



Speech by

**Michael Crandon**

**MEMBER FOR COOMERA**

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## **EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (5.58 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate incorporating the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 and the Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill amends the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, the Child Care Act 2002, the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002 and the University of Queensland Act 1998. One of the policy objectives of the bill is to amend the Child Care Act 2002 to enable the publication of certain information about child-care services that contravene the act—the use of a stick, if you like, to ensure compliance. I certainly understand that of the many, many child-care facilities right across this state there are very few issues that come forward, but they do no doubt come forward. I accept that there is a need for a control device, something sufficient to keep the child-care industry in check to ensure that there is no contravention. That stick is probably warranted in a few cases.

I point out that at this time the industry is stressed over issues around competition. Unfortunately, that competition comes from the government through its plan to locate 240 new kindergartens on school grounds. I understand that currently about 20 kindergartens have been situated on school grounds but it is still to be determined where the other 220 will go. No doubt some of those facilities are needed, and I support and acknowledge that. However, they are not needed when existing private facilities are located nearby. This is the concern expressed to me by my constituents who run day care and child-care centres. I am sure many members—I would not be on my own—have had people from the child-care industry talk to them at length about having another 240 competitors coming into the industry. Of course, the danger is that some of those new centres will be built near existing child-care facilities.

I wish to point out that this is not about profit; it is about profitability. Some people have invested fairly heavily in those facilities and for them this is about survival. People from a wide range of areas—not just from the for-profit organisations but also from the not-for-profit organisations such as church groups that have decided to take on these sorts of facilities to provide a service to the community—have indicated to me that this is about their survival. Those organisations have indicated that, once they face greater competition and have to move into the education framework, the cost per child going forward will be something like \$20 a day per child. That cost has to be borne by someone. At the end of the day, child-care facilities are not a licence to print money. Not by any stretch of the imagination are they in a position to absorb that sort of cost per child per day. Therefore, that cost has to be passed on to the parents.

I am not sure they are going to be entirely happy about that. Of course, in turn that causes the families to give consideration to where to send their children. Perhaps they will take the cheaper route and move their children to the new facilities on school grounds and find some other way of filling the gap. There is pressure either way. There is pressure on the existing facility to absorb an additional \$20 per child per day, and there is a pressure created by the increased numbers of children wanting to access the new facilities. Parents will have to give consideration to the quality of the care versus the cost and the affordability of the care.

On that basis, I urge the minister and the government not to build new centres around existing facilities. In the state electorate of Coomera, down the road from my office is the Coomera State School and I know of two child-care centres within 500 metres of that school. It would beggar belief if the government built another child-care facility, calling it a young child education facility, on the school grounds which would then compete directly with two existing facilities that are not 100 per cent full. Not by any stretch of the imagination are they so full that they cannot take more children. For goodness sake, I ask the government to give serious consideration to where those new facilities are going to be placed.

I ask the government to be very selective and provide the physical facility where it is needed. The member for Callide talked about country areas. I implore the government to give serious consideration to providing facilities in areas in the country where a facility is not already available and give them a break in that respect. In some towns a for-profit or not-for-profit child-care facility would struggle to make ends meet. Even not-for-profit facilities have to cover their budget and their costs. I ask the government to give consideration to placing facilities in such areas, thus giving 3½- to 4½-year-olds early education opportunities in the country.

For a moment, let us give consideration to that point and think about where we are going with this and what we are achieving. I put it to the government that this is a partnership. We need to think about current child-care facilities and proposed government child-care facilities working in partnership with the government. That partnership can be a win for all concerned. I will explore that idea.

The government would win by saving the cost of infrastructure in areas where services are already being provided. If child-care facilities already exist in an area, there is no point in building new infrastructure just because the school has room for that infrastructure to be built. The cost of that infrastructure could be redeployed and spent somewhere else, such as in a country area. Alternatively, perhaps we do not need to build 240 new facilities; perhaps we need to build only 180 and could save the cost of building 60 facilities where child-care facilities are already in place.

The existing child-care facilities would win by not losing a large tranche of the children that they need to retain in order to be viable. This relates to both the for-profit privately owned facilities as well as the church based not-for-profit organisations. Earlier I spoke about the need for those facilities to remain viable in the changing times that are ahead of us.

Our young children would win by being able to stay at the centre that they have always gone to. This is a very important point that also relates to child-care facility operators. The infants and younger children that they look after actually cost them money. They make up that money as time goes on and the children get older. Then the child-care facility can make a profit sufficient to cover the losses incurred when the children were younger. That is because far more people are required to look after infants and smaller children than older children. I think the ratio of children to carer is 11 to one in the 3½- to 4½-year age group. Therefore, that 3½- to 4½-year age group is vitally important to the profitability of child-care facilities.

The facility is also important to the children who have been attending it, in some cases since they were infants. I know of recent cases where mums have faced the burden of having to go back into employment after having three months off with their babies. They would love a lot more time with their babies, but economic circumstances demand that they go back to work. From about three months of age young babies can attend child-care facilities and, of course, they grow up in those facilities with all their mates. They roll around the floor together and smile at each other. As time goes on, they start waddling around together, falling over each other and having a bit of fun that way. Some of those children would go through a bit of trauma if they had to move to an educational facility at 3½ years of age. Therefore, it would be a win for those children. They would be able to stay in the facility that they are used to. One could imagine that then they would all go on to prep and school. If they had a good memory, they would be able to say, 'We've been mates since we were two.'

Our young children win by having the facility available to them in the centre. The parents win because they do not have to find ways to move their children between facilities. I am not sure that this has been thought about too much. We are talking about 15 hours of education being provided to a 3½- to 4½-year-old through the week. That is all very well if that is provided in a facility in the school grounds. However, what do we do with them then? Where do they go? Do they toddle off to the child-care facility 500 yards down the road? If that is the case, how do they get there? Who looks after them while they travel to that other facility? Does mum or dad have to come along and pick them up and take them there? These are the things—

**Ms Male** interjected.

**Mr CRANDON:** I take the interjection.

**Ms Male** interjected.

**Mr CRANDON:** But what about if you are at work? I take the member's interjection, but there is a reason these child-care facilities are there and there is a reason people have to go to work, which is that

they have a commitment to bring home the bacon. All of these things need to be well and truly thought through. Serious consideration needs to be given to where these new facilities will be placed relative to other child-care facilities. I commend the bill to the House.