



Speech by

**Mark Ryan**

**MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD**

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## **AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (4.09 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As indicated by the Minister for Primary Industries in his second reading speech, the key purpose of this bill is to amend the Agricultural College Act particularly to address issues relating to the need for strong corporate governance of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. Industry consultation during the dialogue for action indicated that industry felt disenfranchised from the AACC.

Further, a number of operational assessments indicated that the AACC has experienced declining student numbers and reduced profitability due to drought and competition from other industry sectors. There is also a view that the AACC business model is not optimised to meet the training needs of industry and the training markets that now exist in Queensland. Without reform, there is a real risk that the AACC would become unsustainable. This would be a monstrous tragedy for our rural communities, the agricultural training industry and agriculture in Queensland more generally. We must act now with a genuine view to reform to support the AACC. This bill achieves that objective of reform.

As a corporation sole formed from the amalgamation of four separate agricultural colleges in 2005, the AACC has had an advisory board for many years but with limited powers and a restricted scope of influence. As stated, the bill seeks to change this by broadening the range of matters the board can advise on, including the corporation's strategic direction, operational, administrative and financial policies, as well as other issues that may affect the AACC.

It is important that the board has a wide mandate in terms of the issues that it can advise the AACC executive and corporation sole on and that it is supported by and engaged with industry. This new board, provisioned with an expanded scope, will play a key role in reinvigorating the AACC into a more industry relevant and sustainable organisation. The board will be independent and industry led, consisting of between five and eight members drawn from a formal selection process. To ensure all appointments are made fairly and equitably, a three-person selection panel will be established to consider all applications received and to interview a short list of candidates.

The selection panel will be chaired by a member from the AACC Industry Consultative Committee, which was established in 2009 as an interim measure to oversight the activities of the AACC until such time as the board was put into place. The other two positions will be filled by representatives from the AACC's host agency—the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation—and its primary grant funding provider, the Department of Education and Training.

The selection panel will be looking for Queensland candidates from a range of backgrounds, particularly those with skills, knowledge and expertise in one or more of the following: primary production, education and training, financial matters or other interests relevant to the operations of the AACC. From the short-listed candidates, the selection panel will make a recommendation to the minister on the

proposed composition of the board. The minister will have the final approval on the board's composition and appointment.

Increasing the influence and relevance of the board of the AACC is an important first step in progressing the AACC and reconnecting it with the needs of industry. As the minister alluded to, the AACC has fallen on rough times over the past few years, suffering from a steady decline in student enrolment numbers and a consequent continued reporting of poor overall financial performance. While the decline in student numbers is a result of numerous factors, one fact was prevalent throughout the minister's consultation with industry in mid-2009: the AACC needed to reconnect with industry to start delivering training products and services tailored to the sector's needs.

The creation of this new independent advisory board, strongly led and voiced by industry representatives, will ensure that the corporation does not repeat history but remains connected with the rural and related industries and its constantly evolving demands for flexible skilling products and services. This bill represents the start of a new future for the AACC. By giving the AACC the strong governance it needs, the AACC will once again become the provider of choice for the rural and related industries. I commend the bill to the House.