



CLAYTON BARR'S STATE NEWS JUNE 2016



TAFE CUTS STARTING TO BITE

You probably all know I've been a bit of a broken record about TAFE cuts in the last few years, since the Government brought in their 'Smart and Skilled' program to 'reform' (translation: slash and burn) the TAFE system. Teachers were sacked, student contact hours were reduced, and fees were doubled, tripled, quadrupled or more. The table below shows the incredible disappearance of 3,610 TAFE teachers in just three years. So much knowledge has just been thrown away, and so many hours of teaching are no longer happening.

Number of employees (Full time equivalent)

SERVICE GROUP	JUNE 2012	JUNE 2013	JUNE 2014	JUNE 2015
TEACHERS	10,234	9,642	8,853	6,624

As you expect when you charge a lot more for a vastly reduced service, student numbers are falling. The Department of Education reported 579,719 TAFE enrolments in 2012 and 570,036 in 2013. In 2014, once the Smart and Skilled changes had come into effect, that number was just 534,737, a drop of more than 35,000.

Bizarrely, students from last year still don't know how much their courses will end up costing them! A computer fault that was supposed to be fixed in the first few weeks of last year still hasn't been fixed. It's not a coincidence that this problem arose just after the resourcing and staffing of the TAFE system was slashed. I just hope those students who agreed in good faith to enrol for courses last year don't get a nasty surprise when the bill finally arrives.

This is the state of TAFE in New South Wales. The most frustrating thing is that all of these problems were foreseeable from the moment the Government announced their plans a few years ago.

BUTTERFLY CAVES BATTLE CONTINUES

You may have heard or read before about an incredibly significant Aboriginal site in our Electorate known as the Butterfly Cave. The site has a history stretching back tens of thousands of years. In fact, it was the first Aboriginal sacred women's site recognised in New South Wales. Today though, it is under threat.

The developer's own geotechnical documents state that there is "no certainty that the Cave will survive the impact of earthworks and construction vibration associated with the development".

The battle to save the Butterfly Cave has been going since before I was a Member of Parliament. In my time in this job I've had countless meetings with the Ministers of the State Government, Lake Macquarie Council, community groups and even the developer, trying to convince somebody to take responsibility and save the Cave.

This campaign has tremendous support in the community, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If you support Indigenous heritage and want to make your view known, I'd encourage you to write to me with your views, so that I can pass them on to the Government. There is also a petition circulating on Change.org entitled 'Save the Butterfly Cave', and a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/1ButterflyCave).

It really is as simple as this: either we believe that people have a right to protect their sacred cultural sites, or we don't. That is the choice the State Government must make, and it is a choice that affects all of us, regardless of our background.

CESSNOCK GAOL EXPANSION BUILDS CASE FOR MORE POLICE

You may have heard recently about the Government's plans to expand Cessnock Gaol. At this stage, it seems they will add 620 beds to the prison. Incredibly, as the local Member I heard about this through the media. The Government did not bother to let me know that our prison population would increase by 620.

One of my key challenges during this process will be ensuring that, if the expansion goes ahead, our local Police resources are expanded as well. At the very least, a bigger prison population means more administrative work for our local Police. We need to make sure that our Police can do all of the new work created by the Gaol, whilst at the same time continuing to do their ordinary Police work in the Cessnock area. Basic space constraints mean that the only way our Police numbers can expand is with a new Cessnock Police Station. That fight is ahead of us, and I'll need your support to build pressure on the Government.

ANOTHER SELL-OFF

Perhaps because there aren't many public buildings left to sell, the Government has moved to sell off the incredibly large pool of data held by New South Wales Land and Property Information. LPI is the State Government body that holds information about every block of land in the state, including property boundaries, title and surveying information. This information is used in the buying and selling of property, banks use this data to assess loans and Council draws on this information to assess Development Applications. Our emergency services also use it when they're searching for a missing person or planning during an emergency.

FOR SALE



**Land & Property
Information**

The consequences of selling all this data to a private company are vast. There are obvious privacy and security issues, as well as financial barriers. The price of doing a title search is guaranteed to rise and keep rising, not only because the fees will go up but also because organisation that use the data will now need to take out insurance on its accuracy.

The impacts of this sale will be felt across the State and long into the future. The Government is placing what is likely to be a relatively small value on an asset which is almost priceless. It won't surprise you at all to learn that the proceeds will be spent entirely in Sydney, on football stadiums.

LEGAL PROBLEMS? LAW ACCESS CAN HELP

Occasionally people call or drop in to my office looking for help with a legal problem. I have to tell them that my office cannot give out legal advice, and as your local MP I can't intervene in matters going through the courts. However the New South Wales Government does run a free legal service known as LawAccess.

LawAccess provide a starting point to help with your legal problem. LawAccess NSW Customer Service Officers can provide up-to-date plain language legal information either over the telephone or by sending out written information, as well as referrals to other legal or related services that can assist, if for example you need face to face legal advice.

You can call LawAccess on **1300 888 529**. The hotline is open Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.

YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THREAT

You may not have heard about it, but in the last few weeks your legal rights as a citizen of New South Wales have changed beyond recognition. In May, the Government introduced two pieces of legislation through the Parliament that give Judges and Police extraordinary powers to restrict the liberty of ordinary citizens.

Under the changes, you can be placed under a Serious Crime Prevention Order if you are suspected of committing a serious crime. You can be placed under a Public Safety Order if you are merely suspected of an offence as minimal as damage to property. The restrictions which can be placed on you, under one of these orders, are virtually unlimited. Without ever being charged or convicted of an offence, you can be barred from going to a certain place, talking to a certain person or even leaving the house. So much for innocent until proven guilty.



Obviously these powers are wide open to abuse. That's not a comment on the New South Wales Police Force, but we have protections like the presumption of innocence for a reason. Without them our society is a whole lot less free.