




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Agriculture and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (8.10 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation Bill and its consideration by the Agriculture and Environment Committee. I refer to the questions that were put to the minister throughout that process. A big focus of those questions for me being in Western Queensland was the drought assistance and our approach to that. The drought assistance package in Queensland has been a failure and has not been anywhere near commensurate with the size of the problem and the threat that the cattle industry faces west of the Great Divide. That assistance has been rolled out through QRAA, so a big focus of our questioning was the assistance package through QRAA.

We found that there was \$141 million in cash sitting in QRAA at the moment, undelivered, and \$300 million in equity sitting in QRAA as well for all of their activities. Let me put that into context with the state of an industry that is worth \$4 billion to the state economy. Having that money sitting there with the threat that that industry is facing would lead one to think that we should be reconsidering our approach to the drought industry and what we are doing to help what is a flailing industry at the moment. That was a big focus of that line of questioning. One part of the drought assistance that was addressed was the water infrastructure. That is about the only part of the drought assistance that has been well received. However, the one big issue with that is dam desilting is not allowed under that program, and for people who have run out of money that is a good area for them to get involved in. That is one area we are very interested in.

Another interesting point that came up in looking at the budget papers was the fact that productivity was referred to countless times throughout the documents. I think that is central to a policy failure that is coming through successive governments in the area of agriculture. There is too much focus on productivity and not enough focus on profitability. I saw a criticism of me and the KAP in the *Courier-Mail* once that said that productivity has been improved in the dairy industry and how that is a wonderful thing. What that means is that dairy farmers stay up until 10 or 11 o'clock at night doing the work of two people and getting paid less for it and that is considered a wonderful achievement in productivity and good for the industry. Well, I disagree. Industries should be profitable and that should be the aim of a policy, not just productivity. It would be great to see when policy and budget documents come out that there is more focus on profitability. That is central to the theme of what we should be trying to achieve in government.

Another issue that is very close to the heart of people in Western Queensland is country racing. The minister graciously addressed some of those issues. There is a big problem in country racing—it is measured and put in the same parcel as many other races. The point I am trying to make is that there are many country race meetings in my electorate that are a community service or a social event more than they are a racing event. If you put yourself in the shoes of someone who works in a remote town

of Richmond or Hughenden, they might have one race meeting a year and that means a lot to them but the Queensland racing industry views that as something that should be profitable or should contribute to the racing industry in some commercial way. They are not commercial and they never will be.

Those race meetings desperately need to be revisited in the way they are funded. They could be funded through the department of communities, because they are probably more akin to a social event or something like the multicultural festival in Mount Isa that gets funding assistance to celebrate some part of the community. I think country racing could be funded through that avenue because it is something that is holding these flailing communities together at the moment. It is one of the last things they have and they cannot afford to lose it.

(Time expired)