



## NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

### Vocational Education and Training Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 19 October 2005.

#### Second Reading

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT** (Marrickville—Minister for Education and Training) [10.03 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

As this is the first time I will speak in this House, I ask the indulgence of the House to make some comments on my recent election as the member for Marrickville before I turn to the Vocational Education and Training Bill 2005. I wish to place on the record my gratitude to the people of Marrickville for electing me to be their representative in the Legislative Assembly. The electorate of Marrickville is enormously diverse—36 per cent of the population was born overseas; there is a significant Aboriginal population; it is home to a large gay and lesbian community; and the median personal income is considerably below the New South Wales average. It is this diversity that makes Marrickville such a compelling place to live, and an honour to represent. The electorate of Marrickville has been my home for the past 16 years and in that time I have seen tremendous change in the area.

I am the eighth Labor member for Marrickville to be elected. The majority of people in Marrickville recognise that only a Labor Government will provide the benefits and improvements that they and their families depend on. Other political parties claim they will deliver on our tradition of social justice and equity, but the people of Marrickville cannot afford the luxury of voting for those who promise the world but are incapable of delivering anything but empty rhetoric. I recognise that I have been elected on trust. The electorate wants to see improvements in public transport and health. They want to live in a sustainable community where tolerance is fostered and diversity valued. I will work as hard as I can to continue to build on the achievements of my predecessor, Andrew Refshauge.

Nothing demonstrates more clearly the importance of Labor Governments than the current industrial relations initiatives of the Federal Government. This is one of the greatest attacks on the conditions and quality of life of working people in our nation's history. In 1998, when I delivered my first speech in the other place, I despaired at the ideologically driven approach of the Howard Government, and I still do. Now, as then, I support an approach to industrial relations that promotes change through consultation and co-operation, with the resultant gains fairly distributed and a proper role for the Industrial Relations Commission as the umpire. The New South Wales Government is opposed to these changes and will continue to campaign against them in the interests of the New South Wales community.

I do not intend today to observe the usual form of a member's first speech: I had that opportunity in the other place. I enjoyed my time as a member of the other place. The Legislative Council is often maligned, and yet its composition means that greater debate and negotiation occur on legislation than in most parliamentary chambers. I thank both the members of the Legislative Council and the staff for the courtesy, support and good humour that they have shown me in the time I was a member. I am particularly pleased to see that the Hon. Penny Sharpe has been sworn in to fill the vacancy caused by my resignation. She will make an outstanding contribution to public life in New South Wales.

I could not have been successful in the by-election without the efforts and support of my campaign team and the wonderful Australian Labor Party [ALP] members and supporters who make the Labor Party so effective at the grassroots level. To achieve a swing to the Government on primary votes was a tribute to the Labor campaign and an endorsement of the new Premier, Morris Iemma. I wish to thank my campaign team, in particular my campaign director Verity Firth, who did an outstanding job in running a very tough campaign in a short space of time. I thank all the ALP members and supporters who worked so hard—and while naming individuals is always fraught, I must mention the contribution of Jamie Lovell, Geoff Taylor, Cheryl Baume, Sue Dahl, Bob Stone, Jeff Singleton, Emanuel Tsardoulis, Tim Ayres, Councillors Barry Cotter, Penny Sharpe, Sam Iskander and Rae Owen, Mark Arbib, Luke Foley and Peter Bentley.

I also thank all the parliamentary members who provided support and assistance. I thank my husband, Anthony Albanese, who is here today, for his love and support, strategic guidance and, as ever, eternal optimism—and my son Nathan, for his love and for putting it all in perspective. Finally, I thank my parents, who raised me with a strong sense of conscience and always showed me the importance of being caring and considerate of others. The Labor Party has provided me with some wonderful opportunities. It has been a privilege to be a Minister in both the Carr and Iemma governments. I now look forward to the challenges of representing the people of Marrickville and advocating for their needs in this Chamber and in Government.

I now turn to the Vocational Education and Training Bill 2005. This bill will ensure that the New South Wales world-class system for skills training is strengthened and enhanced. The bill implements the November 2002 decision of the Ministerial Council for Vocational Education and Training to introduce legislative reform to more effectively regulate providers of vocational education and training throughout Australia. Honourable members would be aware of the critical importance of having an effective vocational education and training system—a system that is capable of giving our current and future employees the necessary skills to adapt in Australia's complex and ever-changing work force. Our vocational education and training system provides training for all types of work, from the traditional industries such as building and construction, manufacturing, automotive and utilities to those newer industries that now represent a growing proportion of the New South Wales work force: retail, finance, insurance and business services, tourism, hospitality and community services, and health.

Currently in New South Wales more than half a million students participate in some form of vocational education and training each year, and that training is provided by both public and private sector registered training organisations. Most of these students are in TAFE, yet over 1,565 New South Wales and interstate registered training organisations are operating in the State. It is obviously an attractive business as new providers continue to enter the market each year: 344 new training organisations registered in 2002-03 and 98 in 2003-04. At the heart of our system are the structured courses of vocational study, training and employment known as apprenticeships and traineeships. There were 139,000 apprentices and trainees in training in New South Wales at the end of the 2005 June quarter. Currently 884 New South Wales training organisations are registered under this Act. In addition, 681 interstate registered training organisations are operating in New South Wales.

The current Act supports the regulation of New South Wales registered organisations by the Board for Vocational Education and Training. However, it does not provide for decisions made by the board to apply to training organisations registered in other States that operate in New South Wales. This means that the board has been virtually powerless to act when problems have arisen with interstate registered training organisations operating in New South Wales. At present the regulator's hands are also tied in situations where a New South Wales registered training organisation is found to be non-compliant in New South Wales and, rather than address those non-compliances, the organisation decides to apply for registration in another State that is seen to have a less rigorous registration procedure.

From 1 January 2006 the New South Wales regulatory body will be able to monitor quality, audit or sanction the 681 training organisations currently registered interstate and operating in New South Wales. At the same time New South Wales registered training organisations will be recognised interstate. The Australian Quality Training Framework was introduced in 2001 as a set of standards to guide quality in the training market and to ensure that students and employers receive the high quality training they require. The New South Wales training quality regulator, the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board, has adopted these national quality standards as a guideline under its Act. However, new legislation is needed to enable the regulation of interstate registered providers delivering training in New South Wales.

By agreeing to implement model clauses in their legislation, all States are now ensuring that national quality standards can be appropriately and effectively enacted across borders. Vocational education and training in Australia now operates as a national system. States and Territories operate within a framework of national policies and strategies, underpinned by their own legislation relating to the provision of vocational education and training. In June 2001 the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for vocational education and training agreed to adopt new standards to strengthen the quality of training across the country. The Australian Quality Training Framework standards have been adopted in New South Wales by the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board under the current Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Act 1990.

This is a sensible bill that recognises the increasing national nature of vocational and training provision in New South Wales and, indeed, in Australia. Fifteen years have passed since the original Act was introduced. The world and the vocational education and training system have all changed significantly in this intervening period. Most significantly, the systems in each State have become more alike, and the number of training providers that operate at a national level has increased. This new bill incorporates much-needed improvements to modernise the language of the Act to make it more relevant and easier to interpret. Offences under the Act will also be strengthened and fines increased for breaches of the Act. The final significant change to the Act is to recognise the national register of training providers and courses—the National Training Information Service.

This register is the repository for all publicly available information on the organisations operating in the national vocational education and training system. Having the national register included in this legislation protects its role as the key public tool for accessing information on training organisations. There is still a need for more consumer information to be available on training organisations and the standard of training they offer. The Government will continue working with other jurisdictions to improve the amount of publicly available information on training organisations. The New South Wales Government would like to see the reports of registered training organisation audits by the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board published, as is the current practice in the university sector. The bill establishes stronger and more consistent regulation for the skills development that Australia and New South Wales need.

The bill will increase industry confidence that the New South Wales training system will provide high-quality, industry relevant skills. The approach taken by Australian governments on this issue is a demonstration that State, Territory and Commonwealth governments can work co-operatively on issues of national importance. New South Wales makes up about one-third of our economy, population and national vocational education and training system. This bill will improve the regulatory arrangements in this State to ensure that the training system continues to be nationally focused and a key driver in the continued economic and social development of our State and Australia. I commend the bill to the House, and I thank honourable members for their indulgence in allowing me to make some comments about Marrickville.