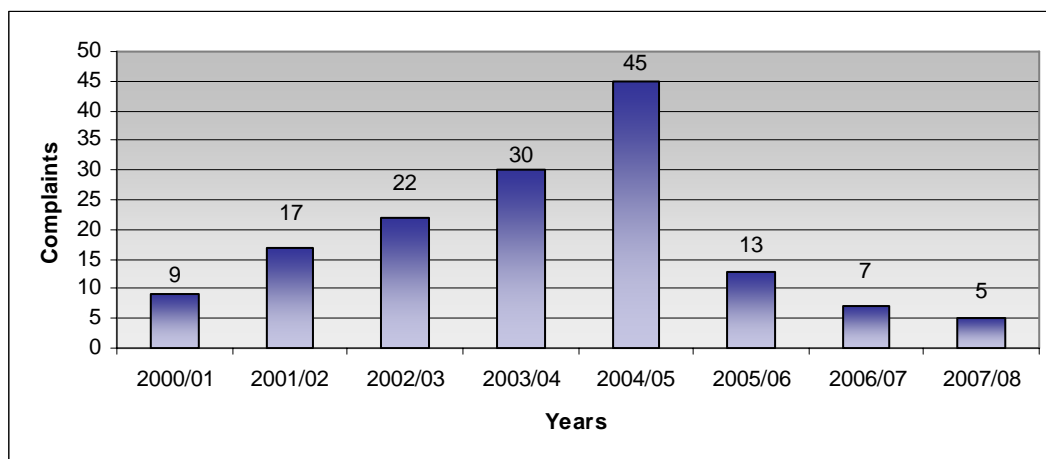
STAFF

The Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) provide administrative support to the Board. Two full-time staff members, the Executive Officer and the Registrar, manage the day-to-day operation of the Board with additional administrative assistance as and when required.

INVESTIGATIONS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Auditing of electrical workers and contractors by the Electrical Safety Unit of NT WorkSafe and education of consumers are the main contributors to investigations of breaches being forwarded for consideration by the Board.

During the financial year 2007-2008 the Board received five written complaints concerning non-compliant or unlicensed work. Active education and advice through Board staff and Electrical Safety has impacted on a decrease in the number of complaints received.



The Electrical Workers and Contractors Act enables the Board to take the following action where a breach of legislation has been established:

- cancel the licence;
- suspend the licence for such period as it thinks fit;
- vary the conditions of the licence including an endorsement relating to the trade classification or grade of the licence;
- fine the holder an amount not exceeding \$100.00;
- admonish the holder and endorse his licence to that effect; or
- do any combination of the above.

The Board prefers to have first time offenders of less serious breaches participate in retraining to

upgrade their knowledge and skills and stay in the workforce rather than suspend or cancel licences.

As well, where it is evident there are misconceptions or common failings across a section of the electrical industry (such as the requirement to register apprentices separately with the Board), then special efforts are made to educate employers and electrical workers rather than penalise them in the first instance.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

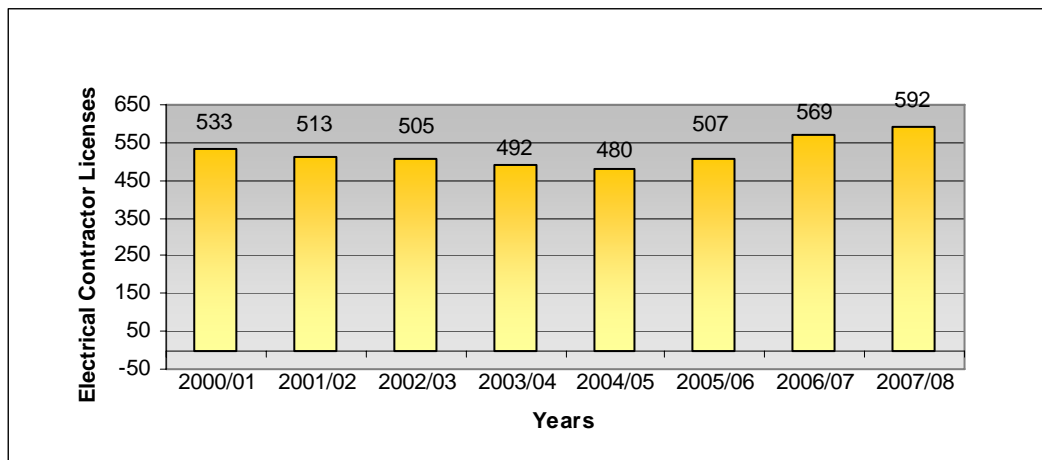
The department administers the Board's budget and finances. The Board's Financial Statement forms a part of the department's report.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Electrical Contractor Licences

Contractor licences are annual licences and had a common expiry date of 30 June each year. Amendment to the *Electrical Workers and Contractors Act*, assented to on 24 June 2008, changed this common expiry date to anniversary date of approval.

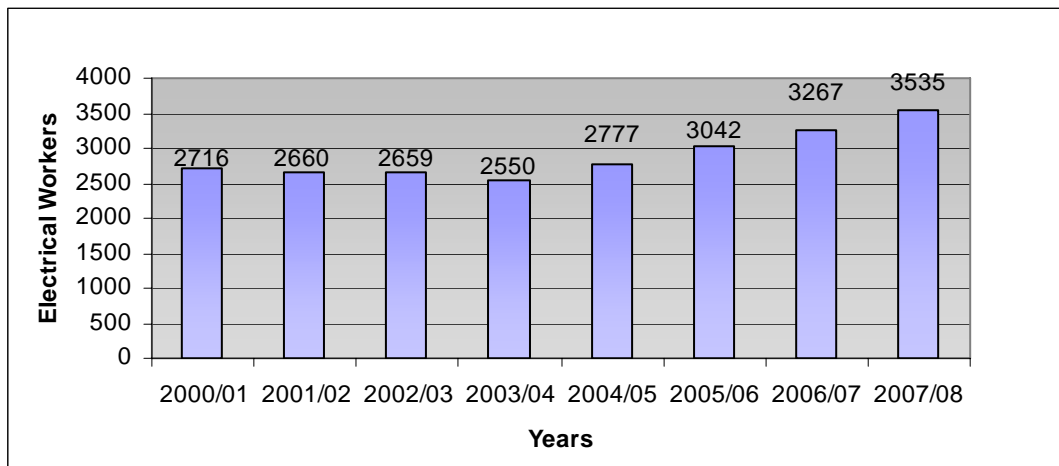
The total number of electrical contractor licences issued as at 30 June 2008 was 592. The increase in numbers is believed to be as a result of a more mobile workforce due to high demand, and the stringent requirement of the electrical industry to comply with the Electricity Reform Act and the Electrical Workers and Contractors Act.



Electrical Worker Licences

A Grade electrical worker licences are issued in the categories of electrical mechanic, electrical fitter, electrical linesman and electrical cable jointer. These licences are issued to persons who have completed training in any of the areas listed above or who hold licences from other states/territories or New Zealand and are eligible to be issued with the equivalent licence under mutual recognition. The total number of licences on issue as at 30 June 2008 was 3535.

B Grade electrical worker licences are issued in the categories of electrical mechanic and electrical fitter. This category of licence requires the holder to work under the supervision of the holder of an A Grade licence. In keeping with national policy, the holders of B Grade licences are encouraged by the Board to upgrade to A Grade licences. The total numbers of B grade licences on issue, as at 30 June 2008 were 12.



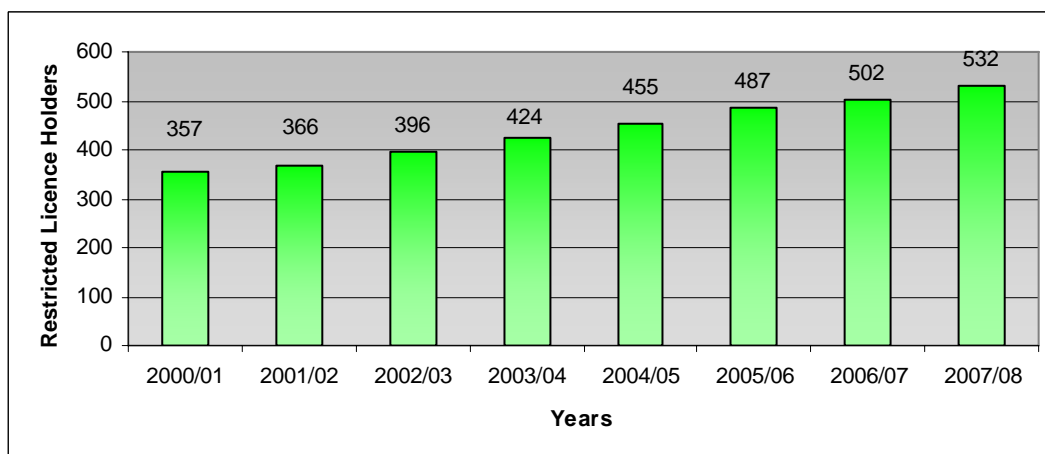
Variations in the above graph usually follow the trends in the construction industry and mining industry.

R Grade Electrical Worker Licences (restricted licences)

The development and introduction of a new national training package for restricted electrical licences ensures consistent training requirements for the 11 categories of restricted licences. The categories cater for those workers who need to carry out a minor amount of electrical work to enable them to carry out their main trade. Examples are refrigeration mechanics, appliance repairers, plumbing and gas trades and areas of the mining industry.

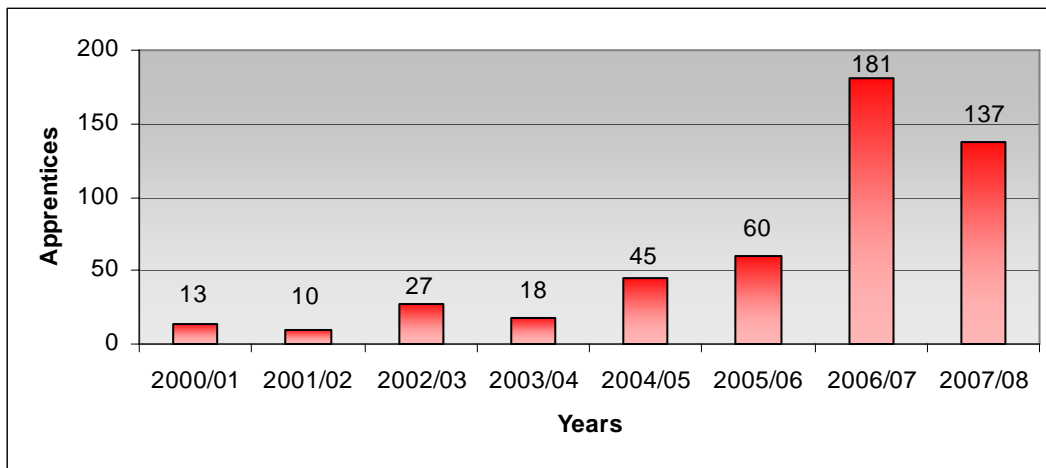
A comprehensive set of guidelines included with the application form have been developed to assist industry to determine if their operation can be enhanced by having their workers trained and licensed.

The total number of restricted licences on issue at 30 June 2008 was 532. The majority of restricted licences are held by workers in the refrigeration and air-conditioning trade.



Apprentices

Apprentices to trades that require a person to hold an electrical worker licence are required to be registered with the Board. In addition to mainstream electricians, these include apprentices in the major service industries of refrigeration and air-conditioning, electronics and appliance service trades.



During this twelve month period a total of 137 apprentices were registered. The increased registrations in the previous year was in response to the Board's newly implemented (and ongoing) program of education and follow-up of all electrical apprentices and their employers registered with DEET, who had failed to register with the Board as required, at the start of their training.

Conclusion

The Board has integrated itself within the electrical industry, interacting with agencies such as the Territory Construction Association, mining industry and the various training organisations throughout the Territory. Through the previously-mentioned channels, it has raised public and industry awareness of its activities. The Board continues to participate in introducing procedures to assist uniformity of licensing with other states and territories through consultation with the licensing agencies in those jurisdictions.

The Board looks forward to another year of positive contribution to the electrical industry.