



Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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TRANSPORT LEGISLATION (TAXI SERVICES) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (7.40 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Transport Legislation (Taxi Services) Amendment Bill represents a serious commitment to upholding the law as it stands in Queensland by providing a disincentive to offer an unlicensed taxi service. There was general consent amongst the community that without this bill or similar provisions rideshare services will have a significant impact on the livelihoods and possibly the safety of many Australians. While a review into point-to-point transport is underway, it is imperative that the regulations and laws of the day are upheld until the review is complete.

Be aware that this does not necessarily have to be a philosophical debate here tonight on the merits of Uber or otherwise. In fact, you could be a supporter of Uber and still support the intent of this bill tonight. This bill tonight is about upholding the laws that we make in this place, in this House, and sending a signal to the domestic and international business community that we will not tolerate businesses arrogantly bypassing our laws to take advantage of existing businesses that we have in this state. It is very important that we send that signal here tonight. The taxi review is coming. Things can happen after that. Until then, if it is an unlawful activity, there should be a signal sent that we are willing to uphold the laws that we make here and crack down on it.

The bill is about being grown-ups in government, earning our pay, doing what may not be popular with certain groups in the community, doing what may make you feel uncomfortable—this is mainly for people who cannot think beyond their own cheap cab fare ride and not think about the serious impacts this has well beyond the reaches of just this bill. The signal that this sends to the rest of not just Queensland but Australia is very important: the government holds the reins and we will not be dictated to by multinational corporations with their business plan. They must abide by the laws that we make in this place.

What is a taxi? A 'taxi service', as defined under the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994, means—

... a public passenger service, other than an excluded public passenger service, provided by a motor vehicle under which the vehicle—

- (a) is able, when not hired, to be hailed for hire by members of the public; or
- (b) provides a demand responsive service under which members of the public are able to hire the vehicle through electronic communication; or
- (c) plies or stands for hire on a road.

As we have said all along, if you are not a taxi service, you have nothing to worry about with this bill. I find the message that we get from Uber very confusing. They are so worried about this bill and at the same time they say they are not a taxi service, but this bill only refers to unlicensed taxi services. If what they say is correct—that they are not a taxi service—they have nothing to fear with this bill. Their position is entirely contradictory. That was tried and tested in the committee hearings, and the members of the committee saw that. Uber's constant comments and interference—they have had great impact in the media on this bill—just go to show how contradictory their position is.

I want to put the taxidivers and owners across Queensland into perspective. They are not the millionaires Uber makes them out to be. These are people who have been operating a service under the regulations of government, who trust the government to protect the very same industry it has worked to build. Let us reflect on this for a moment. This is an argument used by a lot of people—that they are greedy owners, that they are greedy capitalists who build a business and draw an income from a bundle of rights that they pay for, and they will pay a price for that because they know they are protected by regulation. Doesn't that sound like a lot of other businesses out there? Doesn't that sound like the pharmacy industry, the hotel industry, the bottle-o industry, retail shops and commercial buildings?

If I buy a commercial building, I buy a bundle of rights because I know they are protected by laws such as planning instruments—laws that we make in this House—so I have the confidence to invest in that. If we are sitting by while this multinational comes in and says, 'We don't really care about your laws. We are going to come in and undermine all of that,' we are sending a signal to all of those investors out there that we are not willing to uphold those laws or police them or make an effort here. Be careful when you are investing in things because we are not sure whether we are willing to uphold those laws. That is how important this is here tonight. That is how important this signal is. I have received hundreds of letters from some of the distressed taxi owners. With the indulgence of the House, I would like to read one of the letters. It states—

We have owned and driven taxis for the past 35 years. They have educated our children through private schools, and universities, for this we a grateful, however we worked long hours and most weekends.

My husband and I now find ourselves after balloting for licence plates through the Queensland Government and purchased "in good faith" the licence plates, and now find that this asset has eroded by \$200,000. How do you think this feels to us that we now cannot being retired and in our 70's go and start driving again, and earning a living.

If the government can sell the plates on one hand and now legitimise an industry that does NOT have to pay, firstly the registration and numerous insurance policies that regulated taxis pay, and 6 monthly routine inspections that regulated taxi plate holders are required to and also pay security and accreditation licences to the Queensland Government.

Basically the current government are sitting on their hands—

at all levels across all Australia—

or perhaps holding out their hands to an international company, that cannot be even held accountable here in Australia to pay taxes in this country.

When we had drivers driving for us and regular transport inspections, there is accountability for the mileage the cab does and the expected revenue the Australian Taxation Department receives each year.

Uber drivers have no accountability to Australian Tax because it's all paid through PayPal.

I would also like to remind the government of its obligation to the disabled in our community. Is Uber going to outfit their vehicles at a cost of \$50,000 for hydraulic lifters for wheelchair dependent clients. Of course they are not. This in itself is discrimination, having a brother who relies on this transport.

Where is the decency and moral obligation for the government to uphold this hard working and safe transport industry.

Please keep the regulated taxi industry going, or sell taxi plates to the uber company and let them run their business the same as we Australians.

I would like to talk about the quality of service that is provided by Queensland taxis and to look at how that compares across the world. The Taxi Council of Queensland embarked on a research tour of some of the most publicised taxi jurisdictions around the world. I have a copy of that report with me. I only hope this research is taken into account when the outcome of the OPT, Opportunities for Personalised Transport, review is to be decided. Other places like New York, San Francisco and Singapore all could not hold a candle to the Queensland taxi industry in terms of standards.

The standards in Queensland have been driven by the industry itself. They have made recommendations to the government over the years that the standards have been based upon. They have been lifting the standards for themselves for many years. This is despised by many people out there or spoken down as being a negative. We have been working to put these regulations in place for a very good reason over the years—the same reason we have security measures or lockout laws at a pub or any other issue that provides public safety. We do it for a reason. People are now saying that this is terrible because it adds to the cost. It can be only one or the other.

The Queensland taxi industry is well recognised as one of the leaders globally in taxi regulation and offers the highest of standards. No other jurisdiction visited within that review had minimum service levels and universal service obligations, one of which being the provision of a 24-hour service. If members want to look into a crystal ball in the future in a world that has only Uber, there is no obligation on them to offer a 24-hour service. If you are stuck at the airport at 3 am, look forward to surge pricing or perhaps no car turning up. There is no regulation to address that.

Queensland is a world leader in wheelchair accessible taxi services offering the only service that is not subsidised by the government. It is subsidised by the drivers themselves. At the moment they are covering the cost for us in government. It is cross-subsidised by the regular service.

I am running short of time. Uber is saying \$60 billion. Where is that coming from? It is coming from overseas. In New South Wales they are now legal. We will police taxi services in Australia but Uber will not pay tax because they are an overseas company. This is unfair legislation. Be careful of the shiny bauble. Look into the future at what will be produced and you will not like it.

(Time expired)