

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Boating Industry Association (BIA)
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The Boating Industry Associations response to:

Legislative Council Inquiry into Vocational Education and
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Boating Industry Association

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The Boating Industry Association of NSW & SA Ltd (the BIA) is an association of employers formed in 1960 and incorporated in 1970.

Amounting to around 800 in total, the BIA's NSW membership generates over 90% of commercial activity in the sector, which directly employs approximately 8000 people. Membership comprises boat manufacturers and importers, supply-chain goods manufacturers and importers, brokers and retailers (of vessels and equipment), boat storage and service facility operators (marinas, boat yards and slipways, dry-storage etc), providers of industrial services to the recreational and light commercial boating industry (shipwrights, surveyors, mechanics, engineers, technicians, detailers, riggers, sail-makers and upholsterers, painters etc), and providers of travel/ tourism, advisory, and incidental goods and services.

The BIA is head-quartered in Crows Nest, has sister organizations in other States, and is part of a federated structure - the Boating Industry Alliance Australia.

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BACKGROUND

The boating industry is exposed to the Vocational Education & Training (VET) system in respect of apprenticeships in Marine Mechanical and Shipwright/ Boatbuilder trades. Apprentices in these trades are generally young school-leavers, though we have observed a slight increase in mature aged apprentices. Apprentices are generally hands-on, can-do people with an interest in complex machinery, design and construction.

Boating trades are rewarding and diverse, offering scope to work in long and short term placement, travel extensively, and enter into self-employment or business establishment easily. Boating trades may also serve as a foundation for entry to careers in close-proximity industries such as commercial maritime operations (working boats and ships), complex building/ manufacturing, and superyachts.

Irrespective of the benefits of marine industry careers, these are trades with limited per annum placements for apprentices, and a copy-book “thin market” for VET services.

The BIA has for many years been an advocate for high quality VET services, with particular focus on curriculum and service delivery for the marine trades. To date, TAFE NSW has been the only organization delivering Certificate III training in these fields.

From time to time the BIA has been engaged with TAFE where matters of concern were raised by members of the Association, and these engagements have generally been productive with the issues resolved to the satisfaction of TAFE & the BIA.

However in response to grave concerns about the quality and ongoing viability of training in marine trades, the BIA & TAFE entered into a Strategic Alliance in 2011. Regrettably, this proved to be an unproductive vehicle owing – we believe – to the looming reforms which have significantly impacted the structure and capacity of TAFE.

In 2013, pursuant to the further degradation of VET services to our industry, the BIA sought to engage members in a forum to raise the profile of the issue among employers, and discuss a draft strategy to address the challenge. Some detail and a video account of this forum may still be found on our website at:

<http://www.bia.org.au/training/VET/index.html>

Subsequently, the BIA's national assembly endorsed this strategy. To date, opportunities to pursue a structural change in the funding of the VET system have not been forthcoming, and internal resource limitations have constrained the capacity of our organization to take independent action.

COMMENT IN REGARD TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- Factors influencing student choice about entering vocational education and training.

Many factors appear to negatively influence engagement in trade training. These range from community sentiment disparaging of trade professions, to concerns among young people and their advisors/ parents about career prospects in trades, to practical matters such as the accessibility of training.

Particularly challenging for young people in marine trades apprenticeships has been the limited access to relevant quality training. Prior to 2013, Cert III training in both trades was available at only two (2) TAFE institutes covering the greater Sydney/ Newcastle Metro. In 2014, this contracted to only one (1) institute per trade – both located in the Sydney inner-metro.

Given that most boat manufacturing within NSW is now situated in regional areas and that marine mechanical operations occur throughout the state, most employers and apprentices are not adequately catered for.

Where trade-relevant training cannot be accessed, it is not uncommon to find apprentices enrolled in loosely related courses which build competency in some though not all relevant skill areas. This places a burden on employers to interpret and compensate for skill-gaps which inevitably arise, and disadvantages young people in regional areas who are not properly catered for by the VET system.

Where trade-relevant training cannot be accessed or employers have become disenchanted with the VET & apprenticeship Systems, the engagement of young workers without capacity to engage an apprenticeship is not uncommon.

The sustenance of capacity within the System for high quality VET services to the boating industry is reliant on robust numbers of enrolment, however as an industry which is subject to discretionary spending in a volatile economic climate, the past six to seven years have seen a downturn in enrolments.

This has also been the case in other states, and with the exception of QLD, no other state currently offers the opportunities for marine trades apprentices to train in a dedicated VET situation.

Whilst apprentices from other states have sought to enroll at NSW institutes, cross-border funding challenges & lack of travel and pastoral support make the option of accessing quality services in NSW unviable – which then contributes to the viability challenge of NSW providers.

Suggestions:

In regard to the challenge of attracting young people to marine trades, we note that whereas once TAFE was a significant driver and facilitator of trade's apprenticeship engagement, it no longer is. As such, it is suggested that Government consider the funding of Industry Associations to serve as promoters and facilitators of trades in their area of coverage. We refer the Inquiry to the work of the Marine Industry Training Organisation (BITO) of New Zealand.

<http://www.nzmarine.com/directory/business/nz-marine-industry-training-organisation>

In regard to the challenge of sustaining high quality services for thin market situations such as ours, we suggest that: consideration be given to relieving cross-border funding challenges such that centers of excellence can be established and accessed by a wider cohort of students; that models of extended "block training" be considered for students travelling long distances such that learning is concentrated, and travel times/ costs are minimized; that industry associations are supported to coordinate pastoral care for students spending extended periods away from home; and that industry associations are empowered to maintain a partnership relationship with VET service providers and curriculum curators such that meaningful engagement can be ongoing to ensure the relevance of training content, and the quality/ accessibility of service delivery.

- The role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry.

As previously referred to, TAFE colleges no longer play a key role in promoting trade training, and as such there is limited interaction with secondary education institutes. The modern format for educating young people on career and training options appears to be "careers days", which in our view, fail to deliver a meaningful engagement with potential entrants to our industry.

Yet, the development of skills in the boating industry is critical.

Over 235 000 registered vessels in NSW are operated by over 500 000 license-holders. Enormous state resource is applied to the safe operation of vessels, and administration of the registration system.

The vast majority (if not all) of these vessels will at some time throughout their life-cycle require the services of qualified professionals to ensure their safety, and integrity.

The Boating Industry in NSW annually contributes \$2.2 Billion in direct revenues, and a further \$1.3 Billion in spending associated with boating activity (EMDA 2007). Boating is big business, and a highly prized recreational activity among a wide section of the community.

Suggestions:

That the Inquiry gives consideration to methods of ensuring that the VET system supports skills-development relevant to the needs of the community.

In the past, Government has undertaken to assess skills needs years in advance, and tailored general funding and incentive programs to motivate appropriate skills-delivery. Presently, Government action in this regard is not apparent. We believe that the gauging of future skills demand, and motivation of the system to deliver accordingly is a fundamental role of the NSW Government in regard to skills.

In the past, TAFE and to some extent Apprenticeship Centers, have had both incentive and resources available to undertake “business development” aimed to engage people appropriately in apprenticeships. The Smart & Skilled reform - as well as other influences pervasive in the VET space nationally - have drastically impacted this dynamic.

The BIA would welcome the opportunity to discuss ways in which industry associations could play a role in attracting, engaging, and retaining apprentices in marine trades.

- Factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible training.

We believe that the co-contribution model itself is not necessarily a barrier to engagement and completion of apprentices in the boating industry, but that lack of accessibility contributes to low take-up and completion rates.

As previously mentioned, accessible training in marine trades is available only to those living in the Sydney Metro, which means that a significant proportion of students expend substantial time and money on travel to and from TAFE.

Parents and advisors to young people considering marine careers will rightly identify these challenges, which results in alternate choices or a “near enough is good enough” approach to selecting VET courses which *are* accessible.

As such, not only does the cohort of students engaged in marine trades training suffer attendant impacts on viability (either by impact on enrolments or attrition throughout the term of training), but students engaged in “near enough is good enough” training may also become disillusioned.

Suggestion

That the Inquiry consider ways in which the wider community can access relevant quality training through: innovation in modes of delivery; innovation in timing & intensity of training delivery; funding of pastoral and travel expense support for students travelling long distances.

- The level of industry participation in the vocational and education and training sector.

An often heard criticism of the VET system in marine trades is that both curriculum and those delivering training, are out of touch with the ground level reality of the trades.

Whilst the BIA and its members have made substantial efforts over the years to be engaged in the maintenance of competencies and training packages, the processes are complex and convoluted, and the extensive timeframes over which these processes run their course ensures that the curriculum is always a few years behind.

Additionally, technologies, methodologies, and materials in the marine sector are evolving dramatically: engine manufacturers have diversified substantially; new drive systems and integrated control systems are responding to consumer preferences; boat manufacturing mediums encompass wood, metals, and composites, and the working of these materials is the subject of intensive innovations aimed at strength and efficiency of build, and lifecycle operation.

Whilst our industry has many committed TAFE teachers and ex-teachers to thank for its skills base – the vast majority of whom are themselves tradesmen with extensive industry experience - there can be no denying that each year “off the tools and away from the coal-face” contributes to a lack of currency among teachers.

Combining these factors – a dynamic industry, a lagging curriculum, and a faculty which is more or less out of touch - the training delivered to apprentices could hardly be considered contemporary.

Owing to this - as well as the cost and complexity of employing apprentices and engaging them in meaningful apprenticeship training – many marine tradesmen whom are themselves a product of the system, are choosing not to take on apprentices. This signals a serious skills challenge ahead for our industry.

Suggestions:

We suggest that the Inquiry consider ways in which engagement by industry in the curriculum development/ maintenance process can be streamlined and simplified, and results passed through into training packages or competencies more quickly.

Further that the Inquiry considers the scope for experienced and active marine tradesmen, as well as recently qualified tradesmen with exemplary academic and practical track record, can play a role in the training and development of students.

We would also propose that options to ensure the contemporary knowledge and experience of professional teaching staff be examined.

The BIA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.