



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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Hansard 31 May 2000

### **TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (5 p.m.): It is my great pleasure to support the Training and Employment Bill, particularly as this Bill goes a long way towards reinvigorating the TAFE system. I must say that I have had a long association with what was known as the Cairns College of TAFE. Early in 1979—not long after I arrived in Cairns at the end of 1978—I obtained a position teaching part time as well as counselling part time at the Cairns College of TAFE.

I have been pleased to maintain my connections with the TAFE up there through various changes that have taken place over these past 20 years. It is now called the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE. I must say that the truth is that in the months prior to the Beattie Government's election I had never in their history seen the staff of the TAFE as debilitated and dispirited as they were at that time. They were indeed reeling from lots of changes and lots of pressures, some of which were necessary pressures to change but some of which were ongoing uncertainties. Additionally, they were feeling very undervalued by Government at the time, as they were very aware of the previous Government's clear favouritism towards a private sector vocational training system. Of course, I have seen considerable improvements in the years since we have been in Government, but I know that this Bill will be well welcomed by very many of the staff at the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

The Beattie Government is committed to TAFE Queensland. That is the first, clearest and most important message that we wish to send. The Beattie Government is committed to ensuring its viability in a competitive and rapidly changing vocational education and training market. The new Bill underpins that commitment by providing a statutory framework for the TAFE institute structure and its institute councils. It recognises TAFE Queensland as the major and dominant public provider of vocational education and training in Queensland.

The Beattie Government's support of TAFE Queensland acknowledges the immense contribution it makes to regional centres and cities across the State. The TAFE Queensland network of 16 institutes currently provides public sector delivery of vocational education and training programs in over 90 industry areas to about 226,000 students annually. The quality, diversity and customisation of TAFE's training programs provide invaluable skills development for thousands of Queenslanders.

When the Beattie Government came to power, this valuable asset was on the verge of crisis following the rapid expansion of the competitive training market. The implementation of competitive reforms was undertaken at a faster rate in Queensland than in any other State. The escalation in competitive funding had left TAFE floundering without the necessary time or resources to adjust to such a dramatic change. The Beattie Government acted quickly to deal with the situation by producing a 10-point plan to safeguard TAFE in Queensland. The plan's first point made a firm and unequivocal commitment to the maintenance of TAFE Queensland in public hands. This was accompanied by a freeze of competitive funding at January 1998 levels for three years—still at a level more than that in any other State—to allow institutes to adjust and to place TAFE on a firm financial footing.

Our objective was and still is to see TAFE equipped to compete in both the public and private training markets. Accordingly, we moved immediately towards greater flexibility and autonomy by devolving a range of functions to institutes, including financial and human resource allocations. It will be no surprise to honourable members of this House that this was much appreciated in areas such as

Cairns, where it is believed that the particular needs of far-north Queensland are better served by devolution to the local level.

A new body, the board of TAFE Queensland, made up of institute directors was established to provide consultation, coordination and cooperation amongst institutes. The board was given responsibility for matters such as industrial relations, marketing and international business, product development and technology. A task force headed by Kim Bannikoff, a former senior executive of the Australian National Training Authority, was established to undertake a review of TAFE operations. The two key recommendations of that review were that TAFE institutes be re-established in Queensland as key instruments of Government policy in vocational education and training and that institutes be given greater autonomy. In retrospect, those two recommendations were obvious, and yet they clearly needed endorsement by this Government and action to entrench them in the very operations of the institutes.

The report also highlighted the need for TAFE Queensland institutes to adjust to the pressure of change to ensure their long-term viability in the training market. Bannikoff's recommendations formed the basis of a vision statement and constitution for TAFE Queensland, which the Minister launched last July. That vision statement reflects the Government's commitment to preserve TAFE Queensland as more than just another provider. The Bill further affirms this commitment by providing statutory recognition of TAFE institutes in Queensland.

Outlined in the vision is a unique model for TAFE's structure that allows for the maximum level of institute flexibility and autonomy while preserving the strength of TAFE as an individual entity. It also focuses strongly on the relationship between TAFE institutes and the communities they service, and demands that institutes be publicly accountable and responsive at local, regional, State, national and international levels.

I must say that three years ago when I mixed with small business leaders as well as with industry groups in Cairns it was not at all uncommon to hear complaints about the local TAFE institute and its lack of responsiveness to industry needs. I have heard no such complaints in the past 12 months, and that is a credit—certainly in part—to the Beattie Government and the strong leadership and importance we have shown for TAFE institutes as well as, of course, a credit to the staff of the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

To support the transition to more autonomous and accountable institutes, the vision also incorporated the reconstitution of institute councils. These councils represent the community by providing information on local needs and play an important role in contributing to the business direction of TAFE institutes. Through these community focus councils, TAFE institutes are able to respond to the needs of local industries and employers and can use that on-the-ground knowledge to provide the right training for the right people in Queensland communities. The Bill clearly defines the functions of the councils and acknowledges their critical role in supporting high quality vocational education and training in this State.

Already the benefits of the approach encapsulated in the vision are emerging. Eighteen months after the Bannikoff review, TAFE Queensland is in a much stronger position. Through the Government's commitment to implementing the 10-point plan to safeguard TAFE in Queensland and its freeze on contestable funding, the financial stability of TAFE institutes continues to improve. With this improved financial stability, TAFE institutes are able to offer more effective industry, business and community driven training. Through community representation on TAFE councils, institutes are more responsive than ever to the communities in which they operate. New markets are being identified and opportunities for growth into those markets are being developed.

Significant progress has been made towards achieving a target of 60% of TAFE staff dedicated to training delivery by 2005. Better business practices are being introduced at the institutes and staff morale is improving as TAFE Queensland enjoys success in the State's competitive training market. There is no doubt that TAFE is an invaluable asset to Queensland. Private providers of training in Cairns were also in some consternation at the time of the Beattie Government's election campaign and then election to Government. Their concern was that the competitive market had moved too fast for sensible management even within the private sector and that there was poor control of some fly-by-night providers who were not managing the quality and the standards for vocational education that should be provided.

They also expressed their concern that the Beattie Labor Government may excessively favour public education and therefore favour the institutes at their expense. It is to the credit of the Minister that that has not happened. While we have strengthened the public sector TAFE system of Queensland, at the same time the private sector has been given the chance to stabilise and to compete in a market that they think is fair and balanced.

The globalisation of the marketplace is important for Cairns and, I dare say, other centres in Queensland. The pace and the complexity of technological change demands that TAFE Queensland

be equipped with a competitive edge. Through the reforms introduced by this Government and supported in the Training and Employment Bill, TAFE Queensland is now well placed to meet those challenges and to provide Queenslanders with high-quality vocational education and training for the 21st century.

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