




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 29 October 2015

JOBS QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (12.30 pm), in reply: I rise to thank all honourable members for their contribution to this debate on the Jobs Queensland Bill 2015 and for the consideration given to the bill by the Education, Tourism and Small Business Committee. This bill is part of the Palaszczuk government's broader plan to make Queensland's vocational education and training sector the strongest and most productive in Australia. As noted in the report of the Education, Tourism and Small Business Committee, all submitters supported the establishment of Jobs Queensland and they were generally supportive of its functions. Some submissions also commented on the expected benefits for the Queensland economy and business.

Jobs Queensland will identify the skills and training needs across all industries to inform this government's significant investment in the vocational education and training sector. The independent advice and reports from Jobs Queensland will help inform priorities for state investment in skills, training and workforce planning and inform the development of strategies and programs to respond to these priorities. In this way, it will enhance the fit between skills and future jobs and help support economic growth to ensure that skills are developed in areas most needed by industry in our local communities.

I will now address some of the matters that were raised by honourable members during the course of the debate. A number of the members of the opposition suggested that this body has unnecessarily replaced the Ministerial Industry Commission. Key differences between Jobs Queensland and the former Ministerial Industry Commission include that Jobs Queensland is being established under legislation so that it has a firm basis for its independence, which protects its ability to give objective advice on the skills needs of industry. Secondly, it is more responsive, because it will report to me regularly throughout the year as matters arise that are important to the skills needs of our economy. Further, the Ministerial Industry Commission was not an independent body, as the chair of that body was the then acting minister. Finally, Jobs Queensland has a defined role and is resourced to enable industry leadership of workforce planning. This ensures that industry has the capacity to identify where workforce planning should be undertaken.

The opposition has also focused on how long it has taken the government to establish Jobs Queensland. That is because we believe in true independence. Jobs Queensland's self-determination has been ensured through legislation so that it operates completely independently of government. This is because we have gone through a consultative committee process, where we had 11 submissions from a broad range of stakeholders, all of which supported the establishment of Jobs Queensland. The Palaszczuk government has taken its time with this bill to ensure that we get it right. We have developed a model that is independent, responsive, flexible and, as noted by stakeholders who submitted feedback during the committee inquiry process, meets the needs of a broad cross-section of our economy and our trading partners.

The opposition members have also asked about the funding for Jobs Queensland. The shadow minister made reference to the fact that, in his view, it was unacceptable not to detail the breakdown of that funding, including board fees. The government has allocated up to \$10 million per year over the next four years for Jobs Queensland. This amount includes board fees, which will be determined in accordance with the Queensland government's remuneration of part-time chairs and members of Queensland government bodies and Governor-in-Council. This will be only a small component of this allocation to go towards the Jobs Queensland membership. Other aspects of the funding will go towards the program funding, which is likely to be the biggest component of the funding allocation. This includes contracting research services, industry engagement and workforce planning, direct staffing costs for the Jobs Queensland secretariat and the provision of operating support for Jobs Queensland provided by the Department of Education and Training.

I can allay the fears of those opposite that there will be substantial fees afforded to the members of the boards of Jobs Queensland. Can I say that it will be in stark contrast to the board fees that were allocated to QTAMA aboard members, which was a \$75,000 annual fee to the chair and \$40,000 per annum to each board member. So if they want to question fees, I think they need to look at their own backyard and the sorts of money that they allocated. I remind the members of this House that the total cost of the QTAMA board, the audit finance and risk committee that they set up, and the CEO of QTAMA was \$677,779 just in the 2014-15 financial year. So I can assure the members opposite that our fees will be considerably less when it comes to Jobs Queensland.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Grace): Order! Member for Nanango, that is unparliamentary. I ask that you withdraw.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mrs D'ATH: Members opposite have questioned the independence of the entity. The bill ensures the independence of Jobs Queensland by providing limited ministerial powers. At clauses 22 and 23, the bill provides that I will be able to influence the work undertaken by Jobs Queensland, including by making a request or providing a written direction with which Jobs Queensland must comply. For example, I could ask Jobs Queensland for advice on a particular topic to help inform government policy. I know that the Minister for Tourism is very keen to see Jobs Queensland doing work in that particular area to ensure that we have the workforce that is necessary for the growth in tourism in the future.

I will also be able to issue Jobs Queensland with a written statement, called a statement of expectations, about my expectations for the performance of Jobs Queensland of its functions. However, importantly, clause 23(3) of the bill expressly provides that I may not give a direction about the content of any advice given to me by Jobs Queensland. Also, for transparency the bill at clause 21 requires Jobs Queensland to complete an annual report outlining how it has discharged its functions during the financial year and the activities that it has undertaken. I must table a copy of this report in parliament within 14 days of receiving it.

Although I will not be required to comply with the advice of the new entity, its advice and reports will be one key input to help me inform priorities for state investment in skills training and workforce planning and will inform the development of strategies and programs to respond to those priorities. In terms of exercising its statutory functions and developing its advice to government, Jobs Queensland is completely independent.

Establishing Jobs Queensland was one of our key election commitments—to establish an independent entity to provide industry led advice on skills and workforce development and planning. Jobs Queensland is established under legislation to ensure that it has a firm basis for its independence. The new entity will have a clear focus on genuine industry engagement, research activities and providing strategic advice on skills and workforce development and planning. Importantly, it will be specifically tasked and resourced to work with other bodies to advise and support workforce planning—a key difference from previous bodies. This is a critical initiative allowing the state to better target our training programs and skill investment towards the current and future skill needs of our economy. I commend the bill to the House.