




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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### **GASFIELDS COMMISSION BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.06 pm): I rise to speak to the Gasfields Commission Bill. It behoves me to acknowledge the efforts of the committee. I know that very extensive consultation was undertaken on this bill. I was pleased to get very informative feedback from all proponents on all aspects of this legislation. I understand that some 90 per cent of Queensland gas comes from the coal seam gas industry and that it currently plays a very important role in our economy. I understand that the construction of LNG plants in Queensland have generated within a very short period of time a very strong demand for the volume of gas needed to make these plants viable. That has driven the development of this industry very fast throughout Queensland. Some Queenslanders have struggled to meet the timing of this development and it has been a big social shift for them. I appreciate the efforts of this government in forming the commission, but it is my assertion that this is not going far enough and that there are some cases where it will fail.

This imperative for the gas industry has inadvertently driven some animosity between existing landholders and some industry groups. I believe a lot of that was created by some improper behaviour in early developments by participants in the industry not performing best practice. That came out from some of the submitters. This has caused a lot of anxiety to the many landholders who have the imperative of maintaining the status quo. There are many reservations about the industry. I note the intention of the government is to quell the alarm people feel about the industry by setting up a conduit between the GasFields Commission and the government. What I do question—and this was spoken about earlier—is the premise that the bill is based on sustainable co-existence and the definition of sustainable co-existence. It is my contention—and I agree with some of the submitters—that that is not possible in some cases. I believe there is an understanding by the public that this was a solution for people who have great reservations about the impact of this industry in their area. They had a lot of hope that this commission would allay a lot of their fears, and I feel that for a sector of the community it will fall short despite the best efforts of the members of the commission. It does not have the regulatory powers required to be able to meet those expectations. I will go through those in a bit more detail shortly.

The most important area of concern in the report for us is that in some cases the competing interests of the onshore gas industry and those of the community are irreconcilable. The existing bill is based on the premise that there is always a position of sustainable co-existence. This ensures that throughout the balance of the bill there is inadequate authority of the commission to protect interests and, more specifically, those of the community.

It was heard in the submissions that not enough detail has been released on other protective mechanisms in the industry such as regional plans. One of the important points brought out is that some of those regional plans have not been released yet—and still have not to the best of my knowledge. If people are hoping to be protected by those regional plans, they would not know where they sit yet. The GasFields Commission relies on those regional plans to protect people and there is no recourse for those people if this rolls out in an adverse way. If the GasFields Commission is accepted and the regional plan comes out and adversely affects people, they will have no recourse

and there could be some adverse outcomes. Under the existing bill I believe the authority of the commission is inadequate.

Based on this rationale, we also believe there is scope for the commission's roles to be expanded. This includes the requirement to investigate and report on issues of concern that will impact on the social and economic integrity of certain areas. This is already acknowledged by the commission, but I believe it needs to be a bit more intrusive and to go further. Currently, there is not a requirement to report on these. Because the commission plays such a critical role in the interface between the community and government, the onus should be on it to report on these matters at all costs. This is backed up by the point that not all the regional plans have been finalised. So no security currently exists for those people going forward.

Many of the submissions highlighted the requirement for access to information and the imbalance between industry and the community in either negotiations or disputes. A lot of good ideas were thrust forward. The proposed bill requires the necessary instrument to ensure information is made available to bring about the most equitable outcome for both parties. That is a very important point and I think that is going to help going forward. I am of the view that more information is better; it helps the process be more transparent. Drawing on my own experience in valuations, it was always easier to provide the best and most accurate advice on compensation for people when you knew the impact and the historical precedents of other compensation matters. From my point of view, more information is better.

Many of the submissions also identified merit in ensuring that at least certain levels of information are made available from both industry and community/landholder interests to achieve the best workable outcome. Many corporate interests would be very averse to releasing information; they would say it is commercial in confidence. Again, I think more is better. If the commission used its independence to access that and acted as a safeguard for a lot of these often underresourced landholders, that would be of some benefit and would go some way to helping them achieve a better outcome in the rollout of this bill.

I acknowledge the work of the commission and the intention to have someone looking over the community aspects of the gas industry. Again, I draw on my own experience with mining activities in my area. Whilst there can be some very positive outcomes from mining—and I acknowledge there are positive benefits from the coal seam gas industry—there can also be some very great, heavy social impacts on the towns, and the cost is very difficult to quantify. The town of Cloncurry is booming, but shops are closing down and schools are going backwards. It is very important for this commission to keep a close eye on that. I know that is its intention, but it is a very important aspect of this industry which is not going to be there in 20 or 30 years. Once the social fabric of those towns is destroyed and they no longer have the people in the towns to work the butchers or the grocery stores, it is a slippery slope downwards. That is a very big risk and a critical component of the GasFields Commission.

To return to where I started, there are a lot of good aspects of the GasFields Commission and there is a lot of good work that it can do. But in essence it relies on the fact that there is going to be sustainable co-existence in all cases. That is an assertion and a position that we disagree with and it is a point on this bill that we can never agree with. We do acknowledge that this commission provides people with some level of interface with the government on this very difficult issue involving an industry that, in Queensland's mining history, is unprecedented in terms of the speed and increasing size with which it is being rolled out and the impact it will have. That is the major point that we have difficulty supporting in terms of this bill. We believe that the other intentions of the bill are good.