

so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent bills entitled Charles Darwin University Bill 2003 (Serial 169) and Menzies School of Health Research Amendment Bill 2003 (Serial 170):

- (a) being presented and read a first time together and one motion being put in regard to, respectively, the second readings, the committee's report stage, and the third readings of the bills together; and
- (b) the consideration of the bills separately in the Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to.

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY BILL
(Serial 169)
MENZIES SCHOOL OF HEALTH RESEARCH
AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 170)

Bills presented and read a first time.

Suspension of Standing Orders
Pass bills through all stages

Mr STIRLING (Employment, Education and Training): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Charles Darwin University Bill 2003 (Serial 169) and Menzies School of Health Research Amendment Bill 2003 (Serial 170) passing through all stages of this sitting.

Motion agreed to.

Mr STIRLING (Employment, Education and Training): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I move the bills be now read a second time.

When this government came to office, the Chief Minister made it clear that reconstructing and re-invigorating the Northern Territory University was one of the government's key priorities. Today we are embarking on the single greatest reform of higher education in the Northern Territory since the Northern Territory University was established here in 1990. Members would recall that, in 1980s, the Darwin Institute of Technology and the university Campus of the Northern Territory, a branch of the University of Queensland, provided advanced and higher education to Territorians, but it was limited in its offering.

The merger of these two institutions into the Northern Territory University, under the guidance of

the then federal minister, John Dawkins, and then NT Education Minister, Tom Harris, delivered to the Territory a fully-fledged university able to offer real, locally-based education options to students who, until that time, had to seriously consider moving interstate to gain further higher education.

Today we take that process one step further. Today we will reinvent the Northern Territory University, changing its name and bringing together a mix of institutions aimed at providing quality advanced education, higher education and research to our community. This step was necessary because, in the latter part of the 1990s, the Northern Territory University had lost its way. In some ways it brought this on itself through a failure to define its mission and intent and its linkages to local students in its region. In other ways, it became part of a cycle of problems generated because of reductions in funding and resources, leading to a vicious cycle of reductions in students courses and attractiveness.

I was determined to fulfil the Chief Minister's pledge to bring together a new facility that could reassert its role both here and regionally. With the creation of the Charles Darwin University, for the first time in the Territory's history, we will have a single world-class facility, offering enhanced tertiary training and research capacities. The university will become an integral part of the social and economic fabric of the Northern Territory and will play a crucial role in the future prosperity of Territorians.

This is a unique part of the world. Its future development and success is dependent on local residents having a unique and complex mix of skills and capacities to meet the particular needs of our community. By combining and building on the many strengths of three of our existing institutions which have operated as separate entities up until now, we will be able to grow our intellectual capital and skills base. The Northern Territory University is, in its current guise, unable to deliver some of those skills to residents, or provide the research base the Territory needs.

The Territory's small population base but large land mass is one of the biggest challenges the Northern Territory University has faced since its inception. Limited enrolments has meant the university has not been able to provide the full range of courses Territory residents want. Neither could it attract the sort of funds needed to allow it to expand.

In the training area, it has been in direct competition with Centralian College in the delivery of some programs leading to duplication of administrative functions. NTU's limited size has also meant it has never been able to grow its research capacity or meet the development needs of the