



Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014

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Second Reading

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA (Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for the Illawarra) [11.20 a.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.

This Government is proud of its commitment to public education, and to the parents and carers and community members who do so much to support our schools. These people play a vital role through their time, their efforts, and their understanding of the needs of their local school.

Nearly a century ago a number of local parents and citizens associations—P&Cs—from across New South Wales came together and formed a federation to provide service and advice to its affiliated members.

The arrangement worked well for a long time. But in recent years the nature of the parents and citizens associations federation, with its unwieldy governance model, has led to a situation where, despite all best intentions, the organisation has become paralysed.

The recent problems with the New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations have been widely publicised in the media. The Minister and the Department of Education and Communities have received representations from more than 100 school parents and citizens associations, local members and members of the federation.

Their concerns have been myriad, but the message has been the same.

Namely, that while the people behind the federation may all have the interest of schools, of children, of school communities at heart, the nature of the organisation and its structures needs modernisation to keep up with what is a very complex job.

To put it bluntly, as an organisation, the New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations is not working. Something has to be done. And, to their great credit, the federation has over the years made attempts to fix its own problems.

In 2011 the New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations commissioned, at its own expense, an audit into its activities and functions and, specifically, ongoing internal tensions.

The federation's executive asked David Roden, a widely recognised expert in public affairs and governance, to examine the way the organisation was functioning, and make recommendations about its activities and functions and how it could improve.

The final report, handed down by Mr Roden in 2012, concluded that internal tensions had reached the point where the federation's structure required radical surgery if it were to remain viable.

The report called for a number of reforms:

- A new organisational structure with clearer, more practical and modern allocation of roles and responsibilities; and,
- A new legal framework to support the structural and organisational changes and to provide the federation and affiliated parents and citizens associations with enhanced accountability and governance and increased flexibility of operations.

This legislation will take these steps.

Over the past several months various groups within the federation have, in an effort to reform the organisation, invested a considerable amount of time and money. But because of the existing constitutional limitations, they have hit a wall, with the Supreme Court being called upon to adjudicate on a very public dispute.

Many hardworking parents are frustrated by an out-of-date structure and constitution not suited to representing their effective school parents and citizens associations.

This legislation will create a new governance structure, where parents and carers are represented by their fellow parents and carers, where all parts of the State have a voice, where politics and personality disputes are left at the door, and where all school communities are supported.

At the moment, of course, this is not happening. The federation has closed its doors while competing claims are heard in the Supreme Court. In the meantime, service delivery to school parents and citizens associations has ceased. This litigation may be a symptom of the federation's issues, but because of the way the organisation is structured, it will not be a cure.

Crucially, with the passage of this legislation, nothing will change about the way individual school parents and citizens associations go about their day-to-day business or manage their affairs. They will continue to do the important work they do on behalf of school communities. Their activities will not change, their insurance coverage will continue, their own individual governance structures will not change. Only the State body is being revitalised—not school parents and citizens associations.

I acknowledge the hardworking parents and citizens associations within my own electorate, who play such a crucial role in their communities; organising, supporting and raising money to enhance their schools.

So what will the new, reconstituted New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations look like?

The legislation allows for the division of the State into 16 electoral areas, to ensure that parents in Albury are represented just as parents in Abbotsford are.

In the coming months, each school parents and citizens association will cast a vote for two delegates and one councillor for their electorate. These elections will be conducted by the NSW Electoral Commission, and the successful candidates will attend and vote at the new federation's annual general meeting.

The 16 councillors will also serve as members of the board, and internally they will select seven individuals—all parents or carers of children in New South Wales public schools—to serve as members of the executive committee as president, secretary, or other office holder, with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the federation.

Crucially, only parents and carers with a child currently enrolled in a New South Wales public school will be permitted, under this legislation, to hold office in the reconstituted New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations.

There are many prominent community members, including grandparents, local retirees and former teachers, who continue to play an active role in their local parents and citizens association once their children have left school. The participation and goodwill of these citizens at a grassroots level is vital. However, it is also important that those who represent the interests of parents and carers at a higher level are parents and carers themselves.

The Minister anticipates that during term 4 of 2014, the elections will have been completed and the new executive team installed. All of this will take place under the supervision of an administrator, who will have responsibility for the federation, its seal, its assets, and its staff until such time as the new executive is appointed.

The Minister will ask the administrator to consult with the Public Education Alliance—representing principals' groups, the Teachers' Federation and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG], to ensure that the proud history and traditions of the New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations are not lost in the transition to the new executive.

The legislation has a sunset clause of three years from its commencement. During this time the reformed and reconstituted New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations will return to operating as a fully independent, representative, and self-governing body working on behalf of the parents, carers and students of New South Wales public schools.

I commend this bill to the House.