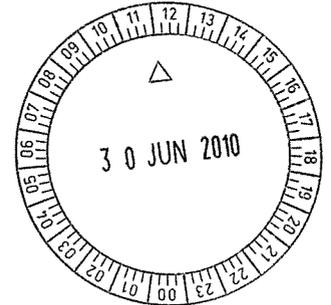




**PUBLIC**

PO Box 141  
Cannington WA 6987  
1 Fitzroy Street  
Queens Park  
Telephone: 08 9458 8088  
Facsimile 08 9350 5594  
ABN 96 780 118 406

Hon Max Trenorden MLC  
Chairman  
Legislative Council Public Administration Standing Committee  
Parliament House  
Harvest Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Mr Trenorden

Thank you for providing DBR Electrical Contractors (DBR) with the opportunity to make a submission to the *Electrical Transmission and Distribution Inquiry* being conducted by your Committee.

### **1. DBR Electrical Contractors**

DBR Electrical Contractors is a Western Australian business that has been operating in the electrical industry for more than 40 years. It currently employs 20 electrical tradesman and 20 apprentices, supported by a team of 10 clerical and administrative staff.

The business primarily operates in the residential housing industry and services six major builders, the majority of which have DBR as their sole contractor for all electrical work.

### **2. The Submission**

The issues raised in this submission relate to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference number seven.

The purpose of the submission is to draw the Committees attention to the concerns which DBR and other major electrical contractors have about the operation of *EnergySafety*, in conjunction with the other agencies involved with the regulation of the state's electrical industry.

The views expressed here reflect the position of many electrical contractors who have extensive experience working in the industry in Western Australia and are responsible for a large proportion of the electrical contracting carried out in this state.

### **3. Functions and Practices of the Safety Inspectors**

#### *3.1 Overlap and Duplication*

We recognise the important role safety inspectors have to play in helping to ensure the maintenance of appropriate safety standards. However, we are concerned about the relatively recent development where

the operations of the *EnergySafety* inspectors and inspectors from other agencies such as WorkSafe and Western Power increasingly overlap and duplicate responsibilities.

As illustrated overleaf, all three agencies are involved in the investigation of electrical incidents and often operate in the same environment. This situation creates an unnecessary added cost to the taxpayer and an extra burden for the industry without, we would contend, achieving any significant gain in safety standards or practices.

<b>Western Power</b>	<b>Division of Energy Safety</b>	<b>WorkSafe</b>
Check licenses	Issue licences	
Enforce legislation	Create legislation	Enforce legislation
Investigate electrical incidents	Investigate electrical incidents	Investigate electrical incidents
Conduct audits	Conduct audits	

We believe the current mode of operation needs to be reviewed with the aim of rationalising the roles and responsibilities and achieving a more cost effective outcome.

### 3.2 Punitive Focus

We believe EnergySafety has an evident punitive focus with regards to electrical incidents which creates a culture of fear rather than education.

The industry accepts there are circumstances where prosecution of a contractor is both necessary and desirable in order to ensure the level of safety Western Australians expect. It is acknowledged that such a situation arises where warnings are persistently ignored, particularly if a major breach is involved.

However, the growing tendency by EnergySafety to make prosecution the first course of action in managing non-compliant electrical incidents is of great concern.

Such an approach is inconsistent with what we understand to be the policy of EnergySafety of employing a four-step process (involving verbal warning, written warning, issue of infringement notice and prosecution), prosecution only being used as the final measure.

In order to preserve confidence in the regulatory authorities it seems an increased effort needs to be made to ensure supervising practice accurately reflects the stated policy. The over-emphasis on punitive measures undermines the potential for greater cooperation and collaborative effort by all involved in the industry to achieve safer outcomes.

## 4. Greater Emphasis on Education

### 4.1 Standard of Apprentices

It is our view that much can be gained towards achieving the safety objectives through a greater emphasis on education; a view mirrored in the EnergySafety 2010-11 Business Plan.

This includes action to improve the standard of apprentices and the level of quality assurance that ensures licensed tradespersons have the necessary skills to meet the industry requirements. Regrettably, as things stand this is not always the case and all too often individual shortcomings can have an adverse impact on the tradesperson's employer, even to the point of prosecution.

### 4.2 Public Advertising Campaigns

It is critical that Western Australia maintains an extensive public advertising campaign promoting electrical safety. This aspect of Victoria's electrical safety education program has been credited with being the major factor in the State consistently achieving low fatality rates when compared to other states and the national average.

It is therefore very concerning to see (in the EnergySafety 2010-11 Business Plan) that the TV advertising campaigns in Western Australia are to be reduced to being run every two years. This effectively means reducing by 50 per cent what is recognised as the most effective means of educating the public and workers in the energy industry.

We argue that the frequency of intensive public advertising campaigns in WA needs to be increased rather than reduced and the proposed course of action should be reviewed.

## **5. Establishment of Electrical Contractors Reference Group**

Under the current arrangements we believe there is inadequate opportunity for electrical contractors to interact constructively with the regulatory authorities. There is little opportunity for electrical contractors to provide advice on changes to legislation and non compliant electrical work. Decisions on these matters are at present often being made without input from people with extensive practical experience within the industry.

This situation could be addressed through the establishment of an electrical contractor's reference group.

A representative group of this kind would create a means for members to have input into the development of industry policy and practices as well as acting as a sounding board for new ideas. More generally, it would help ensure the authorities benefited from the contractors extensive practical experience and current first-hand knowledge of how safety measures are working in practice.

## **6. Conclusion**

The comments made in this submission are motivated by an interest in seeing our electrical industry achieve higher safety standards and become more cost-effective in delivering services to the public.

It would be greatly appreciated if the committee could examine the issues raised in this submission and give consideration to adopting these suggestions that have been put forward. Should the committee so determine, I will be happy to appear before the Inquiry to provide any additional comments that may be seen to be helpful.

Yours sincerely



Peter Rowson  
**Managing Director**

29 June 2010