




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Agricultural Colleges

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.06 pm): I rise to again talk about the closure of the Emerald Agricultural College and the Longreach Pastoral College. Last week saw the sale of the Emerald Agricultural College's beef property Berrigurra for \$32.5 million. I ask members to think about that for a minute because the communities of Emerald and Longreach have been led down the garden path and treated like fools by the Labor government selling these assets that will never be able to be brought back together for the purpose of agricultural skills training. Agriculture is a pillar of Queensland's economy, but building a sustainable workforce is an ongoing and complex challenge. The mission of the Emerald Agricultural College and the Longreach Pastoral College was to turn out graduates who were job ready. For farmers this means someone who has been trained to operate very expensive machinery, someone who is able to climb up into a header and drive the show to completion.

When the LNP came to government in 2012 we found the agricultural colleges in a state of neglect and disarray. In two decades of a Labor government there had been no investment in them—no attempt at educational excellence and innovation. In fact, there had not even been an effort to keep them aligned to the changes in the delivery of secondary and vocational training. Not surprisingly, this had seen enrolments fall. The Dalby Agricultural College had already been sold off by Labor and the Burdekin Agricultural College had been closed and the machinery there was on its way to a clearing sale. The LNP government was determined to fix this. We instituted local boards and invested in bursaries. We wanted to fix it. We ensured local people were running the campuses and we unleashed local enthusiasm in supporting the education of a skilled agricultural workforce. Not surprisingly, the enrolment numbers turned around.

I should point out that both the Longreach Pastoral College and the Emerald Agricultural College have existed for over 50 years. The alumni are now senior figures in rural industries across Queensland. In addition to their own graduates, the colleges provided an important resource for other students, particularly veterinary students, needing practical tutoring in large animal handling skills, from horsemanship to pregnancy testing of cows. You cannot achieve proficiency in pregnancy testing with just one cow; you need access to a herd. Vets need to know how to examine a horse's teeth or a horse's hoof, so the ag colleges regularly played host to students from these disciplines, including from the University of Queensland.

Queensland had an opportunity to develop a world-class, fully integrated agricultural research and training program at the Longreach Pastoral College and the Emerald Agricultural College, but the only vision Labor had was easy money. Practically from the moment the Labor government won in 2015, it formed an independent committee to work on how to close down Queensland's remaining agricultural campuses. All those who colluded in this around the cabinet table should hang their heads in shame. Our so-called minister for agriculture was so proud of shutting down the campuses that he flew to Longreach on taxpayers' money to get his photo in the *Longreach Leader* closing down our colleges, and that is an absolute shame.