



Speech by

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AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (4.02 pm): In speaking to the Agricultural College and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I speak for the current and future generations of those who have chosen to build a life and a career that relates to agriculture and who expect to attend a first-class learning institution. The bill changes the name of the existing board from the Australian Agricultural College Corporatisation Advisory Board to the Board of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. The functions of the board will be expanded and the board will consist of five to eight members appointed by the minister. Previously there was no specific required number of board members. There are also guidelines pertaining to the suitability of board members and their conduct.

As the shadow minister for primary industries indicated earlier in relation to the Labor Party removing the boards from the agricultural colleges, we can see the devastation that removing hospital boards has caused in the past, especially in rural and regional Queensland, when back in 1985 we had maternity services and medical services in our local hospitals. Local board members were very important to those communities. Those on the boards were people whose mums would attend the hospitals and whose children would attend the hospitals. It is the same with those who were on the boards of the agricultural colleges. There was a lot of passion because family members attended those colleges through the generations. We can see the problems caused to the agricultural industry after the wiping out of those boards. It is likewise with the hospitals.

An amendment allowing and extending the employment of overseas trained veterinary surgeons and specialists is also welcome. This amendment allows the Veterinary Surgeons Board to grant special registration to overseas trained vets employed by the University of Queensland or James Cook University. However, the direction in which this government is heading to close down, sell or drastically cut back on the provision of a first-class agricultural college is a disgrace. We are continually seeing this.

I thank the minister for accommodating us and allowing me and the previous shadow minister for primary industries to visit the Kairi Research Station and the Walkamin Research Station. We could see the low morale of the staff. We could see that the Kairi Research Station was starved of funds. It was not fully accommodated and it was not functioning to its full capacity. Likewise, it had a 200-head dairy herd. If it were functioning to its full capacity, if a bit of money and support were injected into the Kairi Research Station, it could have been self-sufficient.

Mr Hopper: The only tropical dairy herd in Australia.

Mr KNUTH: That is right. It was the only tropical dairy herd in Australia. Those on the other side of the House might say that it is a good thing to close it down, but I cannot understand their logic.

Mr Hopper: Cows sold for \$3,000 a head. That is why they closed it down.

Mr KNUTH: \$3,000 a head and prime agricultural land. On top of this, in an area that has a high volume of rainfall each year, heavy dew and continuous drizzle, that research station was very important for research and extension. The area from Kairi to The Jump Up, halfway between Atherton and Mareeba,

has completely different rainfall. To say that research and extension will cover the Tablelands area from Mareeba is completely outrageous and ridiculous. There are still a lot of people up there who are angry that the last remaining dairy herd was sold off at Kairi Research Station.

Instead of maintaining and updating our agricultural college campuses to equal the best in the country, the government has consigned them to the shelf marked 'irrelevant'. Yet this is all about equipping employees in primary industries to take their place with world's best practice, having been exposed to the latest technologies, techniques, research and hands-on experience, including research and development. This is about making sure that our college offers first-class accommodation on campus so that students and families feel confident that students are safe and able to concentrate on the task at hand. This is all about recognising that Australia's future does not depend upon boardrooms in some city skyscraper but upon the productivity of the land which will provide for those who live and work in the cities.

Agricultural college campuses in Queensland are an endangered species when they should be a flourishing breed of vibrant learning institutions offering up-to-date, diverse courses that are adaptable to the current needs of the industry—courses that reflect industry demands. Each college campus is designed to reflect the agricultural industry in that area. For example, the Longreach campus provides theory and hands-on experience in the sheep, wool and cattle industries. The Burdekin campus exposes students to the sugarcane and cattle industries. When first established, this campus also offered courses in basic machine operation and welding. In view of the lack of training facilities that offer this instruction, it would make sense to not only maintain the Burdekin campus but also expand its curriculum to include these subjects once more. The Mareeba campus is in the same situation. It is starved of funds and there is no certainty.

We are tired of hearing the minister's unrealistic spin on a 'fresh approach' and more services via the internet when blind Freddy can see that a first-class curriculum, integrating theory with hands-on experience at the campus offering exposure to the industry of choice for the student, is the backbone of pastoral industries.