

ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

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JCU MUST ASSURE NORTH OF ITS AUTONOMY: KAP

James Cook University must assure the North it is not beholden to foreign interests and pledge to uphold core virtues such as free speech, objectivity and independence, Katter's Australian Party Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter has said.

Mr Katter has today called on the JCU Vice Chancellor to reveal what arrangements or understandings have been reached in the past for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), through its Ministry of Education, to approve JCU's collaboration with local universities.

He has further requested JCU outline what actions it has taken to prevent the Chinese military from infiltrating research projects, and to guarantee that students will not be penalized simply because they say something which upsets the CCP.

Mr Katter's calls follow an announcement by the KAP's Member for Kennedy Bob Katter yesterday that he would move a motion at the next Federal Parliament sitting to call for a full inquiry into foreign influence at Australian universities.

Mr Katter Snr flanked controversial student activist Drew Pavlou who was suspended from his studies at the University of Queensland following a series of anti-CCP stunts.

"The concern about the control the Chinese Communist Party could have over Australia's universities because they depend on fees from foreign students to pay the exorbitant salaries many vice-chancellors and other senior academics receive cannot be ignored any longer," the Traeger MP said.

"For two years Australia's top intelligence security and intelligence experts have been warning that the CCP could use Australia's universities to lobby the Australian Government on its behalf because of their dependence of fees from foreign students."

The biggest group of foreign students in Australia come from China.

In 2018 the Australian Strategic Policy institute revealed that over the last ten years the People's Liberation Army had sent 2500 scientists to western universities as students or visiting scholars - this includes Australia.

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In May James Cook University announced it had made an agreement with Xi'an University of Technology (XUT) to develop joint research projects in engineering and data science.

Mr Katter is was common knowledge that data science was a topic in which China takes a great interest.

"We sincerely hope JCU will be able to explain how research projects will not be used by the CCP to advance its interests to the detriment of Australia," Mr Katter said.

"It must also guarantee it will not discriminate against any students who object to the ruthless actions the party takes to maintain its control over the Chinese people."

In May, JCU dismissed fears about possible foreign university influence as it announced it would team up with XUT to launch a new International Engineering College in China.

It's understood that XUT will establish and operate the college, but JCU will have input into course design and content and their lecturers would deliver some subjects.

The Chinese Ministry of Education approved the collaboration under a program "designed to foster collaboration between Chinese universities and international higher education partners".

"I have to ask, as the average punter probably would, what benefit will actually be provided to students here in Townsville by the collaboration and what is the trade-off?" Mr Katter asked.

"At the end of the day, all people really want to be assured is that it is Australian interests that are at the heart of these precious education and research organisation across the country."

Mr Katter said it was outrageous that despite encouragement by the Australian Attorney-General's department, 13 Australian universities had refused to list their China-backed Confucius Institutes on the national register of foreign influence.

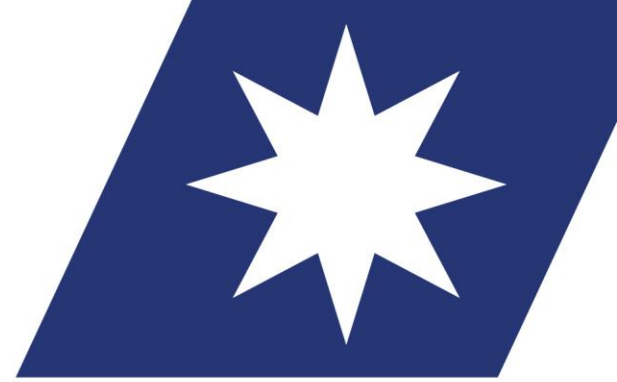
Sweden closed the last of its Confucius Institutes in May after a deterioration in its bilateral relationship with China, and in the United States a third of the 100 centres have also closed.

Mr Katter said while JCU was not currently home to one of the Confucius Institutes, it would be naïve to think it was immune to foreign influence.

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"We have seen what I would suggest is some deeply concerning behaviour from JCU in the past in regards to freedom of speech with regards to differing opinions on the science associated with the Great Barrier Reef," he said.

"That is an evolving and largely separate issue, but I would like to remind the university, and all universities in Queensland, of their responsibility to the Australian people which largely fund them.

"Every Australian should be deeply concerned about the erosion of our national interests by foreign interference.

"This applies as much to the higher education sector as it does the buy-up of our land, real estate and water rights and the movement off-shore of our core processing and manufacturing industries.

"Australians need to say, enough is enough,"

—ENDS—

Media inquiries: Morgan Oss, 0428 772 544