




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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UNIVERSITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.33 pm): I rise to support and make my contribution to the debate of the University Legislation Amendment Bill 2017. There are seven Queensland public universities, as has been mentioned. Each are established as a statutory body under their own act such as the James Cook University Act 1997, and I want to touch on James Cook University's Townsville campus in particular. As one of the local elected members, since our election in 2015 the members for Townsville and Mundingburra and I have strived to have a good working relationship with the university, particularly with Chancellor Bill Tweddell and Vice-Chancellor Sandra Harding, and this relationship is certainly continuing as we go on.

James Cook University is one of our city's major employers and contributes greatly to our city in an economic sense. In fact, in 2016 it employed 3,483 people in the areas of academia relating to tropical health research, medicine and many other areas. As was mentioned by the member for Townsville, there are several alumnus recipients and at the last JCU awards I was very proud to find that my friend, colleague and mate Dr Angus McDonnell had been awarded an alumni award for his work in medicine. He was one of my mentors in the Queensland Ambulance Service. He came from Victoria as a critical care paramedic who went on to do nursing, medicine, work in the Air Force and be deployed to Afghanistan to do work there. He is also the commissioner of St John Ambulance in Queensland.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HARPER: I thank the member very much. He is quite a remarkable fellow for packing all of that into his career. I also want to make a special mention of Magistrate Cathy McLennan, and you might recognise that name, Madam Deputy Speaker Linard. In 2015 she was awarded an alumni award for not just her work in law but her book *Saltwater*. I hope you have read it.

James Cook University is, as has been mentioned, Queensland's second oldest university. It has been around since 1961. It started as an annexe of the University of Queensland with just 105 students. It became a university in its own right in 1970 and today James Cook University is a multicampus university across our state, with over 17,500 students and an international campus in Singapore, which I visited last year. It does a terrific job in our city. Notwithstanding that, I note that CQUniversity has also established itself in Townsville. I concur with the member for Gregory, who talked about retaining people and training people in local areas. CQUniversity in Townsville has also started training paramedics, and I think that is a wonderful thing.

Turning back to the bill, the university acts provide for matters including the size, composition and functions of the governing body; the powers of delegation; and the power to make university statutes about certain matters. The state government retains responsibility for the university acts to ensure that public universities as Queensland statutory bodies comply with financial reporting and other requirements under the Queensland legislation. The amendments in the bill progress the reforms resulting from the review, including technical amendments to improve the operation of all university legislation and governance reforms for James Cook University, and allow JCU to adopt a modern and

flexible governance structure. I was pleased to have been contacted and found some correspondence dated 15 August 2016 with Chancellor Tweddell in which he was seeking my support for the review of the act. In that particular correspondence I noted—

I believe this to be a great opportunity for the JCU Community to make some positive changes towards your council size and composition.

I have looked at your proposed changes and although they seem in line with other Universities similar in size I believe it best for the JCU community to provide the input needed therefore giving you the feedback and or agreement to your proposed changes.

In fact, the Victorian and New South Wales governance models have a make-up of anywhere between 14 and 16 people. I table that correspondence with the chancellor.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 15 August 2016, from the member for Thuringowa, Mr Aaron Harper MP to Mr Bill Tweddell, Chancellor James Cook University, regarding changes to JCU Council size and composition [\[1978\]](#).

The bill provides a power for vice-chancellors to subdelegate functions and powers that have been delegated to the vice-chancellor by the governing body to an appropriately qualified member of the university staff provided that the governing body has permitted the subdelegation. To ensure the integrity of elections the bill requires the universities to adopt an election policy for the election of staff and student representatives to university governing bodies. Currently, JCU is governed by a 22-member council, comprising three official members—the chancellor, the vice-chancellor and the president—eight members appointed by the Governor in Council, 10 elected members, and one member appointed by the council.

JCU has the equal largest university council. It has the highest number of elected members and the lowest number of members appointed by the council. During the review of the university acts, it was identified that the JCU council faces particular difficulties in ensuring that it has the appropriate mix of skills, expertise, experience and corporate knowledge that is necessary to oversee the operations of the university. JCU was invited to develop a proposed governance reform model for consideration by the government. JCU undertook extensive consultation with the JCU community, including union representatives, before submitting the proposal to the government. This bill gives effect to the JCU proposal. It allows the JCU council to make a resolution that will set the size and composition of the council. The bill provides that the resolution must be passed by a two-thirds majority of the council and must provide for a council of between 11 and 21 members.

I note that the NTEU opposes that part of the proposal that the vice-chancellor subdelegate powers delegated to them by the university governing body on the basis that it will erode accountability and transparency and reduce the capacity of the governing body. I think the intent of the bill makes sure that the governance of the universities and their respective acts will not do that. The NTEU also opposes the JCU governance reforms, in particular a reduction in the overall size of the council. Notwithstanding that, I am very pleased to support the bill, which gives Queensland's universities the greater flexibility and capacity they need.