



Minister for Employment and Small Business
Minister for Training and Skills Development

28 NOV 2022

Our Ref: 2738/22

Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee

I write to provide a submission in relation to the inquiry into Northern Australia's Workforce Development. I note that this submission pertains to my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills development only, and does not represent a whole-of-government submission from the Queensland Government.

The Queensland Government is taking a proactive approach to strengthening Queensland's current and future workforce. On 30 August 2022, the Queensland Government released *Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032* (the QWS), which is Queensland's first whole-of-government workforce strategy. The QWS delivers innovative and practical solutions that are needed now to ensure Queensland has a ready workforce to support growth, strengthen our communities and keep Queensland at the forefront of new economic opportunities. The QWS can be accessed at <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-strategy/about>.

This Strategy is underpinned by a \$70 million investment in new and expanded initiatives, that builds upon the \$1.2 billion Queensland will invest in 2022-2023 alone in building the skills and capability of Queensland's workforce. The actions in the Strategy align to five focus areas:

- Workforce participation
- Local solutions
- School-to-work transitions
- Workforce attraction and retention
- Skilling Queenslanders now and in the future.

The QWS and the focus areas within it were informed by extensive stakeholder consultation, including through the Queensland Workforce Summit held in March 2022. This consultation emphasised the importance of workforce approaches that are industry-led, community-centred and government-enabled. The outcomes of the Queensland Workforce Summit can be found at <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-summit/summary-videos>. I note that many of these insights align with those generated through the Australian Government's Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022.

The QWS provides the strategic framework for the Queensland Government's approach to developing Queensland's workforce. It will be important that the Committee's deliberations, and any recommendations it makes, are cognisant of this whole-of-government approach. I note that the QWS also identifies a number of issues that are central to addressing current and future workforce challenges that are responsibilities of the Australian Government:

- Employment services and income support systems to facilitate effective pathways into work

- Lifting barriers to workforce participation through childcare subsidies, taxation arrangements, superannuation regulation and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Regional economic development including housing availability and affordability
- Addressing skills and workforce shortages through the national skills reform, university funding and skilled migration.

The committee would be aware of the significant population, workforce and economic activity that exists within northern Queensland, and it is pleasing that the terms of reference for this inquiry are considering the critical importance of workforce development to regional economic development.

I draw the committee's attention to two sources of data and information on workforce development issues in Queensland that may inform the work of the committee:

- Jobs Queensland publishes detailed employment projections for Queensland and enables detailed segmentation of this data by industry, region, occupation and qualification. At the Statewide level, this data outlines that Queensland is projected to add over 280,000 jobs in the four years to 2024-2025. This data is available at <https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/anticipating-future-skills/>
- The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training publishes a range of data and information in relation to the delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Queensland. This data is available at: <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/docs-data/statistics/training-performance>

Queensland is a large and decentralised state. Workforce challenges and opportunities differ across, and in many cases within, individual regions throughout Queensland. The QWS places significant priority and focus on the importance of place-based workforce responses through the 'local solutions' focus area. I encourage the committee to consider the diversity of Queensland's regions and the importance of policy responses that recognise this regional diversity in undertaking this inquiry.

To deliver on an action outlined in the QWS, the Queensland Government is also developing a Queensland VET Strategy. The VET Strategy will ensure that Queensland's significant annual investment in skills and training is tailored to meet current and future workforce needs.

I note also the Committee's terms of reference includes a focus on empowering and upskilling the local Indigenous population. On 8 September 2022, the Queensland Government released the *Paving the Way – First Nations Training Strategy*. This \$8.3 million strategy will support First Nations People to be better connected with training and skilling opportunities that link importantly to sustainable good local jobs. Further information on this strategy is available at <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/docs-data/strategies/first-nations-training-strategy>.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your consideration of this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Di Farmer MP
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