




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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**PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

**Aurizon, Cattle Industry**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (3.30 pm): I rise in the House to discuss an issue relating to rail services in my area. I have been informed recently that Aurizon is proposing to scrap 120 cattle rail wagons from its fleet, stating that it has 122 too many wagons in the area. It is a common theme. The service has been run down over many years so people have walked away from it because they got fed up with the level of service. Instead of fixing the service to help cattle producers in the area, it has deliberately run down the service in order to let more mineral trains on that line because they are more profitable. I am concerned about this for a number of reasons. Firstly, it puts too many trucks on the road. Our roads are already overloaded. This is the last thing they need. That has a multiple effect, including additional driver danger, additional wear and tear on the roads and higher transport costs for graziers already hard hit by other factors. Secondly, this confirms the suspicions people in the north-west had for many years under the Labor government that cattle rail would be taken off the line for the stronger mining industry. There is real fear that this will be the winding down of cattle train wagons so essential to the industry in north-west and Western Queensland, where distances from paddock to market are enormous. Discussions with producers along the line have informed me that cattlemen prefer rail over road as their stock arrives in better condition on rail over distances than they do on road. It is an important element to a currently fragile industry that will burden many producers if no longer available.

I believe that this is the start of Aurizon walking away from taking livestock on that line. A US government study earlier this year published in *USA Today* reported that a 40-tonne truck does as much damage to the road as 9,600 cars. Even allowing for imperial and metric conversions, does the government want to put more costs for roadworks of this magnitude back on taxpayers? This poses the question to this government and to the wider public: do we want to preserve a broad industry base or do we want to ensure that these utilities make the most profit for the government? Based entirely on profitability of the line, then, yes, concentrating the available rail space on carting ore is probably a good idea. Surely we are not here though to make sure that governments are simply profitable. The government has a very important role to play in preserving a broad industry base to ride the mineral boom cycles. At the moment all other industry outside of mining is struggling and it is as imperative now as it will ever be to preserve other industries like cattle grazing so that it is still there during the downturns. Applying the rationale of providing a broad industry base means that you do not just shut down services like rail freight, as was done in the past, or wind down cattle rail. The priority should be that the rail line needs proper levels of maintenance so that locomotives can run at 80 kilometres an hour and not the 30 to 40 kilometres an hour as they do at the moment. This will allow greater access to this line and remove the requirement to bush the cattle wagons. The government needs to turn a great deal of attention towards this line as it may well be an affordable way for the government to do something great for the people of Queensland.