




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 28 August 2014

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LAND (PROVIDING
FREEHOLD) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.31 pm): I rise to make a contribution to debate on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land (Providing Freehold) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014. At the outset, I commend the government on having the good judgement to follow the concept of providing freehold land in Aboriginal communities. This concept is about as familiar to me as the Bradfield scheme, transmission line or ethanol. I was brought up on these things with my father, ever since I was a kid.

I think it is very appropriate that I acknowledge my father's contribution to the start of this journey, which is the genesis of what we are seeing today. I refer to the title deeds on Thursday Island—a very radical and much fought against move in the day and one which almost cost him his job in the ministry and one that many people I still mix with—public servants—still commend him for. At the expense of some humility, I would like to acknowledge his contribution. I acknowledge the rather negative connotations the minister put on that the last time we discussed this process in the House, but it was the start of a process that was not finished. It is finished today, and I commend the government for that. But I think it is important to acknowledge where this started.

I will relate an anecdote from when the last bill on this matter was before the committee. Fred Gela from Thursday Island kept mentioning the Katter leases. I thought he was saying the 'cattle leases', quite naively. Afterwards I was intrigued to know what the Katter leases were. He said, 'That's what we want, the Katter leases.' Here we have an improvement on that. I acknowledge that. I think there will be a lot of barriers and a lot of heavy work to be done from now on to have this implemented anywhere, because there will be a lot of interests that converge within the individual communities themselves.

While I am on that subject, I refer to the debate we had last night on the idea that policy development never comes from outside of government or the major parties. I did not hear much of this from anyone other than my father over the years. It just goes to show that if you call for these things—it is not to take away—

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr KATTER: It is not to take away what is being done here by the government, but it is something that has been pushed outside the parliament for years and you have adopted it—and that is how it should work. It gets developed when it gets into parliament. That is how it should work. That is what we were debating last night.

I think it has been discussed quite extensively here today so I do not want to labour it too much, but I do need to relay to the House my own personal examples. Doomadgee and Mornington are the two Aboriginal communities in my electorate. They struggle a lot and there are a lot of big challenges there. To the outsider it is sometimes hard to see the appeal for people who want to stay in those communities, but there are people who love those communities and want to stay there. They want the

best for their own communities. A critical component—arguably the most critical component—of them staying there and having some hope is owning their own home, which is what we are delivering.

Building on this concept—this has also been discussed—it is also about them building their own homes. There was a scheme that was very effectively applied in Doomadgee in, I think, the late 1980s. A number of houses that went out there most recently were modular. They were all built off-site and plonked in there. Whilst there was some local labour involved in putting those in, the social benefit of training the local workforce by building those houses from scratch far exceeds the much higher per unit cost of building homes that way. It might be cheap to put in modular homes in the first place, but you are denying yourself a lot of social benefit from training.

The other point I would like to address is alienable versus inalienable rights. I think that is a critical part of this legislation. At the end of the day it could be debated quite extensively. I would have to fall on the side of inalienable. I acknowledge that I think it is not a bad middle ground the government has found. I understand that the first sale cannot go outside the community or has to at least be to another Indigenous person. Particularly in the infancy of the scheme, I would have preferred to see inalienability, which I guess would deny people some opportunities. It does address some of those concerns that people have. I think it is a pretty good middle ground that has been reached in terms of the first-sale clause.

I think the consultation period—I just read that in the committee report—could have been handled better. On my two visits to the community they did not seem well aware of the legislation. I think a bit more engagement earlier would make the rollout of this much easier.

In closing, I am happy to acknowledge the good judgement to carry this forward. I pay tribute to where this all started. I would like to see it go further whereby we actually carry out home building in these communities. I think that is the next step.

I think this has been laboured here already, but in these communities at the moment there is a lack of hope because if you cannot buy a house you cannot get a mortgage from the bank to buy a tipper truck that you are going to hire to the council in order to make a living, for example. That generates your own sense of self-worth and when you have that sense of self-worth the family unit becomes stronger, you are looking after the kids better and we have better social outcomes. The delivery of this will be a long and difficult journey but it is a journey that we have to start to provide some hope and prosperity in these communities, because where there is an absence of hope despair prevails. This is the start of the journey. I commend the government for putting it out there and taking it this far. I will be supporting the bill in the House.