




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 28 October 2015

**ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (9.42 pm): It is with an enormous sense of frustration and anger that I rise to speak in support of this bill tonight. I have a lot personally invested in this bill. I may only be here for the longevity of this parliament, but there will be a legacy after this that will resound for longer and play a significant role in the future of Queensland.

I do not think it comes as any surprise that in most cases money from government gravitates towards where the voting areas are. It happens all the time, and I think that is a proposition everyone can accept. I think everyone would accept the proposition that there is a dwindling population in rural and remote Queensland and therefore there are fewer seats. There are more seats in Townsville and Mackay and there is more propensity for the money to go there. I love going through the examples. I have to pick on Townsville because it is my nearest neighbour. A couple of years ago they got \$24 million for Blakeys Crossing. Out in my electorate we have the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere. It has 38 kilometres of road to seal off so it has all-weather access. There are about 900 workers there and none of them work in Mount Isa. It is not a Mount Isa issue; they are Brisbane and Townsville workers. But it does not get money primarily because we do not have the seats out there.

A deficit of infrastructure and policies go through this House beyond the term of this government, whether it is Liberal or Labor. That happens because we do not have the seats, and I think that is a proposition everyone can agree upon. The population is dwindling because there is less opportunity because we are not investing. There is a deficit of policies and investment. I will go through a catalogue of them if you like. The transmission line is going to hurt our competitiveness in energy in the North West Minerals Province. Little things like the year 7 transition; people leave town. Railway cutbacks; people leave town. There is a deficit of investment and we keep losing people. So they gravitate to the city, which means there is more reason to have more votes in the city. It is a self-manifesting problem. If we do not do anything about it, like with this bill tonight, it is going to get worse. It is not my electorate we are talking about, it is the state. If you want industry to grow, you need investment west of the Great Divide. We are not talking about creating more seats, we want to preserve what is there. They are rural and regional seats with rural and regional issues. We are losing the battle anyway; we are just trying to keep what is there.

I have a personal investment in this because I live my life like this. I will give you an example of a working week for me. People in Mount Isa say, 'Rob, we never see you.' I think, 'Bloody hell!' I think I am in Mount Isa all the time and I think that I am not in Brisbane all that often, so what am I doing? My house is like a motel. I cannot connect with friends in Mount Isa. Here is a typical drive for me. I will do eight and a half hours from Mount Isa to Georgetown in one of the far reaches of my electorate. Over 90 per cent of that time I am out of mobile range, so telecommunication does not mean a thing. If I am going through a town, I will make a couple of insignificant calls because I am racing through there. I do not get a rest because I need to get to the place where I am going to meet people. I do not have time

to check my messages when I am there because I need to engage with the people who are the whole purpose of my being there. Then I will hop back in my car. Late at night I might get a chance to check some messages, in which case I do not get a chance to call my family or other people. I get up early and drive back eight and a half hours. Now, that is eight and a half hours that a lot of you people do not have to use. Then I am expected to come down here and compete with you all in debates on issues when you have had extra time. Because you are not sitting in the car you can read your bills and you can connect with the media. You have access to TV cameras and newspapers.

The other week I had to pay money out of my own account to get the media out to try and throw light on an issue that anyone on the coast would have perfect access to. The parliament did not fund it so I paid it myself. In the last six months I was \$4,000 or \$5,000 out of pocket on my travel. I have never gone over it before, but with this new role we have to travel everywhere. I am \$4,000 to \$5,000 out of pocket, my own personal expense, trying to get around my electorate and that means I am driving by myself. That means twice this year I have slept in my car overnight. This is not to make a statement; I just could not make it back in time. I had run out of charter money.

I might only be here for this term, but we are talking about the people after me. There is a great disparity for anyone who lives out in these electorates, and all we are asking for is something that will preserve that. If four per cent is too much, then give us something that just protects where we are. That is not much to ask. What I am also trying to ask here today is that we save ourselves, because this state has a big problem in that we are not investing west of the Great Divide. Not all of the answers are there, but many of them are. If we do not have the voting power it does not get there. No-one has been enlightened enough or had the traction to do that.

I heard people throwing off at Sir Joh before, but he was one of the last people to throw serious money out there to make things happen. You can sit here and make it all about one party or the other, but this is a division between west and remote areas and city areas. We are losing the battle anyway, as my colleague from Dalrymple knows very well. We are used to taking hits on everything. One of the facts I have in front of me is that nine per cent of Brisbane residents live in poverty while in rural and regional Queensland it is up to 15 per cent. That is no coincidence.

This is not about the Mount Isa electorate. It is not about either party having an advantage. We need to leave a legacy that sets a platform for development and the proper government of Queensland. We are losing the battle in western areas. I have 14 councils, 23 police stations and 40 schools to look after. There are a lot of kids I never get to hand something out to on presentation day. I really feel for those kids. It means so much to them when I can go and shake their hand and be there. I cannot do it over the phone. I have 40 schools to get around, over 570,000 kilometres. If we do not do anything here tonight, if we do not support this bill, we are telling a lot of them that it is going to get worse for them. That is really unfair.

I think I have made my point. I hope I have. I know which way this will go tonight, but I hope members can live with their conscience. This is a bitter pill for us to swallow. It is unfair on the people of Western Queensland. It will do the state damage. We have the opportunity to do something right. If members think four per cent is too much, they should change it to 2½ per cent.

If we do not want any more politicians and I am being told to suck it up in the western areas, then members in the cities need to suck it up as well. We should keep everything the same and not have electorates gravitate to the cities. City constituents do not need any more representation, just as I do not need any more area in my electorate. If I have to take a hit and suck it up, so should people in the city if there are too many people in their electorates. I do not wear that argument.

The last point I make relates to telecommunications. I think that is a very invalid, poor argument. There is no replacement for giving people the opportunity to shake hands with their member or look their member in the eye. There is no great advantage in me or other members in large rural electorates at least preserving the size. Without this, we cannot guarantee preservation of the current size.

I speak with a lot of anger and frustration, but I think this is a build-up of a lot of issues. It goes beyond just this parliament; it goes through all the other parliaments. There is an extreme disparity in representation already. I think the state is paying for it right now. I think it will pay for it more if it is not fixed. This will just take it further. This gives more power to larger voting areas, which is why we talk about more traffic tunnels and more major superhighways when the rail line to the North West Minerals Province, with a gross regional product of \$4 billion, is in decline. I mention the rail line and the Flinders Highway. We do not have a transmission line so we are stuck with the price of gas. All of these things will see industry and opportunities in other parts of the state decline. As I said, over 50 per cent of people out there are flying in and out from Townsville and Brisbane. If members want to save themselves, they should be rethinking their position on these issues. There is a lot of opportunity out there that drives a lot of the business and opportunities here in Brisbane, but it will not be there forever. It is dying at the moment and it will keep dying if we do not look after it.