




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 20 May 2014

LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (8.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The aspects of the bill that concern me the most are those regarding land tenure, in particular the treatment of leasehold land—and I think about 70 per cent of land in Queensland is leasehold—and the opportunity for people to convert that to higher forms of tenure. That obviously helps economically and informs the basis of a stable economy, influences investment decisions and provides general confidence out there, particularly for people like me in the pastoral industry in north-west Queensland. I generally agree with the intent of the bill in providing security as those landholders are battling a lot of economic adversity. On that point I am supportive of the bill. The concept of being able to bring forward the rolling leases—although I think you have to wait until there is 20 per cent of the term left—enhances that tenure security, which at the end of the day is the end game. Finding the best way to do that is very technical and very difficult because of the way that we deal with issues like native title. I think some reasonable solutions have been found, and I commend the officers and the government for the way that they have approached that.

One point that I do object to—and it is a point of fairly heated debate—is the removal of those sections of the act that restrict corporations owning and individuals aggregating pastoral holdings. Speaking to AgForce and others, I think it is important to preserve that place in the marketplace for owner-operators and people like me who aspire to one day owning their own piece of country. There was a place preserved in the marketplace for people like us that kept out corporations and those larger entities. A lot of people would say that that opposes free market principles. Yes, it does remove the ability of those people trying to sell those properties and a lot of people who own these properties are in favour of this because they want to sell it and get the best price they can. On the flip side of that argument, there are people like me out there who want to get in the market and it is being made that much harder because we have to compete with these bigger entities. I believe in intervention. I believe in some form of regulation. It is the essence of conservatism in preserving that place for owner-operators and family farms, and I support that. That is one aspect of the bill that I am not fond of. I understand the arguments in favour of it; I just do not agree with them.

I am very pleased that, finally, the government is tackling the land rent calculation. It is an antiquated system and is desperately in need of review. Some good advice has come through from AgForce on that. We could not have had a better example of why it is a failed system than those inflated property values which went up by 200 per cent to 300 per cent. The cost of production escalated in similar proportions and the value of the commodity stayed relatively stagnant. It has been a terrible impost on a lot of those producers out there in that their land rents have been increasing—you could almost say skyrocketing—over the last five or 10 years when at the same time their cost of production has gone up and the value of the commodity has gone down. That is something that desperately needed to be addressed and I am grateful that the government has given that some attention.

I was pleased to be part of the committee that travelled around and held hearings on the land tenure review. We took a lot of submissions and listened to the public on that. I see the issues there with native title and those land councils. I think they are very difficult issues. It is a very difficult system that we operate in. It is very hard to find that common ground or midpoint and to balance those issues. I appreciate the difficulties on both sides in trying to resolve some of those issues.

One of the main features of this bill is that it enhances tenure security; I acknowledge that and I commend the government in that respect. I do not agree with the removal of the restrictions on corporations owning and individuals aggregating pastoral holdings. I philosophically disagree with that part of the bill. Otherwise, I will be giving the bill my support.