




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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QUEENSLAND TRAINING ASSETS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY REPEAL BILL

 **Mr RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (8.19 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority Repeal Bill 2015.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr RYAN: Already the member for Lockyer is interjecting. Maybe if he actually listened, he would learn something. Maybe he should go to TAFE; he might learn something there as well.

As the explanatory notes indicate, this repeal bill forms part of the Queensland Labor government's Rescuing TAFE election commitment to return control of Queensland's training assets to the relevant government department and to restore TAFE Queensland as the state's premier provider of vocational education and training. This repeal bill will reinstate the priority position of TAFE Queensland to access state-owned assets and ensure that TAFE Queensland continues to play a leading role in the vocational education and training sector. This repeal bill is a necessary component of the Queensland Labor government's commitment to reverse the ideologically driven plans of the previous LNP government to gut TAFE Queensland and the public provision of vocational education and training in Queensland. As the explanatory notes also indicate, part of this Labor government's Rescuing TAFE election commitment will be achieved through this repeal bill by, among other things, repealing the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority Act and abolishing the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority, also known as QTAMA, and transferring the assets, liabilities and records of QTAMA to the Department of Education and Training.

As mentioned, this repeal bill forms part of the Queensland Labor government's Rescuing TAFE election commitment. Given the way that the previous LNP government was treating TAFE Queensland, there is little doubt that TAFE was certainly in need of rescuing. As the parliamentary committee heard from some witnesses during its inquiry regarding this repeal bill and as the Attorney-General indicated in her introduction speech, the introduction of QTAMA was just another part of the LNP's ideological attack on TAFE as the public provider of vocational education and training in Queensland. As the Attorney-General also stated in her introductory speech, under the previous government's approach to vocational education and training, there were public concerns about the attack on TAFE teachers, the running down of our campuses, the cutting of subsidies, the increasing fees and the systematic attack on our TAFE system in this state.

There were many competing views presented to the committee in reviewing this repeal bill and I encourage all members of this House and the community to view those submissions. However, for the purposes of this contribution, I will refer only to some of those submissions that were made before the committee. Prior to the 2015 Queensland state election, I heard many concerns from the community about how the previous LNP government was treating TAFE and how the previous LNP government was dealing with public training assets, and it is very important to put these concerns in the context of this repeal bill. The reason I say this is because the previous LNP government's motivations for

introducing QTAMA must be seen in the context of the LNP's broader attack on TAFE as a public vocational education and training provider. Members of this House will no doubt recall news reporting under the previous LNP government that some TAFE campuses were to be closed and sold off. With these plans and in the context of what had also happened, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the previous LNP government wanted to increase privatisation of the provision of vocational education and training at the expense of TAFE and at the expense of the principle that vocational education and training should be publicly available like it is for primary schools, secondary schools and universities. In fact, everything that the previous government did was geared towards increasing privatisation in the VET sector.

To be publicly available, it is essential that course fees be affordable, that facilities be appropriately located for Queenslanders living all over this state, be it in rural or remote areas, and that there be appropriate staffing levels in those facilities. As stated in TAFE Queensland's submission to the committee, TAFE Queensland is the state's most experienced provider of vocational education and training, with over 130 years of experience in delivering training and managing the state's portfolio of training assets. Unfortunately, that history appears to have counted for nothing under the previous LNP government and obviously continues to count for nothing under this current LNP opposition. TAFE Queensland's submission to the committee highlights the full extent of the previous LNP government's so-called five-year VET action plan. According to that submission, this action plan included: the creation of QTAMA to achieve the objectives of providing access to public training facilities on a commercial basis and to improve utilisation rates by managing public infrastructure, again on a commercial basis, including the disposal of assets among other things; transferring the public assets previously managed and occupied by TAFE Queensland to QTAMA, including the land, buildings, equipment, training material, teaching aids and other assets of TAFE Queensland; introducing 100 per cent contestability for government subsidised training, thereby putting additional pressures on the courses offered by TAFE Queensland and the fees associated with those courses; deregulating those course fees, thereby allowing vocational education and training providers to increase fees; and, among other things, introducing a new investment framework with varying levels of government subsidy for a lower number of subsidised training courses.

In its submission to the committee, the Queensland Teachers' Union suggested that the combined impact of the decisions made by the previous LNP government contributed to a significant reduction in the number of students enrolled in TAFE and a significant increase in course fees. It is in this context that we can see that all of these actions of the previous LNP government, including the introduction of QTAMA and the transfer of all of TAFE's assets to QTAMA, are connected. As the Queensland Teachers' Union President, Kevin Bates, said in the *Brisbane Times* on 7 September 2012, TAFE being the public provider of technical and further education meant that there were unique costs associated which have to be factored into a rationalisation. He stated—

"It's not just the physical facility that is a concern for us, it's also the other unique responsibilities that TAFE has—providing libraries, student counselling services, there's a whole range of support services that TAFEs provide that private providers don't ...

"Selling TAFE assets without factoring that into the equation is not going to be helpful for Queensland where there's already a skills shortage and our economic prosperity is going to be determined by how well we can respond to that skills shortage."

Notwithstanding the above, a further critical concern with the QTAMA model is that from 1 July 2016 TAFE would be required to pay full commercial rates to occupy QTAMA facilities. In a contestability framework, such a requirement is arguably geared towards making those facilities available to private providers at the expense of TAFE. The committee heard at its public hearing that examples of this had already occurred at the Toowoomba and South Bank campuses, where TAFE Queensland was forced to make space available for private providers. Of additional concern to me is the effect that the QTAMA model may have had on existing and future partnerships between TAFE Queensland and industry. At the public hearing, the committee heard that partnerships between Santos, Komatsu and Queensland Gas Company, for instance, had been put at risk by the introduction of the QTAMA model and, in fact, may have been lost. If we are to believe that there should be a public provider of vocational education and training in Queensland, then in my view the position of that public provider, TAFE Queensland, should be given some weight.

In its submission to the committee, TAFE Queensland made the following comments about the QTAMA model, among other things: that the QTAMA model restricts industry training partnerships; that QTAMA's proposed introduction of full commercial rates for regional facilities from 1 July 2016 will have long-term implications for regional, rural and remote training delivery; that the QTAMA model creates a disincentive for training providers to invest in training infrastructure due to the lack of long-term ownership or tenure; and that the model has not met its intended purpose with only a limited number of additional leases secured with private operators.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Attorney, the committee secretariat, all of the submitters, the department and other committee members for their respective contributions to this debate.

The Queensland Labor government is a consultative government. Unlike the LNP, this government is not about dividing and conquering. This is a truly syncretic government bringing Queenslanders together and working for a better Queensland. We continue that work today by reinstating the priority position of TAFE Queensland to access state-owned assets and to ensure that TAFE Queensland continues to play a leading role in the vocational education and training sector. TAFE needed rescuing from the LNP, and this week with this repeal bill and a great Labor state budget we saved TAFE. I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.