

PE Branch Chairman's Address – End of Year 2026

Oct 29, 2026 · @Michael Straton

Opening

Good evening, everyone. Thanks for coming.

Let me start with a word you don't often hear in a chairman's report: colonoscopy. I had one yesterday. I've had one every few years since I turned 40, because my father died of colon cancer at 49. That's a risk, and risks need managing. The test is the tool for managing it.

We all understand risk. As business owners we put it on the line every day. We risk not having enough clients to pay the bills. We risk something going wrong on site, and when it does, we have to fix it, and there are always consequences. So why do we do it?

We do it for our families. That's where it starts. We build these businesses to give our families a good income, and I intend to be there for mine. I don't plan on repeating the story of dying young and not be able to see my children and grandchildren grow.

As our businesses grow, our employees become part of that family too, and we look out for them. We make sure they get paid. We make sure their social benefits get paid. When there's an issue, we're the ones who step in and sort it out. That's what responsible contractors do, that's who is in this room.

Everything gets tested

A colonoscopy is just a test. Is everything working? Any polyps? Anything that could cause trouble down the line?

Our industry runs on tests. Compliance testing: a set of rules, obligatory, a bit confusing at times, but there. That's one good reason to stay in an organisation like this. We learn from each other how to apply the rules and how to get better outcomes for our customers.

This region has had its own test around the dismissal of Pieter du Toit. I've heard it whispered that the matter may go to the Labour Court for review. As I understand it, that would be him against the CCMA, with the ECA probably joining as an interested party. I'm no lawyer and I don't know how that process runs, but if it goes ahead I fear it will bring more turmoil to this region, and to this branch in particular. My personal view, and it is only

my view, is that instead of chasing a Labour Court decision, Pieter would be better off fixing the actual cause of the dispute and getting himself rehabilitated, so that he becomes eligible for re-enrolment on the roll of attorneys.

I've also heard the rumours of a new members' organisation. If you feel that's the right thing for you to do and put your weight behind, that's your call. But please don't stand with one foot in each camp. Choose a lane and stay in it, and choose it out of conviction, for the right reasons: to influence where you can, not to disrupt where others still want to contribute.

So how is the patient? The PE scan

Let's look at our own scan, starting with last year, 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

We welcomed 11 new memberships: five ordinary members, four special service members and two service associates. We lost 26. Twelve of those were struck off on 19 June for outstanding subs. The other 14 left for the usual reasons. Seven memberships went because the business closed its doors. Three resigned. One contractor moved overseas, and one contractor with three memberships transferred back to the Free State. Net result: down 15.

Now this year, 1 July to today. Six new members have joined: four sole traders and two ordinary members. Welcome to QD Plumbing Services & Projects, Agrivolt, Verisol Energy, JRT Electrical Construction, Kwikelec and Afrika Projects. Five have left: one distributor, one service associate, one sole trader who retired, and two special service members who joined in May and were gone by September. Net result: up one.

That leaves us at 175 members today: 133 ordinary, 19 service associates, 10 special service, 9 distributors and wholesalers, 3 sole traders and 1 ordinary service. By my count we started last July at around 189, so we're down about 14 over sixteen months. Not a crisis, but maybe indicative of the current economic climate.

Training and events

Electric Fence in July: 19 delegates, 14 from member companies and five non-members. IE Prep Part 1 in February: five delegates, four members and one non-member. The Labour Course in June: nine, all from member companies. That is 33 people through the door, 27 of them from our members.

Our recent golf day here in PE raised around R60,000 for charity. Thank you to everyone who played, sponsored and gave. The region also held an additional golf day down in George, so we've had good company and good causes across the region this year.

Well done to Fiona for spearheading all the training and events so well.

Zooming out: the region

Our region is three branches: South Cape (George, Mossel Bay and surrounds), Port Elizabeth and surrounds, and the Border area, East London and surrounds.

Together we are 366 members. PE is the biggest at 175, just under half. East London has 105 and South Cape has 86.

By category, the region has 269 ordinary members, 26 service associates, 24 special service members, 18 affiliates, 15 distributors and wholesalers, 12 sole traders and 2 ordinary service members.

That is 366 contractors, and we are one of six regions in the ECA(SA). We rank fifth on that list, so we can't expect to be heard on our own. We get our voice heard by working hand in hand with the other regions, and that is exactly what I would like us to do.

Category	PE	East London	South Cape	Region
Ordinary	133	69	67	269
Service associate	19	4	3	26
Special service	10	9	5	24
Affiliate	0	18	0	18
Associate distributor / wholesaler	9	5	1	15
Sole trader	3	0	9	12
Ordinary service	1	0	1	2
Total	175	105	86	366

The region's books

Labour levies came in at about R1.84 million, up from R1.65 million the year before. That is an increase of 11.3%. Subscriptions were about R712,000, up from R590,000, an increase of 20.7%. Total income for the region was R3.29 million, up 14.3%. Levies and subscriptions together are roughly three-quarters of that income.

Line	Year to 30 Jun 2026	Year to 30 Jun 2025	Increase (R)	Increase (%)
Labour levies	R1 836 233	R1 650 452	R185 781	11.3%
Subscriptions	R712 002	R589 920	R122 082	20.7%

Line	Year to 30 Jun 2026	Year to 30 Jun 2025	Increase (R)	Increase (%)
Total income	R3 294 096	R2 882 175	R411 921	14.3%

Why I'm still here

My colonoscopy and the ECA are linked through my father's death. Company structures changed at that stage and I went out on my own. That's where my journey with the ECA started.

I've been a member for about 28 years and I've thrown my weight behind the organisation. Being in an employers' organisation is hard, because you're dealing with employers who all have their own opinions. The only way to influence change is to get involved. It's pointless standing outside shouting and complaining if you're not prepared to get your hands dirty and change things from the inside.

I was added to the branch committee very quickly and saw a lot that an ordinary member never sees. Then the Eastern Cape representative of the day agreed to a main agreement that would make wages the same across the country over two years. That was the point where I had to get involved. I got myself put forward as the regional representative on the National Labour Committee and made it my business to get that decision reversed.

The older members will remember we actually had strikes in the industry over this. We convinced enough people to stay the course, and we kept wages where they were, with cost-of-living increases. There were 19 different wage rates across the country. We're now working towards three, with a difference between the strong metro areas and the weaker, more rural ones.

That didn't happen because someone shouted from the sidelines. It happened because people turned up.

Final thoughts

As electrical contractors we can make our own plan. We can provide alternative power for ourselves, and we can sort out water and pumping so our homes and businesses keep going when the system lets us down. But when the municipal poop pipes block up and stop doing what they should, there's very little we can do about the sewage, and then we're all in it together.

So here is my call, and I'll admit it's a desperate plea: on 4 November, go and vote. Influence everyone in your immediate and extended family to go and vote. After all, you are paying your employees for the public holiday so that they can vote. Make your vote

count. It doesn't matter who you vote for, but exercise your vote as a South African who is involved and wants to see things improve.

Thanks also to our Regional Director, Fiona Knell, and her PA, Wilmarie Smith, who work tirelessly to keep things going in the office and in our new training centre.

And in case anyone was wondering, my colonoscopy was clear.

Thank you for a hard year, and for turning up. Have a safe, restful festive season, and let's come back strong in the new year.