




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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### **AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.12 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Agricultural College Amendment Bill 2013. The Australian Agricultural College Corporation has been delivering rural training to Queensland families since 1967. In that time it has played a vital role providing training and a pathway for those people growing up on the land who could see themselves investing in skills and technology to apply back on their own farms in an industry that they love and live and breathe.

The AACC employs approximately 200 Queenslanders providing training for off-site venues and residential colleges in Emerald and Longreach, whilst also operating six training centres. Unfortunately we saw the closure of the Burdekin and Dalby colleges. I know many people who went through those colleges and benefitted from their time there.

The genesis of this bill was the report conducted by Ernst & Young in 2012 addressing deficiencies in the corporate governance and management of the AACC. One would assume that the downturn in student enrolments sits squarely on the governance and management side of the ledger, but as we have heard from many of the contributions here, the issue is more the viability of farming and the hope and outlook of so many people who have been hit hard for so long. It is difficult to make that investment in your life, both time wise and financially, when it is hard to see a positive outlook in that industry. We have seen so many hits in the rural industries over the last 10 or 20 years. I think that outlook has changed completely. Until that is addressed, the issue of the viability of these places will never be resolved.

It is the same situation in relation to our rural towns, particularly in my electorate. Many rural towns are facing much adversity, much of which is based on the agricultural industries. If the numbers are down at the school the first thing that is done is the teacher is ripped out because the business case is not there. That precipitates more people leaving town, there are less numbers going through the hospital and it is a slippery slope downwards and there is only one inevitable outcome. If we invest in these things, maintain them and build them up and resolve the issue that sits behind it that is causing these symptoms, that is a better long-term solution and is the key to keeping our inland populated.

I listened with interest to the previous speaker in relation to many of the issues that are confronting our rural industries. One issue in particular in my area is that we have been sitting on vast volumes of water flowing out to the sea along hundreds of thousands of acres of blacksoil open plains naturally cleared. People are going broke and watching cattle die when there is the ability for them to create off-stream storage and small mosaic farms but they have not been able to access that water for so long. They are the sorts of things that can create prosperity and hope and deliver some sort of future to these people. I speak from the point of view of the Mount Isa electorate, but they are the sorts of things that will create hope and positivity and force people to invest in education and their future and support colleges such as these. That is where the answer lies. I think we have heard that a lot already in this discussion. That is where the effort needs to be made. It is good to treat the

symptoms of these problems, but it is a bit pointless without going to the root cause of the issues affecting agriculture, which are very structural and deep seated and have been growing for a long time and will need significant changes in policy, both at a state and federal level, to resolve. We aim to support this bill and support the change to the corporate governance, bearing in mind that this is treating a symptom of a much larger problem in agriculture that needs to be addressed.