



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (5.49 p.m.): I rise to support this legislation that was introduced by the Minister for Training and Industrial Relations, the Honourable Paul Braddy. I wish to address a particularly important aspect of the training infrastructure in Queensland, and that is the important role played by agricultural colleges in this State.

Members will be aware that I have the privilege of having two such colleges in my electorate—one in Longreach and one in Emerald. The other two colleges are located at Dalby and in the Burdekin. Those colleges play a vital role in the training of young people who want to enter agricultural industry. Today, I want to place on record the magnificent work that has been and is being done by those colleges and will be done in the future. An important fact to remember is that these colleges provide young Queenslanders and other young Australians with the opportunity to be trained to a very high, professional level in the art of management and all other facets of agriculture. I pay tribute to the Director of the Longreach Pastoral College, Dr Frank Keenan, the Director of the Emerald Pastoral College, Mr Mal Binnington, and their respective boards, which operate under the chairmanship of Wally Miller for the Longreach college board and Mrs Dyan Hughes for the Emerald college board.

As I said, those two colleges have played a vital role in the training of young people in agriculture over a long period. The important thing to remember is the diverse skills that these colleges instil in these young people and the opportunities that these young people are given through their presence at these institutions. Back in December 1989 when I became the member for Gregory, I visited the Longreach Pastoral College and saw the opportunities that are available to these young people to familiarise themselves with all facets of the pastoral industry. I believe that those young people can learn at those colleges in two years what took me 20 years to learn. I think that those colleges present wonderful opportunities for young people.

I salute the Government for its apprenticeship scheme. I know that in many ways that scheme has copped a fair bit of flak, but we are talking about young people and it is absolutely paramount that we recognise that it is our responsibility, no matter on which side of the House we sit, to provide them with a future. I believe that young people are our most important natural resource. It is our responsibility to make absolutely certain, no matter what field they want to enter, that we give them the opportunity to do so.

Since about 1965, agricultural colleges have been providing essential vocational education training for the State's rural sector. These colleges were an initiative of the former coalition Government and have had a very positive impact upon the professionalism of various occupations that are critical for the future development of rural industries. We know that in recent times some of those rural industries have been going through trying times. We know of the hardship that is being experienced by the sugar industry in the Burdekin. We also know about the developing fruit industry in that region. I know when I was Minister for Transport and Main Roads—and this is going back a couple of years—it was considered important that we upgrade the road infrastructure of that region so that we could develop that industry.

The magnificent value of these agricultural colleges lies in the fact that they are located in four totally different rural districts. Young people—not just young people from Queensland but young people

Australia-wide— can take advantage of the unique training skills and the unique career paths that these institutions offer. The Emerald Pastoral College offers wide-ranging training in horticulture, cotton cropping, the grain industry and the cattle industry to allow young people to take our agricultural industries further into the 21st century. The Dalby Pastoral College deals mainly with grain. The Longreach Pastoral College deals with the wool industry. I know that currently the wool industry is going through trying times. However, we still have young men and women who want to give their total commitment to that industry, and I believe that we have to give them a total commitment in return.

As I say, these four colleges give young people a qualification that will enable them to understand our agricultural regions and the difficulties that they face. I want to take this opportunity to touch on a couple of very contentious issues. Last Thursday evening in this Parliament, I referred to the plight of the wool industry. Currently, the wool industry is trying to take itself out of a dilemma. However, the industry was told by the Federal Government to take control of its own agenda and put in place an operation that will take it out of the wilderness and into the clouds above. During my contribution last Thursday evening, I said people such as Warren Truss, Mr Costello and John Howard, the Prime Minister, were not listening. I think that Governments, politicians and communities at large are going to fail if they are not going to listen to the needs of people, and the people involved in the wool industry are no exception. The people in the sugar industry are also no exception. Those industries face hardship.

I also want to touch on the fruit and vegetable industry. The glassy winged shooter moth could be imported into this country through the importation of grapes. Grape growing is an integral part of the Emerald irrigation area, which is a developing agricultural area. It is absolutely paramount that the Government—and I am not talking about the State Government; I am talking about the Federal Government—realises the consequences of ludicrous, irresponsible policy decisions that act to the detriment of those agricultural industries.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (3.27 p.m.), continuing: I will continue with my speech from last evening when the debate was adjourned at 6 o'clock. I got off the track a little bit, but I was talking about the young people who attend pastoral colleges throughout Queensland and the importance of not only what they learn while they are there but what they learn about particular industries. I talked about the Longreach Pastoral College, which deals mainly with the wool industry. They also have a very specialised cattle industry section. The students also learn horsemanship as well as managerial and maintenance procedures in relation to property management. There is a whole host of issues that young people are taught in those pastoral colleges.

I congratulate the former Government and the current Government on maintaining those schools. It is absolutely paramount that we have those institutions where young people can gain skills. I was reading only the other day, I think in the latest edition of Queensland Country Life, that more young women are now working in the pastoral industry than ever before. A lot of young women who attend these colleges go on to bigger and better things. It is a fantastic concept, and I will talk a bit more about that in a moment.

Last Saturday His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, Major General Peter Arnison, and his wife, Barbara, attended the Springsure show. The Governor referred to the guard of honour that was provided for him by Emerald Pastoral College students on horseback. Those students were all young ladies. The way that they presented themselves and the way that the horses were presented is a true reflection of the quality of student that these colleges are turning out. At the end of the day, it is all about the presentation, what they learn and the in-depth briefings that they receive.

I also want to specifically acknowledge the interest taken in these agricultural colleges by the former Minister for Industrial Relations, the member for Clayfield, who was responsible for restructuring these institutions by reshaping the structure of the management of the boards of the colleges to make them responsive to the needs of stakeholders and to be accountable for their management decisions. He was the Minister who also provided additional funding to supplement the enterprise bargaining arrangements and to reinstate the losses that had been incurred by the colleges when they did not receive annual escalation funds over a number of years, principally the years of the Goss Labor Government. I note that the amendments before the House today are designed to introduce a number of reforms in the training framework. These reforms include an audit program for training providers and proper processes for the introduction of training programs.

Another reform is the introduction of new streamlined and administrative arrangements for apprenticeships and traineeships. I touched on that subject last evening as well. I saluted the current Minister for the program he has put in place in relation to apprenticeships. This is absolutely vital to the young people of this State. Too much emphasis is put on academia today. Many young men and women can take advantage of trade skills—whether they be carpenters, plumbers, welders—in these different fields. It is absolutely paramount that we get more people into these areas of expertise. I know that the current Minister is working hard to make sure this becomes a reality. At the end of the day, as I

said in the House last evening, it is our absolute responsibility to make sure that young people are looked after and that we create the channels whereby they can access these different professions.

I have one concern to raise with the Minister. The area of training is becoming a bureaucratic nightmare. I am concerned that some of the processes are becoming more and more complex and are developing a language all of their own. I know there are complications. Some people in the community are not too sure about the right way to go down this path. That is something I want to talk to the Minister about later. Even though these complexities are there, I really believe that we can work our way around them. A lot of the confusion is probably misinformation and misunderstanding. Similar complexities are being faced by industries trying to get training programs established. There is misunderstanding. It is an issue that needs to be resolved.

The industry training advisory bodies and the Australian National Training Authority process are becoming a barrier to the development of relevant training. I hasten to say to the Minister that much of this problem of complexity derives from the Federal level and has been developing for some time. I have a real fear that some of the complexities associated with curriculum development are used as a barrier to prevent the development of training programs in what should be a competitive training market. While I note the Minister's intention to make this training framework more flexible, I fear that his honourable intentions are being sabotaged by vested self-interests making the process harder to understand. Those complexities should be analysed.

Any member who has tried to comprehend this complex legislation before the House today will get a pretty fair idea of how complex this training function has become. The member for Clayfield, the shadow Minister for industrial relations, has specifically detailed some of these complexities in his speech in the debate. I share his concern at the complexity of this legislation and some of the anomalies such as matters which seem to be at variance with the national training framework. Those anomalies seem to put in place a closed-shop mentality, directly the opposite effect the Minister has claimed is the intention of this legislation. I therefore propose to listen carefully to the Minister's summary and response to the specific items raised by the shadow Minister. If, as I suspect, the Minister fails to give satisfactory explanations, I shall be supporting appropriate amendments.

There is another issue I want to touch on in relation to the colleges in question. The instructors at these colleges are wonderful people. They do a grand job. More emphasis should be placed on their expertise and on not only the work they do whilst teaching the students but also their efforts made to these magnificent institutions in their own time. They are concerned about the welfare of the students. They are concerned about the families of the students. I applaud the boards also. They consist of caring people. I believe the boards have played a very significant role in making these colleges work to date and have looked at ways of finding more creative activities for new courses at these colleges. As I said before, that is something that both Governments can take credit and kudos for. At the end of the day, these are programs in different specialist fields with an emphasis on training young people. Those young people are certainly going to be the leaders in agriculture in years to come.

There is another issue I want to touch on. There is a fair amount of angst in the community at the moment in relation to staffing at some TAFE colleges in my area. Even though the Bill specifically relates to the central region, there is uncertainty at the TAFE college in Emerald in relation to some of the casual staff or semi-permanent staff. This issue is causing a great deal of angst to people in the area, which incorporates Rockhampton and Gladstone. It is something that I hope the Minister can address. This uncertainty in relation to staffing is certainly not going to be beneficial to the people, no matter who they are, who want to take advantage of these courses.

The other issue in particular I want to touch on today relating to the Longreach Pastoral College is the continuation of a program that the former Minister, the honourable Santo Santoro, put in place when Minister, that is, the new dormitories for the Longreach Pastoral College. I have to thank the Minister for making that program become a reality. That is certainly going to be of very great benefit to that college and its students. In western areas of the State like Longreach, the summer nights get pretty hot.

Mr Santoro: It's 45 degrees or 50 degrees in some of those dormitories.

Mr JOHNSON: Absolutely. They were like ovens, as the honourable member for Clayfield has just said. I know that the Minister understands that as well. As Mr Santoro just said, people could not live in the male dormitories at night. The female dormitories have a very antiquated air conditioning unit. Therefore, this project is a fantastic achievement. I acknowledge that those new dormitories are now in the process of being built. That is certainly going to complement that college in order for it to go on to bigger and better things for the young people who want to derive benefit from the pastoral industry in that part of the world.

In supporting this legislation, whilst I have raised areas of concern in relation to the complexities of some issues, I congratulate the Minister for making sure that some of the programs were continued. At the end of the day, if we can work together to highlight some of these anomalies, we can reach greater goals in all these institutions, whether they be pastoral colleges or TAFE institutions.