




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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**FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TRAINING OMBUDSMAN) AND
ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.09 pm): I rise to speak to the Further Education and Training (Training Ombudsman) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. This bill seeks to establish a Training Ombudsman as an independent statutory position to ensure that Queensland VET students, employers and other significant stakeholders have a clear pathway for complaints and that systemic problems can be easily identified. But as mentioned by the member for Gaven earlier, in essence, with this legislation Labor has written a very large cheque for another level of bureaucracy that would be best placed in the federal arena. That position is also backed up by the Consumer Action Law Centre, which, in its submission to the committee, considered a single national Training Ombudsman to be its preferred model for dispute resolution. Again, we see a huge amount of taxpayer dollars being spent on a position without any detail or transparency as to how this money will be spent—\$5 million over three years to establish the Training Ombudsman and the allocation of half a million dollars on an ongoing basis. There is no explanation as to how the government came up with that figure.

That is a lot of money that could be spent in a better way, especially for the people in my electorate of Gregory who rely heavily on continued funding and support for training. The electorate of Gregory is the home of the Longreach Pastoral College and the Emerald Agricultural College. I am very proud to represent those two fine institutions in my electorate and I will do everything to advocate on their behalf. Longreach Pastoral College was founded in 1967 in direct response to the needs of the agricultural industry for staff skilled in semi-arid beef and wool production. Since that time, the college has continued to deliver industry endorsed and recognised training in wool and beef production, horse breeding, shearing and wool handling.

The Emerald Agricultural College officially opened its doors in 1968 under the chairmanship of Brian Hughes. In the early years, the training college concentrated on beef cattle production, but, as many members may know, as the township of Emerald developed an irrigation system from the Fairbairn Dam the college added irrigation and cotton and cropping training as part of its curriculum. I would have to say that the farm at the Emerald Agricultural College is considered to be one of the best farms in the region.

Although both colleges come under the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, both campuses are an RTO through the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. So when I hear that the Labor government is going to spend \$5 million to set up a Training Ombudsman's office with running costs of half a million dollars and we have experts in the field suggesting that this position should be a national responsibility, it simply beggars belief. That money could be spent on these two colleges. The \$5 million that has been allotted for the Training Ombudsman may have been better spent on some actual training and education for the unemployed in Queensland to improve their skills and enhance their employment prospects.

When the LNP came into government in 2012 after 20 years of Labor government in this state, it found that the once pinnacle of agricultural training in Queensland had been left to go to rack and ruin. The Labor government had sold the Dalby agricultural college, abandoned the Burdekin agricultural college and had left the Emerald Agricultural College and the Longreach Pastoral College debt ridden and falling apart. In fact, the Emerald Agricultural College had some major health and safety issues in relation to its kitchen and its sewerage system was certainly not up to standard. Back then, the Labor Party had forgotten those agricultural colleges and was prepared to let them go. It had no interest in investing in agricultural training, no interest in investing in tomorrow's agricultural leaders; that was simply off the radar for the Labor Party. It was not until the LNP came into power in 2012 and under the stewardship of the then minister for agriculture, John McVeigh, that we started to turn things around. I remember the member for Toowoomba South saying to me, 'When you do a company director's course, the one thing that gets drilled into you at these courses is that there are three things that can get you into a lot of trouble: bad finances, bad health and safety and neglecting your responsibility regarding the environment.' Guess what? Back then, I think the Labor Party left these agricultural colleges in a state that they ticked all three boxes.

The member for Toowoomba South quickly put together an action plan and set about getting what was left of these agricultural colleges back on track. The first job was to take control of the debt, fix up the building defects and the sewerage system. Then it was to give local control back to those colleges by setting up local boards and giving them a better say on the future of these colleges. I thank the member for Toowoomba South for his leadership and stewardship of these colleges. I think that it should be recognised in this House that, if it were not for him, I do not know what would have happened to those colleges. Maybe they would not exist today.

Vocational education and training is a vital strand of education in the electorate of Gregory. Although the intent of changes to the vocational education and training landscape has been to improve outcomes and completion rates, there is no doubt that those changes have left the vocational education and training landscape more cluttered and difficult to negotiate for students, parents and employers. It is clear to me that we are in a transitional phase for vocational education and training.

Years ago, every mine in the Bowen Basin had its master of apprentices overseeing the training of apprentices on site. Alternatively, apprentices would work directly under the supervision of a master, be that a diesel fitter, a boilermaker, an electrician—the list goes on. The theory work was done at TAFE. I would absolutely like to see that happen again in Central Queensland. In my area, many year 10 students have an opportunity to work in these mines as apprentices. If we are to take advantage of the ever-increasing opportunities in South-East Asia and the export dollars, we need more diesel fitters, we need more electricians and we need more boilermakers. These mining companies provide fantastic opportunities for us to have a great training base for tomorrow's electricians, tomorrow's boilermakers and tomorrow's diesel fitters. Most apprentices were school leavers having left high school at the end of year 10. Today, year 12 completion is becoming the norm and the largest and growing segment of the apprentice population is adult students aged 25 years and over.

But the mining downturn has seen a dramatic drop in these opportunities, which is a shame. The money being used to set up the Training Ombudsman's office—the \$5 million and the ongoing costs of half a million dollars—would be better spent on giving incentives for local businesses to take on these apprentices. We do not need more bureaucracy, we do not need more red tape and we do not need a lavish office in Brisbane; we need money for training, money for incentives for local businesses to take on young apprentices while we weather the downturn. Let us keep our people employed. We should spend and spread that money as far as we can. We need to create jobs, invest in our economy and spread the wealth across Queensland, especially regional Queensland.