




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (4.47 pm): I rise to speak to the Agricultural College Amendment Bill 2013. These amendments will restructure the AACC as a statutory body with a decision-making board with provisions for college boards. The restructure is aimed at addressing governance and management deficiencies identified in a business review report conducted by Ernst & Young in 2012. The deficiencies identified in the report found that the AACC was not operating profitably and its performance was deficient in areas such as financial reporting, record keeping, workplace health and safety requirements, and performance management. The proposed restructure is aimed at ensuring that management and decision-making accountability is reinstated through a governing board that takes into account industry and student needs. The bill will restructure the AACC from a corporation sole to a statutory body of governing board responsible for its performance. The new body still retains the assets and liabilities of the AACC but will be renamed the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges.

That is not an issue. In fact, it is probably a good thing. It is all about restructuring to address inefficiencies. However, in the past governments have not promoted facilities like these colleges—and this also relates to aged-care facilities or cluster units—and the benefits they can bring in training people in technologies, skills and future developments. This is a good thing and is understandable given that agriculture is struggling, so this is the time when we really need to get behind agriculture. Potato farmers are ploughing their potatoes back into their fields. Dairy farmers and farmers in general are living with the drought. Time and time again parents are saying that their children do not want to take on farming because they think, ‘Why on earth do we want to get into this?’ This is a problem we face. Over the years we have seen a rural decline—the closure of our railways and small hospitals which affect those regional communities. People such as ringers, roo shooters and contract fencers go to ag colleges and train to develop those skills. However, we have to realise that some children who want to take on farming might think that they have been handed a poison chalice. This is a great opportunity to ensure that we promote these colleges, promote the benefits of these colleges and promote those skills with this money that we are injecting into these colleges with the new board and corporate structure. No doubt the best way to operate a college like this is to ensure that the board is well skilled and has an understanding of business and how these agricultural colleges operate.

This is good legislation; it is just sad that we have to review and restructure. Down the track I hope that we can advance the agricultural industry so that we do not have to import food products from overseas, so that our farmers are strengthened, so that our dairy farmers are strengthened, so that we buy local products, so that our canned food comes from local farmers in our own regions so that they can develop those skills and technology. Of course they should look to overseas markets, but it is important that we not only protect our rural industries and protect our markets but also protect our children who are looking to go into agriculture. We also need to protect rural areas to ensure that there is not rural decline, to ensure that there is advancement in technology in areas such as health

services. An example of that is videoconferencing where operations are able to be performed. Rural areas need those kinds of services so that people who live in rural areas can enjoy a quality of life like people in the cities. Rural areas need those services so that they can thrive and areas can grow and so that there is the population in those areas for people to attend those training colleges to gain those skills.