



Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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

Second Reading

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (4.32 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Representation and bipartisanship are at the core of the Electoral (Improving Representation) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. Importantly, the bill ensures that Queenslanders will have more equitable and improved access to representation. We are conserving and improving current access, not stretching our electorates beyond capacity. That is an important point to think about, because much of the media has been reporting that this is a grab at power for the bush. It cannot be like that. At best, this bill preserves the representation that exists now. There is no way it can increase the representation of the bush or rural seats. That is a completely misleading proposition that has been put up by the media.

The Electoral (Improving Representation) and Another Act Amendment Bill does this in three ways. The bill provides for further seats in Queensland, increasing the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly from 89 to 93 to improve representation. It is expected that they will be distributed in urban areas, as per the existing models. Again, the additional seats probably will be of more benefit to the people in the south-east corner, but at best it offers that there will be no sinkhole in the south-east corner that pulls out and enlarges seats in rural and regional Queensland. The bill ensures that the Electoral Commission of Queensland is chosen through bipartisanship support, as opposed to single nominations by the government of the day. Further, the bill requires an appointee with qualifications in demography.

I will explain what this bill does not do. This bill does not disrupt or attempt to amend the district weighting system for the five large rural seats of Cook, Gregory, Warrego, Dalrymple and Mount Isa, therefore leaving voter weighting consistent. The one vote, one value ideology will remain as it stands under the current system. The bill does not add more seats in rural and regional areas. I wish it did, but it does not. Alternatively, it is likely to add more seats in urban areas. The bill simply retains the status quo to maintain the current boundaries, ensuring the rural voice is not diluted or restricted any further than it is already.

Unless this bill is passed, the next redistribution, which is due in 2016, will most likely result in more rural and regional seats being lost to South-East Queensland. We need to amend this outdated system. In 1986 the average electorate had 17,500 constituents; now each has 34,000. I repeat: the system is outdated. It has been almost 30 years since the last increase in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, with the number of seats rising from 82 to 89, serving a population of 2.5 million. Today there are over 4.8 million Queenslanders.

By comparison, New South Wales has 93 electoral districts represented in its lower house and an upper house of 42 members, which is a total of 135 elected members. Often I find the point that is lost in the media and public discussion on this issue is that ours is a unicameral system and there is a hell of a lot more members of parliament in all of the other states than we have here, so already we are doing a bigger job. Victoria has 88 electoral districts represented in its lower house and an upper house of 40 members, which is a total of 128 elected members. Neither New South Wales nor Victoria has the huge land mass and huge distances that we have in Queensland. The proportionate increase in major urban areas has led to an expansion in many rural seats that can least afford it.

The Mount Isa electorate alone covers 570,502 square kilometres, which is over 30 per cent of the entire state of Queensland. In total, Mount Isa has 23 police stations, 40 schools, 19 ambulance stations, seven fire stations, 20 hospitals and healthcare centres and 14 shires. To give a bit of a snapshot, in November I travelled 9,100 kilometres from Mount Isa to Brisbane, 560 kilometres in a single trip from Mount Isa to Richmond, 1,040 kilometres from Mount Isa to Hughenden and 1,374 from Mount Isa to Birdsville, which is a total of 12,000 kilometres in one month. All up, in November I travelled an average of 5,100 kilometres per week. Although it may seem trivial, I would like to illustrate this point and the simple impracticality of the size of electorate. While most members with urban seats have been able to carry out community duties, especially over the Christmas season, most of my electorate goes without their local member. I am unable to attend school events, graduations and awards nights due to the sheer vastness of the electorate. Therefore, today I wish all the schools in my electorate well and acknowledge those events that I will not be able to get to: the Barkly Highway State School awards parade, the Mount Isa Central State School awards night, the Normanton State School awards, the Townview State School awards day, the Barkly Highway State School farewell night, the Mornington Island State School awards, the Mount Isa School of the Air awards, the St Francis School awards, the Boulia State School awards, the Birdsville State School awards, the Burketown State School awards night and Christmas carols, the Dajarra State School awards night, the Forsayth State School awards night, the Camooweal State School awards, the Georgetown State School awards, the Gulf Christian College awards in Normanton and, last week, the Julia Creek State School awards, the Cameron Downs State School awards, the Edmund Rice Education Australia awards day, the Healy State School graduation evening, the St Joseph's School awards and the Croydon State School awards night. All those school events will happen without the presence of the local member and that situation will continue under the status quo, if not get worse. I think members would be doing an injustice to those schools and the people involved in them if they do not vote for this bill tonight.

The Clerk of the Parliament stated with regard to the redistribution in 2009 that the parliament needed another 10 seats otherwise, it was suggested, each redistribution would result in fewer country and regional seats. This would result in less representation of country and regional people in the Queensland parliament. Like we have said before, that is not good for anyone.

I will labour that point. We talked about this last time. This is not about Rob Katter or my successor getting extra electoral allowance; it is about a legacy of this parliament that there is representation for a significant portion of the state which has significant industry that is neglected. We know that there is always a gravitation of funds from this parliament towards where the votes are. I can tell members now that it will get worse. Members will be part of the legacy of contributing to the vacuum out there. It is bad for the future if we continue down this path.

There is such a deficit in terms of the concentration on issues out there. Every now and then there are good things done by governments for western areas, but we are definitely losing the battle. Towns are dying and industries are dying. That might not mean much to a lot of people. A lot of people on the coast and in urban areas might still have a good lifestyle, but for those in western areas it is diminishing at a rapid rate.

The big problem is that a lot of the mining, agriculture and primary industries, which are vital to the robust integrity of our economy, have been severely compromised. We cannot run these industries remotely and we cannot have fly-in fly-out for every job out west, even though that is happening in increasing numbers.

There will be a day of reckoning. At some point someone is going to have to arrest the momentum and the trajectory we are on. We are on a trajectory to oblivion. These areas have vital industries which are critical to the normal functioning of our economy.

Five or 10 years ago everybody was saying that the mining industry is going to get us through and we do not need to worry about agriculture and some of the other primary industries. People should look at that now. The mining industry is dying out there and we all need agricultural jobs. That should play out across all areas of the state. The resources will not be allocated there if there are no votes there.

My seat may end up being a Labor seat or a Liberal seat after the next election. We should take the party politics out of it. We have to think about what we are doing in this parliament. What sort of legacy will we leave for future governments and future parliaments? We are already down that road, but we can arrest the momentum. All we are asking is that we put a stop to the loss of seats. There will not be any gain here. We are just asking to put a stop to the loss of seats and increase the representation in city seats. I commend this bill to the House.