

The long drawn out dispute between the Electrical and Building Bargaining Councils in the East and South Cape is finally over.

The jurisdiction dispute, over the activities of electrical contractors in 17 Magisterial districts in the East / South Cape, has been settled on 21 April 2009 in favour of the Electrical Bargaining Council.

A formal publication in the Government Gazette on 8 May 2009 granted jurisdiction to the Electrical Bargaining over all electrical work carried out in the Republic of South Africa.

The disputes arose after the Electrical Bargaining Council extended its jurisdiction to the Eastern Cape in 1995. The Building Council objected to this, and ever since this date contended that it held registration in respect of electrical fitting and wiring in buildings.

As a result, electrical contractors operating in these magisterial districts had a choice of registering with either NBCEI or BIBC.

This was not a healthy situation, as the purpose of a bargaining council is to create a forum for organised labour and employers in a particular sector to regulate affairs in that sector. It was clearly not the case in the East / South Cape. Instead of creating order, the dual jurisdiction has served only to fragment the Electrical Industry in the East / South Cape.

NEDLAC, in March 2009, demarcated the activities of employers engaged in the Electrical Industry in South Africa, with the exception of an area within 20 km of the Post Office of Kimberley, in favour of the Electrical Bargaining Council, bringing to an end almost 15 years of arguments, disputes, legal action and finally a CCMA arbitration hearing in Port Elizabeth during 2008.

Huge challenges lie ahead:-

- ❖ Employers in remote parts of the country, who had up to now not been part of organised industry will have to be drafted into the mainstream of the Electrical Industry.
- ❖ Delicate discussions with trade unions and other stakeholders in the Industry will have to take place in order to get "buy in" from all the role players.
- ❖ In the East and South Cape areas in particular, the conditions of employment, benefit structure and compensation levels of workers currently outside the scope of the Electrical Bargaining Council need to be aligned / adjusted to level the playing field for all electrical contractors who complete for work in these areas.

Now more than ever, level headed leaders and captains of Industry must join forces to make the new system work.

The time for fighting is over. The Industry is bigger than the interests of individuals or groups of people who are there simply for their own benefit and interests.

A lot of hard work lies ahead. The ECA extends a hand of friendship and co-operation to the other role players in the country to develop and grow our Industry in order to take its rightful place in the economy of our country.

A new era has dawned for the Electrical Industry. Now is the time to grasp the opportunity.

Kind regards

LM Bowles  
Regional Director  
East / South Cape