



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 7 August 2002

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (12.54 p.m.): The Agricultural Colleges Amendment Bill will make a number of important amendments to the Agricultural Colleges Act 1994 to enhance the delivery of vocational education and training in Queensland rural communities. I want to touch base regarding the exhibition, which starts tomorrow, and its impact on rural communities and city communities. I endorse the minister's earlier comments and sentiments today that the 10-day event is a brilliant opportunity for all Queenslanders to celebrate when the city meets the country. I am extremely proud of my uncle Warren Cummins, the well-respected ringmaster of the exhibition. Warren and Noela are great hosts along with all RNA council members to parliamentary members from both sides of this House. I know that they share the friendship of many members opposite as well as members on this side.

I have been an Ekka addict from a very young age. When I attended St Joseph's school at North Ipswich we came to the Ekka as an adventure for the day. It was a marvellous opportunity. Although Ipswich is not that far from Brisbane, the train trip and all those things were great for young schoolchildren to experience. I would encourage all Queenslanders to get along to the Ekka. Like members opposite and members on our side, I also strongly applaud the free entry given to foster children this year. It has already been put on the record, but I believe that Colin Meagher is doing a marvellous job. It is a great thing to ensure that the underprivileged get the opportunity.

The legislative amendments of the Agricultural Colleges Amendment Bill 2002 reinforce the fact that vocational education and training programs and the state's public training providers are evolving with the changing needs of industry. The Queensland government is committed to providing Queensland's regional and rural communities with the skills necessary to ensure the continued prosperity of our state's rural industry. The Beattie Labor government has made significant improvements to the vocational education and training system so that all Queenslanders can be assured of industry-relevant training that leads to real jobs in our community.

The Queensland government recognises the importance of equipping young people with the skills necessary to lead fulfilling working lives. But that is only part of the picture. Our government also recognises that caring for and supporting students throughout their vocational education enhances their professional development and improves their job prospects in later life. I believe that this government will be remembered in a very positive sense for ensuring that Queenslanders have equitable access to training and education following the most comprehensive reforms in 40 years.

The fact that more than 90 per cent of full-time students obtain employment or continue on to higher level studies upon graduation from an agricultural college in Queensland is a marvellous result indeed for all those involved. We must offer training that matches the immediate and future skill demands of prospective employers and the diverse employment aspirations of its students. The Queensland government sees this shift as a timely opportunity to enhance training opportunities throughout rural Queensland. I commend the minister, his parliamentary secretary, all relevant department staff and the bill.