




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 11 September 2012

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.57 am): Agricultural Minister McVeigh's humiliating backdown on threats to close agricultural colleges last week shows the shallowness of his claims about the viability of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation campuses. It is pleasing that the minister has finally seen the light and has acknowledged how important the colleges are to regional Queensland and the future of the agricultural sector in Queensland. I am also pleased the minister has recognised the depth of community opposition to the closure the minister planned and that the reform started when I was agricultural minister has been working. There was never any logic to the minister's plans to abandon the bush by closing the colleges—just an ideological determination by the dries in the LNP to slash and burn front-line jobs, services and facilities.

The Ernst & Young report which Minister McVeigh originally used as the reason to close agricultural college campuses actually showed the reforms process started by the former government was working. The report clearly stated the reform process was working and needed more time for the reforms to effectively roll out across the state. In particular, the report acknowledged the expansion of delivery sites from five to 14 which we introduced as part of our reform process was an effective way to deliver relevant agricultural training to more young Queenslanders in a modern setting where the majority of young people attending ag colleges no longer require on-campus training.

As industry recognised when we began the reform process, the way in which agricultural training should be delivered and the needs of the industry have changed immensely over the last 50 years. The report also acknowledged that the new delivery sites of Mareeba and Mackay are working and that more time should be allowed to let our reform processes roll out over the rest of Queensland. It is obvious that Minister McVeigh has crumbled under community opposition to the closure of the Emerald and Longreach campuses.

Travelling through Western Queensland last week, I found that local councils were horrified that the LNP government was even considering closing one of the agricultural college campuses. I think the member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, would have been particularly vocal in explaining to Minister McVeigh just how unpopular closing an agricultural college campus in the bush would be. In stark contrast to all other LNP members who do not stand up for their local communities, I am sure the member for Gregory would have made his views known in his usual forthright manner, helping the minister eventually see the sense of keeping both the Longreach and Emerald colleges open.

The idea to move the responsibility for the agricultural colleges under the Department of Education, Training and Employment is also a crazy idea by the LNP. Historically, TAFE training has focused on civil, mechanical and electrical trades. The responsibility for the agricultural colleges should be left with the agricultural department, which has the industry knowledge and understanding. Minister McVeigh's plans to introduce local boards for each agricultural college was part of the reform process—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Berry): Order! There are far too many interjections.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister McVeigh's plans to introduce local boards for each agricultural college campus was part of the reform process we started, with local advisory boards being established at Emerald and Longreach campuses under the previous government. Today's state budget must include funding to a level that unequivocally guarantees the long-term future of all of the AACCC campuses. Unless such funding is provided in the budget, our rural sector and those who want to make their future in it simply cannot believe the LNP's claims that it views agriculture as one of the pillars of the Queensland economy. The fact that the closure of campuses was even being considered by the Newman government shows how little regard this government has for rural and regional Queensland.

The Premier continues to fuss over plans for a new executive building in the Brisbane CBD for himself and his ministers but does not think twice about withdrawing jobs, services and facilities from rural and regional Queensland. The Brisbane-centric Newman government simply does not care about the bush and the future of rural and regional centres. Agriculture is worth \$14 billion to the Queensland economy. The agricultural sector creates one in eight jobs in regional Queensland. Regional Queensland is built on agriculture and there is a real need to upskill the sector. Government needs to work with the industry to develop future workforce plans for the long term of the agriculture sector. Industry needs to embrace the models of the colleges and what they have to offer to the future of the agricultural sector in Queensland.