



Speech by

Hon. WENDY EDMOND

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard 11 November 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

James Cook University Medical School

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha— ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.48 a.m.), by leave: I rise today to clearly and unambiguously state this Government's position in relation to the establishment of a medical school at James Cook University in Townsville. Unlike the previous Government and, in particular, my predecessor in the Health portfolio, this Government is 100% committed to the establishment of the JCU medical school.

I have said on many occasions that the creation of a medical school in north Queensland has been a long-term proposition. Indeed, the people of Townsville have been waiting 25 years for a medical school, since it was first proposed by the then Federal Labor Government. Most recently, the impetus for the Commonwealth was the result of a Keating initiative announced during the 1996 Federal election campaign. The question is now whether the Howard Government will stand by its election commitment for a medical school in Townsville. Perhaps that commitment depends on whether or not it is a "core" election promise.

While the Federal Government vacillates behind the scenes, this Government can prove its commitment to the JCU medical school. Firstly, we have already allocated \$2m of our \$10m election pledge in the 1998-99 budget towards the establishment of the JCU medical school. The remaining \$8m will be allocated in the 1999-2000 financial year. Secondly, I have called for this Thursday, 12 November 1998 another meeting of the key stakeholders—that is JCU, the University of Queensland, Queensland Health, Education Queensland and the Commonwealth Departments of Health and Education, Training and Youth Affairs—to get this issue resolved once and for all.

Having first written to the Minister for Health and Family Services, Dr Wooldridge, on 2 July 1998 seeking clarification of the Federal Government's intentions, I have been increasingly frustrated by the lack of clarification of the Commonwealth's stance on the establishment of a JCU medical school. I am pleased that I have finally managed to get something happening. This will be the very first time that all the key stakeholders have come together to progress the issue.

I note with some amusement that my predecessor has been in the press of late haranguing me over my supposed lack of commitment to the creation of a medical school at JCU. "Headlines" Horan is grandstanding yet again. This is just one of many issues that he displayed no commitment to resolving during the two years that he was in charge of the Health portfolio. Now he is out pretending to be JCU's best friend and advocate. Where was he on this matter during his two years of stewardship of Queensland Health?

As I indicated, I will be holding a meeting of the key stakeholders this Thursday. I hope that the Federal Government does not pull out again this time. The excuses that the Federal Government has been using for pulling out are wearing thin and we really cannot afford further delays.

There are many issues which need to be resolved. These include the provision and funding of student places; determination of the type of course to be offered, be it graduate or undergraduate; timelines for the establishment of a fully fledged medical school; and identification of appropriate transition arrangements which will support a smooth creation. In terms of what type of course is offered, I have an open mind on the matter, but I am committed to resolving these issues. I am not content to allow the Commonwealth to continue to fudge around the issue and give responses which raise more

questions than they answer. Contrary to the public statements of the Federal member for Herbert, Mr Peter Lindsay, the only written commitment from the Howard Government has been—

"From 1999 the University of Queensland will be allocated by the Commonwealth an additional 20 conditionally funded places which must be located at the Townsville Clinical School."

It goes on—

"In the longer term, should a full medical school evolve at James Cook University, the Commonwealth would work with Queensland to identify the initial and recurrent funding requirements ..."

The key words here are "should a full medical school evolve". I think this clearly shows who lacks the commitment to the JCU medical school, and it is not the Queensland Labor Government. I have been concerned at the ongoing debate about the establishment of a medical school at JCU and the apparent inability of the key players to work together on this. I am acting to make sure that the JCU medical school is not still being discussed for another 25 years.
