



Speech by

Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Tuesday, 13 March 2007

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (QUEENSLAND) BILL

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (2.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Australian Catholic University (Queensland) Bill 2006. Clause 3 states—

The main purposes of this Act are to—

- (a) recognise the Australian Catholic University as a university; and
- (b) facilitate its operation in Queensland.

This bill is not a long bill. In fact, it is only about eight pages long, but members of the public should not underestimate its importance. As the minister stated in his second reading speech—

For some time the Australian Catholic University has argued that Queensland legislation is important for several reasons. Principally, the university contends a separate state act is imperative for institutional status and comparability. It would also put the university on a more equal footing with the eight Queensland institutions which enjoy their own dedicated state acts.

I note the opposition's support for this bill, but it would have been good to see a few more members from the opposition side speaking to it. As a young student who attended St Mary's Catholic College many years ago, I recall that upon graduation a lot of my fellow classmates went on to attend what was then the McAuley campus at Mitchelton to undertake either a teaching course or a nursing course. In fact, recently at the 20-year reunion of my graduation my friends still talked fondly about their days at McAuley College. I am also pleased to report that my cousin, Rachela, also graduated in nursing from McAuley College and went on to complete a Bachelor of Education there. So my family has strong links with the university.

Like the member for Ashgrove, my electorate also has a very strong Catholic community, with St Mark's at Inala and the Darra-Jindalee Catholic School. Both schools are very well attended and provide students with an excellent all-round education. Indeed, the Australian Catholic University provides a very, very high standard of education. Its web site states—

One of our primary goals is to provide an excellent higher education experience for the entirety of our student body, through upholding the principles of free enquiry and academic integrity. In doing so, we aim to provide teaching, research and community engagement activities that are valued by our students, and the communities in which we live and work.

Today, modern universities need to cater for all students by providing them with an education that they can utilise in their future professions. Therefore, it is very important that we recognise the no-religious discrimination provision that is contained in clause 12, part 4 of the bill under 'Miscellaneous'. The explanatory notes state—

Given that the university is open to all students and staff, regardless of their beliefs and backgrounds, it is appropriate that the university should not be able to use the exemption in section 41 of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991.

Clause 12 sets out that position by stating that section 41 of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 does not apply to allow the university to discriminate in the area of education by excluding an applicant for admission as a student who is not of a particular religion. I think it is appropriate that the bill contains this provision. To restate words of the minister—

This will ensure the student population of the University will continue to be representative of the broader community.

I would like to thank the minister for taking this important step in bringing this bill to the House. I commend the bill to the House.