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First-year apprentices kick off studies in South Coast's first dedicated electrical trade initiative



By [Megan McClelland](#)
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 Electrical apprentices from Batemans Bay to Eden have started their training with the support of Repurposing for Resilience Eurobodalla and the National Electrical and Communications Association.

Up until July this year, electrical apprentices from the Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Shire had to travel for hours to Canberra, Sydney or Nowra to study their trade.

Now, with the support of grassroots not-for-profit organisation Repurposing for Resilience (RfR) Eurobodalla and the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), 16 first-year



Lisa Cornthwaite from Repurposing for Resilience is a mature-aged electrical apprentice who had to travel frequently to Nowra TAFE and camp in her car for up to three nights in a row to complete her studies. She said the demand for an apprenticeship placement in Nowra was so high that she struggled to gain a spot.

"There's no accommodation and the \$50 allowance you get doesn't get you a hotel room," she said.

Ms Cornthwaite approached NECA, a body that represents 6000 contractors and 100,000 workers, in the hopes of giving electrical apprentices a chance to study without the burden of leaving behind commitments and travelling for hours.

"We approached TAFE but they told us there wasn't enough demand [on the South Coast].

"Once we got on board with NECA, our first information session was full of apprentices, employers, local schools and apprenticeship network providers. There is massive demand here."

General Manager of Training and Apprenticeships at NECA Tom Emeleus said the organisation works to recruit and train the next generation of tradespeople.

"It's madness that apprentices haven't had training available on the South Coast," he said, "There isn't the capacity to build an entire college here in one go, but we're going to get there".

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environmental group is aimed to foster the growth of a sustainable local, educated workforce: "We expect this to grow in future years beyond first-year apprentices".



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Eurobodalla councillor Alison Worthington, mayor Mathew Hatcher and Bega MP Dr Michael Holland met with NECA representatives at Kyla Hall in Tuross Head on August 5, where the 16 apprentices have been meeting each Tuesday since July as part of their studies.

The hall is a temporary location for apprentices to study while NECA finds a permanent study solution on the South Coast.

Ms Cornthwaite said when the idea was pieced together to offer training in the region, it was originally offered to apprentices living in the Eurobodalla.

"Then we realised that people living in the Bega Valley Shire would have to travel even further for study."

She said many in the cohort are school leavers from Bega, Cobargo, Narooma and Batemans Bay.

"We don't all have the luxury of leaving our commitments to study regionally, so this has been a real win."

meet the construction demands predicted over the next ten years.

"It was clear the community wanted to have the capacity [to study] down here so we don't have students driving to Nowra and getting an allowance to sleep in their car - that's not a constructive way to learn.

"This is all about getting people into the industry and giving them the quality training to start their career."

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