The Greens response to Vision Australia's 2015 NSW Election Priorities

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# Elections

Voting is a critical component of democratic participation.

Every effort should be extended to ensure that every citizen can engage with every aspect of the political process, including but most certainly not limited to voting.

Ensuring equitable access to voting on polling day and during pre-poll is vital.

For these reasons, Greens NSW MPs in the NSW Upper House enthusiastically supported the 2010 legislation that permitted the introduction of iVoting.

For the same reasons we also support the extension of iVoting to local government elections.

The Greens are doubtful that private polling operators contracted by some council to run elections would have either the ability or inclination to operate an iVoting system with the level of integrity and consistency that the NSW Electoral Commission applies.

The imperative to provide access to voting for all citizens is another pressing reason to require all council ballots to be conducted by the NSW Electoral Commission.

As it stands, those councils that have contracted out the conduct of periodic elections would be effectively cutting off their vision impaired citizens from democratic participation at the local government level.

We also support the introduction of iVoting for federal elections. There is no reason that it cannot be done. The technology exists and works. Any moves that assist more people to participate in our democracy are welcome by the Greens, particularly for those whose voices are, shamefully, often not heard.

# **Education**:

From the outset the Greens NSW warned that the competitive market would see TAFE’s budget squeezed and opportunities for students, particularly those with disability and particular learning needs, would be severely reduced.

We worked alongside students, teachers, staff and their unions as well as community organisations and activists to stop the introduction of Smart and Skilled. Our state-wide campaign secured the support of the NSW Upper House for Greens legislation that placed a moratorium on the competition agenda and reversed the cuts to TAFE and the massive student fee increases.

The Liberals and Nationals have pushed ahead with Smart and Skilled, and it has been a disaster for TAFE and for the most vulnerable students. Students with a disability have had their courses cut, fees that were previously nil or negligible increased to unaffordable levels and extra support available for some students such as tutorial support has been significantly reduced or removed entirely.

We are particularly concerned that

* the 15% disability loading is woefully inadequate to fund adjustment support for low vision and blind students;
* the abolition of the 9999 course has taken away an important vehicle for disability support; and
* the reduction in numbers of Teacher Consultants Disability and the move in some TAFE institutes to generic positions will deny critical support to students with low vision and blindness.

The Greens will continue to work towards the abolition of the competitive training market and the full restoration of all TAFE courses and teaching and teacher consultant positions.

In the new parliament the Greens will move legislation to protect TAFE by seeking to end Smart and Skilled and competitive tendering for TAFE's budget.

In the event that we are not successful we will move to:

* Limit non-TAFE providers to just 20% of the government’s budget for skills training,
* Stop any new training providers receiving public funding, and
* Prohibit for-profit training corporations receiving public funding.

The Greens will prioritise additional funding for students with special needs including vision impairment for those enrolled in public schools.

We support initiatives to increase support and assistance to blind and low vision students. Such measures should be developed in consultation with experts in the field.

We have consistently raised concerns with the Liberals and Nationals' devolution agenda for NSW public schools and in particular the impact it has on students with special needs.

Increasingly principals are being asked to make their own decisions about staffing and professional development and learning support. This is having an impact on students with special needs. It is very hard to determine how many of these students are receiving support and whether the support is sufficient and appropriate to their needs.

This abrogation of responsibility by the government has been compounded by the loss of hundreds of so-called “back office” positions in the NSW Department of Education and Communities.

If these positions are not restored it will be very hard to achieve the coordinated approach as outlined by Vision Australia. We will work to reverse these cuts.

We are also calling for dedicated expertise available in a timely fashion to students and schools as specialist teachers and centralised teams. While the learning support team and general staff do the best they can, there are limits to what can be achieved in the absence of dedicated resources.

# Employment:

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

* double the workforce participation rates of people with disability within the public sector in the next four-year term. - **YES**
* develop targeted plans that address structural barriers to employment and deliver job opportunities in partnership with employers; - **YES**
* implement the four key recommendations identified in the ‘Disabling the Barriers’ Report: developing workplace culture, increasing representation levels, developing effective employment outcome measures and addressing key job accessibility and career progression issues for people with disability – **YES**

## The Greens Disability Policy states

32.Provide adequately resourced pathways that support school leavers with disabilities to make the transition from school into meaningful employment, educational and vocational programs or other community- based activities;

33.Expand funding to labour market programs for people with disabilities and the development of a program of affirmative action for employment of people with disabilities, including government subsidies to support employers hiring people with a disability in meaningful work, and positive awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of workers with a disability;

34.Promote initiatives to increase employment levels of people with disabilities in the public service and government agencies;

35.Enhance provision of infrastructure and interpersonal support for people with disabilities in the workforce;

# **Getting around:**

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to:

* increase the TTSS to $50 per trip; - **YES**
* increase the TTSS to $70 in rural and remote NSW locations;- **YES** and
* replace TTSS paper vouchers with an electronic card payment system to improve ease of use and cut waste.- **YES**

## The Greens NSW Disability policy states

29.Promote standards and ensure greater integration across all public transport services to develop a universal transport system that removes all barriers across public transport conveyances, premises and infrastructure;

30. Ensure that state government transport services are adequate to allow freedom of movement and independence, including through the provision of equitable transport subsidies and concessions across all forms of transport for those with limited mobility;

In Parliament The Greens have focused on this issue with a petition, questions, a successful motion, a forum and media and written to the Minister for Transport.

The motion calling for a review and increase of the TTSS was agreed to by the Legislative Council on the 27th June 2014

# TAXI TRANSPORT SUBSIDY SCHEME

**Motion by the Hon. JAN BARHAM agreed to:**

1. That this House notes that the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme's [TTSS] current maximum subsidy level of $30 has been in place since 1999, meaning that it has gone 14 years without an increase.

2. That this House acknowledges that the 2010 Select Committee Inquiry into the NSW Taxi Industry reported:

(a) Recommendation 35: "That NSW Transport and Infrastructure increase the value of the subsidy provided by the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme to half the total fare, up to a maximum value of $50.00 per fare", being a $20 increase on the current subsidy, and

(b) Recommendation 36: "That the Premier request the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to consider the value of the subsidy provided under the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme as part of its annual review of taxi fares."

3. That this House notes the Government responses at the time to the above recommendations were:

(a) Recommendation 35: "Transport NSW will review and evaluate the current Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme subsidy cap," and

(b) Recommendation 36: "Transport NSW will review and evaluate options for the future adjustment of the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme subsidy cap."

4. That this House also acknowledges that Victoria's Multi Purpose Taxi Program's 2011-12 budget of $51 million is almost double New South Wales' Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme 2011-12 budget of $26 million.

5. That this House notes with concern that a recent survey of Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme users by the Northern Rivers Social Development Council and supported by the Physical Disability Council of NSW, the National Council of Social Services [NCOSS], and Spinal Cord Injuries Australia showed that:

(a) 32 per cent of respondents said that taxis were their only mode of transport,

(b) 54.7 per cent of respondents received the Disability Support Pension, 15.1 per cent were in part-time employment and 12.3 per cent were in full-time employment, and

(c) of those people receiving the Disability Support Pension, almost half, being 47.5 per cent, spent between 11 and 30 per cent of their income on taxis, and that this percentage was higher for those in part-time employment 50 per cent and slightly lower for those in full-time employment, being 35.7 per cent.

6. That this House notes that:

(a) Victoria's Multi Purpose Taxi Program's 2011-12 budget of $51 million is almost double New South Wales' Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme 2011-12 budget of $26 million,

(b) in 2008, Victoria increased its Multipurpose Taxi Program subsidy from $30 to $60, an amount that it is double the current New South Wales subsidy, and

(c) NCOSS's pre-budget submission recommends the New South Wales Government "review the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme to ensure affordable access for participants, and increase the subsidy cap from $30 to $50."

7. That this House acknowledges that:

(a) the $30 Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme subsidy is inadequate today and has not kept pace with New South Wales' rising costs of living, and

(b) the subsidy does not meet the needs of many people with a disability travelling throughout major metropolitan and regional areas on our taxi networks.

8. That this House calls on the Government to increase the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme.

# Access to Information

Vision Australia calls on you to increase funding to Vision Australia to expand this vital access to information service, and make more material available. – **THE GREENS SUPPORT AND WILL ADVOCATE FOR THIS TO HAPPEN**

## The Greens NSW Disability policy states

40.Strengthen disability advocacy services and ensure people with disabilities are provided with adequate funding for independent advocacy services and access to free legal advice; and

41.Fund community education programs to promote public awareness and attitudinal change toward people with disabilities.

# Supporting blindness and low vision service continuity in NSW

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit further funding, to ensure that blindness and low vision services are provided equitably across NSW to people of all ages, to address the current gaps in service support. – **YES**

## The Greens NSW Disability policy states

12.Support a well-funded and resourced operational service sector to meet the needs of people with disabilities, including the full establishment and implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme that provides fully-funded lifetime care and support, as proposed by the Productivity Commission’s recommendations from the Disability Care and Support inquiry in 2011;

13. Support increased funding to ensure that all people with disabilities have access to a range of high quality, age-appropriate, community care and accommodation options to support a person-centred approach to meeting people with disabilities’ accommodation needs, including supporting the implementation of access-ready buildings to provide adequate and functional opportunities for life-long in-home living and the provision of funding for equipment to provide at-home care;

14. Support a full and effective implementation of the National Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020, including ongoing review of performance in the removal of barriers in the six key policy areas:

(i) inclusive and accessible communities;

(ii) rights protection, justice and legislation;

(iii) economic security;

(iv) personal and community support;

(v) learning and skills; and

(vi) health and well-being;

25. Provide, without cost and in a timely manner, equipment, facilities and support personnel to ensure people are able to participate in all aspects of community life, regardless of their differing abilities;

26.Ensure equitable and integrated community access, including the provision and maintenance of ramps, rails, toilets, information and communications systems and appropriate public and private transport options;

27. Ensure that people with disabilities have access to affordable and accessible communications technology and services that are appropriate to their needs;

28.Promote and enforce standards of universal design and access to public spaces and public and private buildings, and recognise community access as an essential human right, including funding for local communities to upgrade existing infrastructure to meet accessibility standards, and encourage businesses to provide adequate access to their services;

# Accessible Voting through iVote:

Vision Australia now calls on you and your party to:

* ensure that the NSW Electoral Commission extends the iVote system to local government elections; **YES** and
* promote the adoption of the iVote system to the Australian Electoral Commission, to extend this invaluable service in support of the 350,000 Australians who are blind or have low vision, to vote independently in federal elections. –**YES**

## The Greens NSW Disability policy states

25. Provide, without cost and in a timely manner, equipment, facilities and support personnel to ensure people are able to participate in all aspects of community life, regardless of their differing abilities;

27. Ensure that people with disabilities have access to affordable and accessible communications technology and services that are appropriate to their needs;