




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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**ELECTORAL (IMPROVING REPRESENTATION) AND ANOTHER ACT  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.48 pm), in reply: I rise to sum up the debate that has taken place. Members have heard a lot of the arguments before, but I will go through them all again because it is really important. I think the first thing to acknowledge here—it is stating the obvious—is that there is politics at play and a lot of sense and reason has gone out of the debate. I will simply reiterate the primary argument.

This is not a plea from Rob Katter for the seat of Mount Isa, Gregory, Cook or Dalrymple. That really misses the point. The point is that there has been, as was said before, a deficit of policy and investment in rural and regional Queensland. Intrinsicly, we are an economy and a state that relies very heavily on those areas. I want to give members a little snapshot of how that can play out in electorates like mine when there is ignorance or there is just not that focus or you do not have that representation. During the last term of government we had the introduction of the year 7 transition, which had support from both sides of this House and federally. The year 7 transition rolled out and most of the towns in my electorate did not have a high school or go through to year 12, so in many towns this was a big problem. I do not think many people realised that, but once everyone realised how big an effect this had on those towns you were left with the impression that people ran this policy out without actually realising how much it hurts those little towns. Those towns only have small numbers and are pretty insignificant in terms of the broader population of Queensland, but it is very significant if you live in Julia Creek, or Karumba, or Georgetown. It is very significant.

When you lose one more teacher or lose one more family from those towns, those towns are trying to hold it all together and are saying to people, 'Don't move away. We'd love you to still stay here. You can build a future here,' when they are seeing more people ripped out of the school. We still have not repaired the damage from that, but you just get forgotten. I do not really blame people for doing that. It is just how it works when you do not have the numbers or the representation out there or if you are not on the ground enough. It has been said ad nauseam, but I am not on the ground enough so I do not expect anyone else here to get on the ground out there much. Unless we want to have a vacuum out there and service these places from the coast, I do not see how else this plays out because the trends are there now. If you look at a couple of communities where there has been some population growth, the future still does not look good. Intuitively you can see how this all plays out because in these towns you do not get the investment.

I will pick on the last government in terms of the Royalties for the Regions program, but this is a theme that is played out with both sides of parliament through many governments. With regard to the Royalties for the Regions program, the world's biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere is the Incitec Pivot plant at Phosphate Hill. It needed 30 or 40 kilometres of bitumen to give all-weather access to one of the biggest fertiliser plants in the Southern Hemisphere. None of the employees are from

Cloncurry or Mount Isa. Rather, they are all Townsville or Brisbane employees so the benefits are really more to the coast than those places and all of the royalties come to Brisbane. All the benefits come down there, but they have a disadvantage in that they have not got a sealed road into their mine so consumables cannot get into that mine in the wet weather most months of the year. Money went everywhere else in that program, but there was no money for roads like that. That is a theme that plays out all of the time because the numbers are not there, the votes are not there and country representation in parliament is not there. Whether we like it or not, it might not be a huge part of the economy but it is a very important part of our economy that gets neglected because it does not have the representation.

There is a really important point that has not been raised tonight in this debate—that is, pound for pound, it is much harder for the member for Dalrymple, the member for Mount Isa and the member for Gregory to match it with a city MP. There is a distinct comparative advantage from the start if you are a city MP. For instance, if I am a city MP on the coast, you have direct access to TV cameras and newspapers. You are at your desk more often so you are in touch with the media. I am out on the road for half the day and there are big limitations on what you can do on your phone because you cannot pick up papers and look at your diary and make reference to things. You can make some phone calls that do not take too much, but there is a lot that you cannot do when you are not at your desk. If I am driving in the electorate most of the time, I am at a distinct disadvantage when trying to debate with someone else who has a different opinion or view and who has the opportunity to get a lot more outreach due to their contact with the media and who has a lot better connection with the media and is not spending as much time on the road as I am. Already there is a distinct disadvantage for rural MPs to come down here and try to compete on a level pegging. I know there is a lot of sympathy in this House for rural areas, but sympathy does not play a part in it when it comes to numbers in parliament because the politics will win at the end of the day. It always does. Again, we are not talking about increasing those numbers; we are just talking about stemming the flow and stopping the haemorrhaging.

In summary, the bigger point that is being missed is that this is a real risk to our economy and our future as a state because representation has to be adequate in those areas. Everyone would acknowledge that it cannot be done with a bit more communications allowance or technology. That does not make a scrap of difference to what we are talking about here, and this bill goes some way to try to address that. It does not correct it, but it goes some way to try to address that. At best it can get us close to a position of fairness where we are not expected to go these enormous distances. For a few more seats in parliament, if Queenslanders saw the full picture—and all of those people making submissions saw the full picture—and had access to those arguments I think they would agree. I think they would want good representation for those areas. Just as I want good representation for the people of Brisbane, I hope that they would want fair representation for their rural cousins as well. I do not think that that is a big ask and I think it is dreadfully unfair if the government does not support that ideal. It really limits us in the future as a state and I can absolutely assure members that we will be paying the price in terms of the way that we develop and the impact of how this plays out in the future. I do not just commend this bill: I plead with members of the House to seriously consider this bill and the impacts that it will have on our state. I ask members to try to put their political prejudices aside so that we have a good outcome for the people of Queensland. I commend this bill to the House.