

Second reading

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA (Parliamentary Secretary) [11.02 p.m.]: I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

We are all aware of the recent problems facing the community of the Saint John's College within the University of Sydney. Adding to these problems, a large number of the fellows of the governing council of the college have now resigned so that a quorum of the council no longer exists. The lack of a quorum means that governance of the college is now in limbo. The Saint John's College Amendment Bill being introduced today has been prepared following a request for assistance from the University of Sydney and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. The bill deals with the immediate problems facing Saint John's College by providing for an alternate process for appointment of fellows of the Council in these unusual circumstances.

Like other residential colleges within the University of Sydney that were established in the mid-nineteenth century, Saint John's College was created by a Private Act of the New South Wales Parliament. The Saint John's College Act 1857 establishes the college's governing council as a corporate entity and contains a basic governance framework. The Act provides for the college to be governed by a council consisting of eighteen fellows—of which six are to be priests and twelve are to be laymen—and a rector, appointed by the fellows. The Act also provides that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney is the "visitor" of the college. As the visitor, the archbishop has limited oversight functions but is not authorised to appoint members of the council when unexpected mass vacancies arise. Section 13 of the Act provides that the council must have at least one clerical and two lay members for a quorum to exist. To deal with the need to restore and maintain a quorum of the council, the bill provides that where there are no clerical fellows and/or no more than one lay fellow, then all fellow positions become vacant.

The bill also provides that in these circumstances the archbishop is to appoint 18 new clerical and lay fellows of the council for terms of up to three years. The archbishop's appointments must be done in consultation with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney. This consultative approach will ensure that the broader interests of the university community are considered under the new arrangements. Where there is a vacancy in the office of a fellow appointed by the archbishop, then the archbishop may also appoint another fellow for the remainder of the term of the fellow vacating the office. The university and the archbishop have asked the Government to urgently address the issue of the appointment of fellows of the council of Saint John's College and it has done so by introducing this bill. I commend the bill to the House.