




Speech by

Ian Rickuss

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

Hansard Thursday, 7 June 2012

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND, GATTON CAMPUS

 **Mr RICKUSS** (Lockyer—LNP) (3.45 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise today. I would like to comment on what the minister has just spoken about. I have read the Coroner's report on the 2011 floods. At the back of that report there are some interesting statistics. It shows that where services were introduced around Toowoomba, the suicide rate dropped dramatically to about 20 per cent or 30 per cent of what it was in the past few years. That is quite an interesting statistic.

I am glad that the Minister for Agriculture is in the chamber because I want to talk about the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland. Real concerns have been raised about the fact that agriculture is not being facilitated appropriately at the Gatton campus. Unfortunately, courses are winding down. This is a chicken-and-egg situation where, because courses are winding down, lecturers are leaving and they are not attracting the students, so the courses are not being offered and so it goes on. I am very concerned about this.

Animal science studies and veterinary science studies are very strong, but agricultural studies are winding down. This is of concern, because, as I am sure the minister knows, if we are going to feed nine billion people into the next century it will be done through agriculture. We will not be feeding them cows. Unfortunately, about 50 per cent of the world's grain is now stuffed down cows' throats. We have to work out how to manage appropriately the study of agriculture and animals.

I realise that in some Asian countries diets are changing and they want more protein. Even still, they only eat a very small amount of protein compared to us. We need rice, grains and other vegetable crops. The vegetable industry is struggling. Prices have been very poor. I get a bit frustrated when I hear Coles and Woolies slogans such as 'Down, down, prices are down'. Someone has to pay for that and quite often it is the farmers and the producers, who really do not have any recourse because, in Australia, Coles and Woolies are very big retailers of fruit, vegetables and a lot of other primary industry goods and we cannot cope without them.

However, it is really disappointing when things are sold purely on price. I have seen surveys that show that price is about the third item that a person is concerned about. They need a lettuce and they look at the lettuce to see if it is good quality. Those are the first two things that they think about. The third issue is price. Driving prices down to be the cheapest on the block is not what it is all about. It is about good marketing and ensuring that everyone gets a fair deal. It is not about having the cheapest price on the block, otherwise we would end up with \$2 Chinese shops everywhere and I do not think the community really wants that. We expect high-quality food, which is what we have always had. The only way that farmers can keep producing high-quality food is by getting a fair price.