



Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TRAINING OMBUDSMAN) AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (4.32 pm): I rise to speak to the Further Education and Training (Training Ombudsman) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. If there is a bureaucracy to be found, this Labor government will find it. If there is a way to waste taxpayers' money, this Labor government will find it. If people wonder why we have a debt of \$76 billion, getting closer to \$80 billion, for the answer they need go no further than the initiative this minister has brought to the House tonight. This initiative will cost \$5 million over three years—\$5 million that will be poured down the drain because there is absolutely no need whatsoever for a training ombudsman. For this reason, the opposition will be opposing the bill.

We need to go through the history of the Training Ombudsman to actually understand where we have got to today and why the Labor Party is bringing this bill to the House. The previous Labor government established a training ombudsman which was aimed at providing an independent office for resolving complaints pertaining to apprenticeships and traineeships. This was at a time when the state had jurisdiction and full responsibility for the regulation of the VET sector. Then in 2009 the former Queensland government commissioned a wideranging independent review of state government boards, committees and statutory authorities. The Brokering Balance report, known as the Weller review, assessed 459 organisations to establish which organisations were still necessary and which could be abolished. The report recommended dismantling the office of the training ombudsman in Queensland as it was seen as being unnecessary red tape and regulation, but the previous Labor government ignored that report.

Then major changes occurred with regard to the jurisdiction of the VET sector. In 2012 the former federal Labor government undertook reforms of the vocational education and training sector including the establishment of a national VET regulator responsible for the regulation of registered training organisations, known as the Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA. Following the establishment of ASQA, responsibility for the registration and regulation of RTOs was of course transferred to the federal government. Therefore, a training ombudsman was no longer relevant as the position had no control of issues outside of their jurisdiction. So the previous LNP government ceased the training ombudsman in 2012 as it was considered a duplication of service that was already provided through many agencies including ASQA and the Department of Education and Training.

This bill claims to form a single point of contact for complaints about the vocational education and training sector. The role of the ombudsman will include receiving complaints about the VET sector, helping people make complaints to or refer complaints to another entity, giving complainants information or advice, monitoring the outcome of complaints, undertaking reviews and research and making recommendations to the minister about the VET sector. I will come back to those roles shortly.

The Training Ombudsman is about adding red tape and additional cost to the VET sector. There are already independent bodies capable of dealing with complaints: the Office of Fair Trading, the Queensland Ombudsman, the Overseas Students Ombudsman, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commissioner, Fair Work Australia, QCAT, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and, of course, ASQA itself.

The Training Ombudsman that is being proposed by the minister will attempt to deal with complaints that fall outside its jurisdiction. The ombudsman will have no power to make binding decisions in relation to the registration or regulation of training organisations. To enforce any decisions the ombudsman will have to refer complaints to the relevant organisations for investigation and possible action. The ombudsman will essentially act as a complaints management and referral agency at the cost of \$5 million over three years.

I return to the bill to look at the functions of the Training Ombudsman. If colleagues have this bill in front of them, I recommend that they have a look at it because it is something to behold. The Training Ombudsman has the following functions: to receive complaints—and the bill talks about what types of complaints they might be; to help people in making complaints; to refer complaints to a referral entity; to give information or advice to complainants; and to monitor the outcome of complaints. This is nothing at all about resolving these complaints. This bill and the objectives of the ombudsman are vague, nebulous, bureaucratic and a total waste of money.

This is a Clayton's ombudsman—the ombudsman you have when you are not having an ombudsman. The government has a responsibility to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent responsibly. The department has reported that 25 complaints were made to the ombudsman between 14 September and 4 December. I am not a great mathematician, but that rate of complaints—

A government member: We know that!

Mr MANDER: I entirely admit that. I could count to six; that was about it during football. Given the rate of complaint—that is, 25 complaints in that period of time—that means that each complaint made to the Training Ombudsman will cost at least \$15,000 each. Is that good value for money? Is that good value for taxpayers' money? I think not. The establishment of a Training Ombudsman is totally unnecessary, a complete duplication of services already offered by many other agencies and an absolute total waste of taxpayers' money. That is why the opposition will be opposing the bill.