




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 6 March 2018

EDUCATION (OVERSEAS STUDENTS) BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.01 pm): International students foster long-term goodwill and understanding between our country and others from where students originate. These fond memories of time spent in our state stand us in good stead for the future promotion of our country, our state and our regions. A local school in my electorate that understands the importance of establishing close links to international students is Bundaberg Christian College. In fact, the college is quite proactive in enticing international students to study in the region. The college has groups from Japan that come to visit for a week-long student experience and the college expects the arrival of these students in July this year. The college is also currently liaising with a sister school in Japan regarding one or two senior students who will be arriving later in the year to study at the school for one term.

Interestingly, the college is working with Central Queensland University and other key stakeholders in the region to develop a study cluster in order to attract more international students to the region. While typically locations such as Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast and Cairns are popular destinations for our international travellers, it seems Bundaberg is considered less popular. Bundaberg and the Burnett region has so much to offer. We are the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, deliver world-class turtle experiences, experience an ideal climate and are the fruit bowl of the state. Need I say any more? It is hard to believe that we are typically considered less popular than our counterparts. The promotion of this region to international groups is therefore ongoing work and is one which the college and other key stakeholders are committed to.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the good work of Bundaberg Christian College. The college continues to think outside the box and provide its students with unique learning opportunities, academic and biblical foundations to enable each of its students the ability to reach their potential and give them the best start in life. Just last month I joined the students at their junior assembly to talk about reusable Boomerang Bags and the impact of plastic pollution. The college is a big supporter of promoting the importance of cutting back on plastic in our society and how each and every student can make a difference to the environment. In fact, the college was behind the push to get Boomerang Bags up and running in the first place in the region, helping to reduce our reliance on plastics.

I was honoured to join the year 9 students in the lead-up to their Clean Up Australia Day activities where we combed the roadside in an effort to make our region clean and litter free. Students were able to reflect on the impact each and every one of them had on the environment. This initiative is part of the school's Rite Journey program aimed at year 9 students to support their development in becoming responsible and resilient adults. Participating in a community event like this is one of many activities students at Bundaberg Christian College do every year as part of the Rite Journey program.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Member for Burnett, I just remind you of the long title of the bill and bring you back to what we are debating.

Mr BENNETT: International students will also benefit from Rite Journey as it is a program that rejuvenates and reinvigorates the traditional process of a rite of passage in transitioning year 9 students and other international students who participate from dependency to responsibility. The rite program seems to be having a positive impact on these students and is clearly transforming their lives. During the roadside clean-up event I met some respectful young students who were eager to do their bit in the community. It was really wonderful to see and I commend Bundaberg Christian College.

Getting back to the long title of the bill, the bill was referred to the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee for consideration, with a report date of 2 March 2018. The committee recommended that the bill be passed. There were no other recommendations. The bill creates a new regime for the regulation of providers of courses to overseas students and international student exchange programs and provides the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority with functions to administer new senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems commencing for students entering year 11 in 2019.

It makes minor and technical amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000. On this serious issue, during the election last year the government said that it would implement a no-card no-start policy in relation to closing a loophole in the blue card system. Despite changes in this bill relating to the working with children legislation, Labor has missed the opportunity to make the changes and is exposing those most vulnerable—our children.

The bill amends the Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990 to provide that larger retailers in regional areas without Sunday or public holiday trading be allowed to open on the public holiday on Easter Saturday. The bill modernises Queensland's legislation to achieve closer alignment with the national framework.

In addressing the Education (Overseas Students) Bill 2018, one will find not in the title of the bill but parked way down the back in the legislation a serious issue, an important issue. This complete debacle is Labor's trading allowable hours legislation and it is now on the record with many amendments. It has affectionately been called the hot cross bungle. I flagged in August 2017 that we had grave concerns about the Trading (Allowable Hours) Amendment Bill 2017 as it was proposed then—namely, that it would make it easier for major retailers, particularly Coles and Woolworths, to dominate local community run and owned supermarkets and convenience stores in regional communities like Bundaberg and its surrounds.

The opposition listened but those opposite did not. We identified problems early with smaller hardware stores and motor traders and caravan traders in my region. In the course of transferring unchanged provisions from the now rescinded trading hours order into the amended legislation, a provision permitting non-exempt stores to continue to trade on the Easter Saturday public holiday in those regional areas without seven-day trading was omitted. As a consequence of the omission, all non-exempt shops in areas without seven-day trading were going to be closed over Easter—Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday. Regions affected include areas in my electorate including Childers. The omission of the provision was brought to the attention of the government by the National Retail Association.

Sadly, I can advise the House that we tragically saw the demise of a popular family run hardware store in Bundaberg. Labor ignored the warnings and concerns given by previous submissions to the committee that opposed this, with many claiming that the government's plans were anti community, anti consumer and anti competitive and worked solely in the interests of the major national supermarket chains. There were concerns that the only sectors driving this policy agenda were some union stakeholder groups and large multinationals.

Locally in the Bundaberg region many concerns were raised. The region was on its knees. The policy agenda will affect jobs in my community and in rural Queensland generally and should not be taken lightly or dismissed. I again thank Dale from Takalvans, Brad Solomon from Bundaberg Motor Group, Ross Gray from Ross Gray Holden and Ben Searle for standing up to this regressive legislation as they knew that seven-day trading would have killed off their family run caravan and car businesses. These small businesses know that they would be taken for a ride. Sadly, others have not fared as well.

I always had concerns about this legislation as it dictated which retailers could open their doors and who would be disadvantaged—namely, those local family run small businesses. Labor's policy is all about backing the big end of town—the big businesses over small businesses—and in the end it means that consumers lose out and jobs will be lost.

Despite the claims of those opposite, Bundaberg family owned small businesses told me that the changes would lead to a loss of quality licensed staff who do not want to work all weekend. It would also force an increase in overheads in businesses that are already facing increased financial regulation and running on tight margins.

When all of this started, the legislation was based on recommendations made last year that were not totally independent. Much has been said about that. Community driven, family owned businesses provide vital support and are the heart of our communities. If they are forced to downsize or close their doors, a direct adverse impact right across our communities will be felt. As local businesses close, consumers have less shopping choice, especially in regional Queensland. This is a reality. As local businesses close, there are few options for consumers in our regions.

More market dominance means that it is easier for major operators to increase prices. History has shown that that occurs especially with fresh produce—something on which my region depends. Queenslanders lose jobs because jobs lost in the independent stores are replaced in the major chains and sometimes workers are paid at half the penalty rates. One would think that those opposite would be concerned about those impacts on our communities.

When we shop in our local community supermarkets, our money stays in our communities' economy rather than going off to the head office of a multinational company. Keeping money local supports our local businesses and community ventures. As we know, there are nearly 800 independent supermarket operators employing near 21,000 staff. Nearly \$3 billion is spent in Queensland alone. This is now seriously under threat and should not be ignored.