




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

ADJOURNMENT

Cattle Industry

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (12.34 am): I rise to elaborate on the question that I asked today in this House regarding the offer of low-interest loans from the federal government to the struggling cattle industry. It was a legitimate question with no provocation intended. It was a genuine appeal to help the battling cattlemen in Western Queensland. Some of these men are on their knees and I have had personal contact from neighbours of some producers who fear they may take their own lives before the banks move in.

In Queensland, the average farm debt rose from \$700,000 two years ago to \$1.2 million in 2012 and now it is at \$1.4 million and increasing. Some contributing factors to this increase in debt include the BJD outbreak, live-export bans, dry seasonal conditions and the high Australian dollar. This is the environment that some people are facing and some lifelines have been thrown.

I have tried to be gracious by suggesting in the media that the government package of \$11.2 million is welcome, but in retrospect that was far too generous an appraisal by me. When the sugar industry was in crisis in the 1980s, the government came forward with, in today's terms, what would be worth over \$300 million. Why? Because that funding was from a government that valued industry above the virtue of the fiscal balance. We have on the table an offer of \$60 million in low-interest loans that has been sitting there for at least four weeks as far as I am aware, perhaps longer. To be fair, there may be some slightly onerous covenants associated with that offer, but in the interest of transparency we must know what they are. People need at least some hope of goodwill from the government. Otherwise this can only be interpreted as playing politics. I truly hope that is not the case. In the meantime, I will not be the one having to deal with my conscience if these producers are foreclosed on.

Some rationale that I have heard is that this offer will only keep people battling away longer. That is precisely what it will do. It will keep people in the game longer. That may be only a small number of producers but, who knows, the seasons could come early and prices could improve and these people could get back on their feet if they are given the right to survive for that bit longer. I also heard that there was concern expressed that these loans presented a risk to the government if they were defaulted on, but I also read that that risk has been mitigated now by the federal government.

There are not a lot of opportunities to receive assistance money like this. I think we should grab it with both hands. I have knowledge of people in that position right now in my electorate and I am sure that they would jump at this opportunity. I plead with the government to consider these people and to take whatever steps that are necessary to make this happen.

The only rationale I have heard in relation to this issue is that the money is coming from federal Labor, which contributed to this situation. Certainly, it precipitated the abominable decision to ban live exports to Indonesia. But I could not care less where the money comes from. It could come from the Callithumpians if it helps keep some of our valued cattlemen alive for a bit longer. I do not care at all where the money comes from. The response from the Premier to my question this morning was a personal indulgence. In my opinion, it was politicising the situation.

(Time expired)