




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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PAYROLL TAX REBATE, REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.16 pm): I rise to speak on the Payroll Tax Rebate, Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I will go through all of the pertinent points of the bill that are relevant to me and things that I feel strongly about. Firstly, the payroll tax rebate is an interesting scheme. It is good to have those incentives in place for the apprentices, and we could debate the level of the threshold of payroll tax. However, I do not want to spend time doing that this evening because I want to talk about creating industry and opportunities for these apprentices, and that ties in with the issue of copper smelter emissions, which I will come back to.

I will move on to my next point regarding this bill, which is the changes to the Plumbing and Drainage Act and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act. When those changes were made during the last parliament we voted against them and I moved an amendment. I believe that there should be a place reserved for those skilled plumbers and that we should be promoting their use out there in the industry. In some cases there may be costs involved, including in some parts of my electorate. However, I think the benefits of creating the space for workers with the proper skills to do those jobs is a more important imperative.

Part of the drive to make that change some 12 or 18 months ago was that it is now so commonplace in government policy to regulate everything. Now we seem to want to deregulate. I think it was due to those free market ideologies that come through all the time that took place here. People say there is too much regulation. However, there is a good reason we have that regulation and that is that we want to preserve our tradesmen and our skills base in Australia, and that is a value that I support.

While we did not support the changes when they came in during the last parliament, we will be supporting these changes. The only issue we have—and the member for Dalrymple will be talking about this—is that if those changes are going to be made we would advocate that they be made sooner rather than later. Having a two-year transition would allow time for those people who have entered the market and have a business plan in place that may be associated with having non-qualified plumbers. If they have two years to build on that business plan, that is going to be more disruptive to the market. We would advocate a policy of doing that sooner rather than later.

With regard to the introduction of electronic conveyancing for transfer duty, I do not think that is going to have a huge impact, but I can see efficiencies for the industry that I used to work in as a property valuer. People will still have the option to do a hard copy or paper settlement. I do not know why, but I would probably prefer that myself. I am probably a bit of a dinosaur in that respect, but I will say a young dinosaur. I see that as an improvement, so that is something we support.

I am of the belief that legislation for farm-in agreements was something the previous government conducted in an administrative way already, so doing that makes sense to me and would add some value to the way that we are managing the mining industry. In Mount Isa particularly at the

moment there have been more opportunities with our smelter and infrastructure. There are smaller miners popping up around the place and Glencore are now doing more business with those smaller miners, so there could be more opportunities in this space and we could see more activity in the north-west minerals province, so that part of this bill may have some practical application. I really hope it does, because that will mean more activity in my area.

We support in principle the occupational licence checks on tradies that are contained in the Criminal Law (Criminal Organisations Disruption) Act. It was too intrusive and I fundamentally disagreed with the impingement on people's rights, so we will be supporting that change.

The most important issues I would like to address are the amendments to the Environmental Protection Act that allow for the cancellation of transitional environmental programs, TEPs, and temporary emissions licences, TELs. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the member for Glass House, with whom I worked in the previous parliament. It is also important to acknowledge that the Premier's team has brought this into parliament now and is bearing the political cost of pushing this through. It is a credit to both sides of this parliament that they have taken the bull by the horns on this issue which is so vitally important to industry, not just in my patch but right across the corridor from Mount Isa to Townsville. It was no surprise to me that, after the election when I met the new member for Townsville, he was very interested in the impact this would have on the copper refinery in Townsville because if the copper smelter in Mount Isa closes the copper refinery closes. It was no surprise to me that he took a great interest in that, so I am very grateful to both sides for making this a reality. This means a great deal to the people of Mount Isa.

As a result of changes to the Mount Isa Mines act, there was a crackdown on emissions, and at the time it was something I was heavily opposed to. After it came in and upon reflection, some people from the mines said they thought it was a good thing because they had to tighten up on their emissions and work a bit harder on things. They put more air monitoring stations around the place, but it soon became apparent that it at some point it would no longer be viable. We are getting down to almost two kilometres underground now and it is becoming more difficult for Mount Isa Mines to make a profit. With the copper smelter all the pressure is on costs, and that added burden meant it shut down. If you follow that through, the sulphur off the copper smelter in Mount Isa is currently captured to make sulphuric acid, which is sold back to the phosphate mine that employs about 800 people a couple of hundred kilometres from Mount Isa. Hardly any of those people who are employed are from Mount Isa; most of them are from Townsville and Brisbane.

They are one of the biggest phosphate producers in the Southern Hemisphere. They buy the sulphuric acid that takes the sulphur off the copper smelter, which is a good environmental outcome, to produce fertiliser at the fertiliser plant. If you shut the copper smelter down they will not get their acid from the copper smelter, so they will have to get it from Canada or somewhere else. If you care about the environment, there would be a carbon footprint of burning diesel to get that acid from overseas all the way back out to Mount Isa again. It does not make sense. Once you shut the copper smelter down you are not sending copper anodes out of the smelter to the coast; you are sending in four times the bulk concentrate on the roads and on rail. It is going to clog up our arteries and it will not leave any space for other mines to cart their ore back to Townsville. If it is clogged up, more diesel will be burned to get it back to the coast—because there is four times the bulk—where it is invariably going to be burned in a dirtier smelter in China, which is where it will go. If we do not do this today the copper smelter will definitely shut down next year, and four times the bulk concentrate will go all the way to China. That would leave a much bigger carbon footprint as a result of it being burned, and it is guaranteed to be a much dirtier smelter over there pumping fumes up into the atmosphere. With the intention of improving the environmental outcome, inadvertently it became worse.

But that has been rectified here today and we are very grateful for that. I would reiterate that this is not just about Mount Isa; it is as much about Townsville. There are some 150 jobs at the refinery in Townsville and 300 skilled jobs. The Mount Isa copper smelter is in the top two of the largest copper mining and smelting operations left in Australia. They have developed world-breaking technology that they have marketed overseas, but if you shut the smelter down you will lose those skills and that expertise. If we lose that smelter it is a big thing because that will ruin the viability of other small mines in the area who cannot afford their own smelter.

It is a great thing we are doing here today. I am very appreciative of the government for making this happen. People in Mount Isa should be very happy that we now have the opportunity to keep our doors open and keep the mine going—a business that was voted the most significant business in 150 years of Queensland's history.

(Time expired)