



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Inland Highway

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (3.47 pm): I rise to speak about the inland highway. About two years ago, early into my term in office, a local transport operator in my region who had about 38 triple road trains said to me, 'You've got a problem. They're not keeping up with the maintenance on the Bruce Highway, so you're not going to see enough maintenance on the Flinders Highway.' He said, 'But I've got an answer for you: make them open the inland up to triples. Most of that road exists already. They've only got to finish off a bit, and you can take triple road trains on the inland. Its 90-tonne capacity will take two B-doubles off, or 45 tonne.' What a cost-effective solution!

I must commend the Premier for finally recognising the inland highway situation, which he addressed recently when dealing with flooding from the recent cyclone. I am very pleased, and I commend him for being so open-minded about this. It has since been taken up by many others. I must acknowledge, with humility, that the US army built that road in World War II. They saw it as a strategic backup to the coastal highway; 70 years later we are giving it the same recognition. One property up on the Hann Highway 10 years ago used to take 10 to 12 hours to truck cattle to nearby Hughenden. With the upgrades on that road, it now takes five hours. If you multiply that by the thousands of cattle properties in that area, you realise what sort of advantage you have.

In the Cairns-tropical coast-Tableland area, some five years ago it was estimated that 400,000 tonnes per annum, requiring about 50 trailers a day—or 100 back-and-forward movements—was needed to go along the Bruce Highway. It is estimated that about 25 per cent of outbound freight from the same area could be diverted over the inland route, generating about 12 long-distance movements a day. Companies like Blenners Transport or Mackays Bananas—which have now moved into Lakeland Downs—must be licking their lips at the prospective cost savings and competitiveness that this sort of scenario will provide to all businesses that exist in the north. The inland highway can save two days of travel and will have the capacity to save 800 kilometres on the journey from Cairns to Melbourne, which is why Advance Cairns included this concept as one of its top five priorities before the last state election.

The cost of maintenance on the inland highway will be significantly smaller than the Bruce Highway once it is established because the same standards needed on the high rainfall areas of the tropical coast are not required. The only sections of bitumen that remain to be completed between Cairns and Melbourne are about 100 kilometres on the Hann Highway and 34 kilometres on the Torrens Creek-Aramac road. A lot of money has been spent on the Hann Highway, but none of that benefit will be realised until that bitumen sealing is finished. There will be many other advantages if this work is completed: stock freight movements are big; there will be a strategic benefit in getting away from those highly flood-prone areas; it will provide employment to inland councils; and there is an opportunity for an inland logistics centre, stopping bottlenecks in the city.