




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 15 July 2015

QUEENSLAND TRAINING ASSETS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY REPEAL BILL

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (8.07 pm): I rise tonight to endorse the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority Repeal Bill 2015. The committee has been unable to reach a majority decision on the passage of the bill being passed. However, the committee has reached a unanimous acceptance of the report, as we strive to do in this committee and on every occasion thus far we have been in a position to reach that decision.

The committee received evidence from some 60 individuals and organisations who made submissions to the committee. As chair of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who lodged written submissions on this bill. I also thank the Department of Education and Training for its advice, all witnesses who appeared, the secretariat and committee members.

This Palaszczuk Labor government was elected on commitments—commitments to jobs, commitments to training Queenslanders to fill those jobs and commitments to not sell our assets. Today, consistent with being elected, this Palaszczuk Labor government will again deliver on our election commitments. One of the significant commitments made by this government is our plan to regain TAFE Queensland's reputation as the premier public training provider of VET in Queensland. Unlike those opposite, we know public providers play a vital role in the delivery of VET in Queensland. Likewise, private partnerships with business needs are crucial in ensuring delivery of quality training now and into the future. Evidence delivered by TAFE Queensland at the hearing explained the importance of this arrangement.

I now turn to some of the evidence provided both through submissions and at the hearing. I point to what I deem to be the most credible evidence at the hearing provided by Ms Schmidt from TAFE Queensland. She expressed concerns about restrictions to industry training partnerships as a result of QTAMA. At the hearing she stated—

... the further development of our business is absolutely dependent on our ability to have sustainable partnerships into the future, whether that be with other private training providers, other public training providers or, in fact, the industry itself. The complexity of the arrangement with QTAMA made it very difficult to continue some of those partnerships, and I saw some evidence of that in some of the other submissions. Also, our experience was that tri-party arrangements where the landowner was involved sometimes diluted the ability and the potency of that—

Later in the hearing in answer to a question about whether those partnerships were at risk, Ms Schmidt responded—

I think all of those partnerships have been put at risk. Some of them we may have lost.

Furthermore, in TAFE Queensland's submission to the committee, they provided evidence on three partnered arrangements with Santos, Komatsu and the Queensland Gas Company. The coal seam gas partnership, which was established in 2012, supported Santos's diversification into the coal seam gas sector. This partnership also built on Santos's longstanding relationship with TAFE Queensland. This partnership additionally provided a contribution from Santos of \$1 million worth of

specialised equipment for TAFE Queensland, establishing a purpose built training facility at its Acacia Ridge training centre. Also, mutually beneficial outcomes were there for TAFE Queensland staff being mentored by Santos industry experts, with Santos gaining extensive knowledge in Australian quality training framework processes and compliance requirements. TAFE Queensland also gained a unique insight into the safety practices of Santos and aligned its safety procedures accordingly, building on its already excellent safety record.

I recall that Ms Schmidt raised concerns of workplace health and safety over the complexity of the arrangements of QTAMA and TAFE Queensland over the responsibilities of their staff in this area. So what does this mean for Queensland? This arrangement and the dedicated partnership provides for high-quality training, with an expectation of delivering 40,000 jobs in regional Queensland communities, which is now considered to be the benchmark of CSG training.

Like Santos, Komatsu Australia benefitted from partnerships providing two dedicated classrooms and one workshop bay to train apprentices, with Komatsu donating high-value equipment to enable TAFE Queensland to deliver training for Komatsu's diesel-fitting apprentices. In addition, TAFE Queensland was able to design training in relation to the specific Komatsu equipment provided. However, this machinery was also available for use by other apprentices undertaking their training through TAFE Queensland on the basis of an agreement reached between the parties. The donated equipment is provided from current industry stock, ensuring apprentices have access to the latest heavy automotive technologies. Under the QTAMA model, this industry donated equipment was transferred to QTAMA on 1 July 2014, and TAFE Queensland was restricted from renting out classrooms within state owned training facilities to other parties. So we start seeing by this process and this evidence the difficulties of having QTAMA and TAFE Queensland in parallel and the effect QTAMA has on important partnerships with industries.

While researching this bill, it became apparent to me of a deliberate conflict of interest of Ms Claire Field, the former chief executive officer of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. ACPET is the national industry association for independent providers of post-compulsory education and training for Australian and international students. At the same time as Ms Field was CEO of ACPET she was selected by the previous LNP government as an appointed member to the Newman government's Queensland Skills and Training Task Force—a task force set up to review and fundamentally alter operations and outcomes of Queensland's vocational education and training sector. I suggest there was a conflict of interest, with direct competition of a private training organisation against the Queensland government VET provider.

Other views that were expressed at the hearing came from the Queensland Teachers' Union. We heard the member for Everton talk about unions earlier. The union indicated in their evidence—

... the effect of QTAMA was to strip TAFE institutes of their assets, and to open up TAFE campuses for use by private for-profit providers. Additionally, some Queensland TAFE campuses were sold in part or in total. The abandonment or significant downsizing by TAFE of provision in certain courses and in certain geographical areas was significant.

The committee noted that, despite some campuses having been sold or leased by the previous state LNP government, whilst QTAMA existed no campuses were sold, though some were earmarked for sale. I contend that many were earmarked for sale under this QTAMA model.

This government has committed \$34.5 million over the next three years through our Rescuing TAFE policy to regain TAFE Queensland's reputation as the premier provider of VET in this state as well as internationally. The Rescuing TAFE package includes many significant commitments over the next three years, including creating 100 new full-time equivalent teaching and support staff positions, investing \$5 million to establish a fully independent training ombudsman, providing \$4 million for training in emerging innovative industries as designated by Jobs Queensland and the repeal of the QTAMA Act 2014.

I, like many in the Palaszczuk Labor government, was fortunate enough to hear from concerned educators and students from TAFE Queensland in the lead-up to the election campaign. We listened because that is what good governments do. That is what Labor does. We listened to those insidious stories, where the LNP government stood by and allowed educators to be terminated in the TAFE system, losing years of trained staff. Additionally, we heard from students about increases in course fees which put education beyond the reach of those most needy. I listened to TAFE students arriving from their train journey at the Grovely train platform. Students informed me of the price rises in course fees at the Grovely TAFE. The Grovely TAFE is on the boundary of the seats of Ferny Grove and Everton, but no doubt the member for Everton was not listening to the same stories I was told. Young students told me of the increase in course fees and the impost of those fees. They told me about the

alteration of some of those courses. These were young students doing the agriculture course at the Grovely TAFE.

QTAMA was created by those opposite to enable the sell-off of Queensland's training assets to the highest bidder and to remove the access of TAFE to its own premises and its own equipment and to lease it out directly to the competitors of TAFE. This legislation was introduced with no consideration by the former government for the long-term survival of TAFE Queensland and no thought to the Queenslanders who rely on TAFE for training or the businesses who benefit from a well-trained workforce. Once these assets are sold, once there are long-term leases in place, there is no going back. This means that any future growth by TAFE Queensland would be restricted by a lack of facilities. Those opposite claim they are committed to the survival of the public provider in Queensland, yet they created QTAMA as a body to flog off our public training assets and give private registered training organisations the inside running. We opposed this act when it was introduced last year, and we made it very clear that we would repeal it as soon as the opportunity arose. The arrogance that those opposite showed in government continues to exist today. The lack of listening to the community continues. Repealing this legislation will save the government over \$430,000 per year in wages paid to the board whose sole purpose was to sell off public training assets.

The former government had an agenda to sell our training assets, privatise VET delivery in Queensland and force TAFE Queensland out of the training market. Basically, the former LNP government, with the advent of QTAMA, set up TAFE Queensland to fail. The Palaszczuk Labor government has a very different agenda. We want TAFE Queensland to continue to deliver quality vocational education and training far into the future because Queenslanders rightly believe that we need a strong public training provider of VET. It benefits individuals by helping them attain the skills and training they need to get work. It supports families, strengthens communities and is vital to give us a productive and skilled workforce we need to grow and prosper into the future. We will enable this through our Rescuing TAFE package, of which the repeal of the QTAMA Act is just the first step. I commend the bill to the House.