



Speech by

Mandy Johnstone

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Tuesday, 6 October 2009

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JOHNSTONE (Townsville—ALP) (9.07 pm): I also rise to speak in support of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill and the Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill. I want to make a couple of points in relation to the James Cook University Act, but before I do so I also want to support the comments made by the member for Everton in relation to the changes to child care. As the mother of a child in child care, it is very important to me to be able to make informed choices about the level of care that my child receives, and I support those amendments.

The Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill makes a range of amendments to legislation administered by the Department of Education and Training to remove redundant provisions, correct deficiencies or omissions and clarify existing provisions. It includes a number of amendments to the James Cook University Act. James Cook University is one of the world's leading institutions that focuses on the tropics. It might be surprising to some to learn, but the tropics are home to more than 50 per cent of the world's population and 80 per cent of its biodiversity. James Cook University is uniquely placed in its location to allow students to study in a diverse physical environment that is unparalleled by any university in the world. The university conducts nationally significant and internationally recognised research into marine science, biodiversity, tropical ecology, global warming, tourism, tropical medicine and public health, particularly in the areas of underserved populations. Since its establishment in 1970, JCU has expanded into a multicampus institution, with large campuses in Townsville and Cairns and smaller centres in Mount Isa, Thursday Island and Mackay and campuses in Singapore and here in Brisbane.

The relevant amendments in this bill are designed to achieve the following: streamline the university's processes relating to the election of convocation members of the council of the university whilst safeguarding the rights of the convocation members to vote should they opt to do so; extend the maximum term of office of the chairperson of the academic board from two years to three years; and clarify that the powers of both authorised persons and security officers may be limited under a condition of appointment, or by written notice of the vice-chancellor given to the authorised person or security officer. The bill also makes other minor amendments.

Clause 41 of the bill amends section 15 of the James Cook University Act. Currently section 15 provides that all the members of the convocation may vote for the two members of the university council who are members of the convocation. According to the JCU statute that sets out information about the convocation, this includes graduates, members and past members of the council, members of the academic staff and general staff who have been employed at the university for at least two years continuously as at the date of commencement of the statute and who indicate that they wish to be members of the convocation, and other persons who accept an invitation from the council to become members of the convocation.

Presently the university is required to send voting material to all convocation members regardless of whether they wish to vote. This imposes significant costs on the university. The amendment will provide that each convocation member of council is to be elected by a ballot at which all the persons eligible under

a university statute may vote. A statute will then provide that only those convocation members who indicate that they wish to be an active member of the convocation for the purpose of receiving voting papers are eligible to vote. This amendment will reduce the costs of conducting convocation elections whilst safeguarding the right of convocation members to vote should they opt to do so.

Clause 44 amends the JCU Act to clarify that the council may make a university statute about the membership of the convocation and the voting rights of members of the convocation. This amendment and the amendment to subsection 15 in this bill will materially align the JCU Act with the authorising acts for the other two Queensland universities that elect graduate members onto their governing bodies; namely, the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland.

Clause 42 is aimed at clarifying the government's position for the university. It puts beyond doubt that the deputy chancellor is to act as chancellor when there is a vacancy in the office of the chancellor or the chancellor cannot perform the functions of the office. Clause 43 provides that the chairperson of the academic board holds office for the term, not longer than three years, decided by the council. This longer term will be consistent with the three-year academic plan cycle and otherwise optimise the effective contribution of that chairperson. The proposal for a term not longer than three years is also consistent with the equivalent term for most other Queensland university academic boards.

Whilst relatively technical in nature, these amendments are important to the effective and efficient operation of a highly regarded, world-class educational and research institution in North Queensland. We need to support our universities. Every dollar counts. Being able to make these minor amendments will allow universities such as JCU to undertake groundbreaking enterprises. Just last week JCU launched a \$21 million cooling project that it is now able to cool its different campuses with. This investment will cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to 12,000 tonnes per year, which is the equivalent of taking 2,600 cars off the road. I am pleased to be part of a government that supports our educational institutions to involve themselves in these kinds of progressive and environmentally sustainable initiatives. It is for that reason that this bill should receive the full support of members of this parliament and I commend the bills to the House.