



Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 6 March 2018

EDUCATION (OVERSEAS STUDENTS) BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (4.07 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker McArdle, congratulations on your role. I know you will undertake it with much professionalism. My sincere congratulations to you.

I rise to contribute to the debate on the Education (Overseas Students) Bill. I note that, although the title of the bill refers to the education of overseas students, it also contains quite remarkable amendments in relation to regional trading hours. Those amendments have not been reflected in the title of the bill. Last year as part of the Labor government's amendments to the trading act, the words 'including Easter Saturday' were removed from the allowable hours section, which would have caused a four-day closure of shops in regional towns over this Easter break. In media reports, this has become known as the Labor government's hot cross bungle. Thankfully, the omission of the provision was brought to the attention of the government by the National Retail Association. The amendments will commence on 30 March 2018, ensuring that shops are able to open on Easter Saturday in communities without seven-day trading.

The consequences of the omission were serious as all non-exempt shops in areas without seven-day trading would have had to close on four consecutive Easter holidays, that is, Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday. Let us be clear that it was not the government that picked up the errors; it was the National Retail Association that picked up the errors in the Labor government's legislation. Had the retailers not brought the matter to the attention of the government, shops in those regional towns would have been closed on Easter Saturday.

The areas affected by the hot cross bungle include Mount Isa; Goondiwindi; Chinchilla, which services my electorate; Kingaroy; Roma, my home town; Childers; Blackwater; Ayr; Charters Towers; Proserpine; Mission Beach; Cloncurry; Weipa; Nanango; Oakey; Home Hill; Pittsworth; Charleville, in my electorate; and Longreach. The retailers in these centres are shaking their heads as are the chambers of commerce as to how this could have happened.

I wish to emphasise how important these amendments are for the community of Roma, which is in my electorate. This year for the annual Easter in the Country festival the community is expecting many locals and visitors. The volunteers who run the Roma Easter in the Country festival do a tremendous job. I know they would want all of the businesses in Roma open for the Easter weekend.

Many travellers stop and stock up on food and supplies at these businesses in Roma and they join in the fabulous country entertainment that occurs over that weekend. Easter is one of the biggest fundraising weekends of the year for many of the local clubs. I know Rotary, Lions, Apex and Zonta are often out selling soft drinks, fish and chips, burgers and donuts, to name a few.

If it is a cold Easter weekend those fundraising clubs may need to restock from local retailers if they run out of bread or something like that. If it is a hot weekend a club might run out of bottled water. They have to run off to one of the local retailers and stock up on those provisions. It is very hard when 10,000 people visit your town and therefore increase the population to work out how much the local service club will sell.

If this hot cross bungle of the Labor government was not picked up and corrected, shops would have been closed for four days over Easter and the reputation of the community's regional event could have been damaged. The ability of local service clubs to maximise their fundraising activities could have also been seriously curtailed.

I want to inform the House about what the Roma chamber of commerce president, Cyril Peet, said in the local paper about the Labor government's hot cross bungle. He slammed the legislation. He said that the wording blunder could have had a disastrous effect on the Roma business community. Mr Peet is a great small business owner and is the president of the Roma chamber of commerce. They work really hard to bring more business activity into that community. The article reads—

Mr Peet said the extra closures, as stated in the botched amendment, could result in 'panic buying' in regional towns.

'There are only three public holiday days where shops in Roma are made to close,' Mr Peet said.

And the general trend is when the shops close in Roma, we see what I call panic buying, which is a problem I'd say for rural towns.

For example on the Sunshine Coast where shops are open seven days a week, it's not such a big deal when things close, but in Roma where we have certain times and that is it, if our shops were forced to close for a four day period, it would be a disaster.

I think it would also cause issues with produce delivery that would be seen in the days following Easter as well.

This law change would hit hardest in the country where you only have two or three supermarkets that supply the surrounds.

Mr Peet said the changes would have potentially interfered with the Easter in the Country festival, which is held in Roma over the Easter weekend.

Easter in the Country is a five-day celebration showcasing the country lifestyle. Now in its 41st year, the event is expected to draw crowds of more than 10,000 people to the town.

Another thing to consider, is the fact that Roma is hosting Easter in the Country during that time. Organisers of the event are trying to convince smaller businesses in the area to remain open for the event, which will attract big crowds from all over—this is a chance for Roma to get extra business that we wouldn't usually have.

If the population doubles over Easter, and the stores have to close, what are people going to do for food? Not everyone is going to eat out. Many people will want to be making food, whether they are at home or camping out for the event. It would be impractical if not impossible.

We can handle one day, but four, it just doesn't make sense.

I think Mr Peet has hit the nail on the head when it comes to this issue. We know that the Palaszczuk Labor government does not really like regional Queenslanders, but this bungle of regional business trading hours, food supply and tourism events in regional Queensland is taking the Labor dislike of regional communities to a very disappointing level.