



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2015

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**North-West Queensland, Employment**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (12.12 pm): I rise to, firstly, talk about the recent announcement by Glencore to cut about 500 jobs in the north-west region. That raises a couple of important issues that I think parliament should be made aware of. Of those 500 jobs, about 140 of them were based in Mount Isa. That is an interesting point to reflect on, because many of those 500 jobs were held by people in Townsville and maybe to a lesser extent in Cairns and Brisbane. People who were in those jobs were flying in and flying out of that region. It is also important to note the temporary nature of these jobs cuts. The zinc market, to which this decision relates, has a good outlook. There has been an unsuspected, or a difficult-to-describe, drop in the price of zinc that is not consistent with the global dynamics of the zinc market. There is an expected upturn in the future.

However, the point to make is that the majority of those jobs were held by people who lived on the coast. The majority of the jobs throughout the north-west of Queensland in the mining industry are held by fly-in fly-out workers and 100 per cent of mining royalties come down here to be distributed by the government with no real demand for those royalties to be returned to the north-west in the form of tax concessions. Right now, the difficulties that are being experienced in the Townsville economy are a result of the downturn in the mining industry, and a lot of that downturn is occurring in the north-west.

There are no votes in the north-west, or west of the Great Divide. I think we could all agree that spending from all levels of government and from different parties in this House has gravitated to the coast. The money is not going where it has to to stimulate industry and, in this case, primary industry. That is part of the economic cost that we are now experiencing in Brisbane and all along the coast. The only way to get these office towers built and retail centres re-leased is to also nurture our primary industry that sits out there. Unfortunately, there has been an enormous deficit in that space. I am not just talking about mining; I am also talking about rural industry.

There are some answers. A few years ago there was an answer by providing competitive energy pricing to the north-west. There was a lot of money contributed from the federal level towards the transmission line that would have kept competitive energy pricing in the north-west. But at the state level that was not committed to. Now, we do not have a transmission line and we are also battling rising gas prices. That is something that we have to address.

At the moment, rural debt and the cost of rural debt is by far and away having the biggest impact on the economy in rural areas. If we can address that issue, we could have a good, viable industry that creates jobs, that pays taxes and that keeps our towns alive. There is a good, viable solution to address that issue by having a reconstruction board. It is also cost effective for taxpayers and it solves a lot of problems that the government has in balancing its budget down here. Without it, we have a lot of problems.

While I am talking about problems, last week I was driving through the west. After three years of drought the owner of a good, solid local business that by all means should be travelling well—and I think his would be a good case in point for all the businesses that exist in every town in my electorate outside of Cloncurry and Mount Isa—said to me, 'Rob, I have to save each week to see if I can get enough money to fuel the car to go to Townsville to pick up stuff.' That is the sort of poverty that I am talking about in the north-west at the moment. These people are on their knees. They need some help from the government and if we do not help them, a lot of towns out there will struggle to maintain their existence. We are dying in numbers now. We have had year 7 taken from us. Every industry in my electorate is affected. There are not many other reasons to be out there, because it is pretty remote. The people in my area desperately need help.

There are some answers, but it will take some affirmative action from this government. The time to act on this issue was about six months ago. There is a plea from my area to get some action on this issue. I am talking about investment in critical infrastructure. I can throw in things like work on the Hann Highway and investment in water and sewerage in those industry-rich areas. We do not want glass baubles and shiny things; we need things that are going to develop industry or nurture and stimulate industry. The people out there want jobs. They want certainty.

I think the loss of those Glencore jobs is a good wake-up call. We need to be affirmative. Queensland wants a signal from the government. Regardless of what the deficit or debt is, they want to see affirmative action from the government and see it involving itself to create opportunities for jobs and industry.