



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST BILL

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—LP) (10.57 p.m.): When the Minister for Education introduced the University of the Sunshine Coast Bill into the House last week, I urged him to debate it this week so that new graduates from the institution would leave with a university degree. I thank him for making sure that occurred.

The Sunshine Coast University is a very important asset to the Sunshine Coast. It is a focal point for our young people. Now our young people can be educated on the Sunshine Coast and hopefully go into employment there. Previously, students had to come to Brisbane or go elsewhere, leave their families, find accommodation and so on. It was a fracture of the whole social fabric of the community.

Others have said what an excellent institution the Sunshine Coast University is, and indeed it is. In a very short period of time it has achieved a level of academic excellence that a lot of other institutions have taken a long time to achieve. The coalition in Government worked very hard to have "college" dropped from the name of the institution. It was very keen for this to occur, and one can see why. The title "university" gives the institution a lot more credibility in the eyes of the public, which really makes one wonder why such an institution should be called a college. The change will mean that graduates have university degrees. Also, the university has been working very hard to attract overseas students. Success with this means money in the coffers. In this day and age, that aspect has to be looked at seriously.

I have a very good relationship with the university, with Paul Thomas and, indeed, with the board. They approached me when the coalition first came to Government to see if the name could be changed. It was not quite as simple as it would seem. One of the fundamental things we first had to resolve was the university's line of funding. Because of the way the original legislation had been structured, the Sunshine Coast University came under the auspices of the QUT and the Federal funding came to the institution via that source. If an institution such as this is to be made a stand-alone university it has to have its own stand-alone source of funding, so it was important that that be established. One of the things needed not only to do that but also to make the university able to stand on its own was proof that it was able to achieve this academically as well.

A review was planned for 10 years from its instigation. We realised that this time frame, to say the least, was too long. There had been an intention to do it within five years. It was important that this be brought forward further so that the university could prove to the world that it had the ability to stand on its own as a university. So the coalition brought that review forward. It was quite exhaustive. It was very independent. At the end of the day, the university came out with flying colours. That is to its credit. It can now say, "We had this independent review by our peers, and we are able to hold our heads high in the academic world and show that we are indeed worthy of becoming an institution in our own right."

I also spoke personally with David Kemp and told him of the importance to the Sunshine Coast of the name change. I also asked that he agree to Federal funding for the university. He did agree to that, and I thank him for that, because that was an important point in our being able to go ahead. It was essential that the funding stream come from the Federal Government—not the State—because, with a name change and a change in the status, it was possible that such an institution would have to be funded through the State. That is not a State responsibility. I believe that all members should thank David Kemp for agreeing to that direct line of funding. He looked at the academic record and the

review. He acknowledged how interested the Sunshine Coast members—all five of us—were in getting that through. I know that he was also in contact with the then Minister, Bob Quinn, who similarly was trying to obtain this change.

I believe that this is a very happy outcome. I am delighted that we are doing it this year, because this is the last sitting week of the Parliament for this year. The new graduates will have a university degree, and the university can sell its very excellent services to others as a degree. It is a great thing for the Sunshine Coast, and I believe that it shows that there are some very able people there and some very able students. I believe that the results have shown that. It is another feather in the cap of what is a growing and progressive area.

I congratulate the university and all involved with it. It has a very dedicated team of teachers and academic staff. The student population is growing. I think that it has already been said that it is now 2,000 or more. The university is an important focal part of the coast. We also hope that having this sort of institution there will spearhead more development, particularly in IT industries— clean industries—in which our young people can be employed. I certainly support this Bill.
