



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND; GATTON COLLEGE

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.09 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I second the motion. As the member for Crows Nest has outlined, this motion is positive and is a proactive attempt to end the uncertainty surrounding the future of Gatton college and to secure its position as an international centre of excellence in agriculture.

It is of considerable concern that Gatton even finds itself in this situation. As an already internationally recognised tertiary institution, Gatton college should be building on its strengths and moving on to even higher levels. Seven professional studies have shown that. Instead, student numbers and facilities have been gradually run down, to the point at which the viability of the college is questionable. The studs have gone, the paddocks have been leased off and the business and hospitality courses will go at the end of this year.

Although it is true that the University of Queensland Senate manages the activities of the campus—that will inevitably be thrown up by Government members tonight as the reason for their inactivity—the Queensland Government and the State of Queensland have a huge investment in the future of Gatton college. We have seen what this college has done for this State in its 100-year history. It is time that the Queensland Government took a leading role in realising the potential of this great educational investment.

As the member for Crows Nest has pointed out, the established plan for Gatton to become an international centre for excellence in agriculture has been around for some years but, in recent times, has met with opposition. That opposition seems to revolve around the reluctance to relocate the agricultural science faculty and the veterinary science faculty from St Lucia to Gatton college. A whole range of diverse reasons has been put forward, from the reluctance of staff to move from St Lucia to Gatton campus or even to commute, to the dependence of these facilities on others at the St Lucia campus—and in the case of the veterinary school, its historic ties with Pinjarra Hills—and to the claim that Gatton does not have sufficient numbers of animals or livestock. Most of these problems are easily surmountable.

Gatton is but a short trip from the western suburbs of Brisbane. It is an hour from the centre of Brisbane and a half hour from Ipswich and Toowoomba. With an investment in improving the facilities at Gatton college through projects such as the animal health institute, it could be up with the best in the world. It has some of the best land in Queensland. For some years, it has been recognised as one of the greatest sites anywhere in this State for an institution of this scale. It is not subject to the increasing urbanisation of Brisbane and it is close to major towns and cities that can provide small-animal, dairy, piggery, horse stud and horticulture facilities. You name it, it is there, virtually within walking distance.

We have heard a lot of rhetoric from the Beattie Government regarding jobs and regional development and its so-called commitment. However, if it cannot give some decent support to this institution, it is clearly a can't do Government. While the Beattie Government maintained the commitment of the former coalition Government to boosting Queensland's biotechnology research and development capacity, we have not seen the same commitment to rolling out some sort of research and development initiatives outside the south-east corner. As a centre of excellence, the Gatton college offers this unique opportunity. Here is the Government's chance. Queensland depends on our primary industries and will always do so.

The vision of the former coalition Government to establish the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications in Toowoomba is putting us on the world map in terms of climate research and extension. Queensland now has an opportunity to put itself on the world map in terms of agriculture and veterinary research development, extension and education, and that opportunity lies on the outskirts of Brisbane halfway between Brisbane and Toowoomba at Gatton college. The Beattie Government should take the issue out of the too-hard basket and show some vision and give a real commitment to rural Queensland.

Primary industries are encountering the same sorts of graduate shortages that we have seen with respect to shortages of doctors in the bush. Veterinary students from the bush and those going back to practise in the bush after graduating are becoming increasingly scarce. Agricultural scientists are in demand. It is time for the Beattie Government to deliver on its rhetoric and show some real, solid commitment. The State Government has influence over the university. It controls its Act and some of its funding. It is time to urge the University of Queensland Senate to see the potential of this college.

The leadership of Professor Hay is vital. Previously, he has made some strong comments in support of the Gatton campus. With good, strong leadership, a vision for the future and an understanding of this true icon of the Queensland rural community, we will realise this once-in-a-lifetime chance. The staff of that institution, its location and teaching facilities are second to none. Universities around the world would fall over themselves to have a facility and an opportunity such as this. But this initiative needs Government support, and we demand that that support be given.

Time expired.
