




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce; Hann Highway

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (3.01 pm): Recently the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce completed a tour of Queensland. I am very grateful to the member for Ipswich West and the member for Nanango for touring with me. Some of it was eye-opening for me. Other members of the House attended. The main point to make is that there are still some deeply rooted structural problems in many of these rural communities. I would describe this as a rural crisis which was brought on acutely by the drought. There are some deeply embedded problems that need fixing.

Part of the discussions centred around the fact that infrastructure projects play a role in this. That is quite an obvious response. I want to park the discussion about the agricultural industry for now and talk about some projects. We are looking for value-for-money projects that have widespread benefits. We all have our own projects and our own problems.

One of the greatest opportunities in terms of infrastructure that runs through my electorate is the Hann Highway. We are at the point where we need a commitment. Everyone is talking about it. Everyone agrees it is a terrific idea. The US Army built the highway during the Second World War. They recognised that strategically Queensland needed an alternate route that does not run down the coast in flood-prone areas. It needs to be west enough so that it is not subject to the influence of the high rainfall rivers. The US Army built the Hann Highway at that point.

It has never been sealed since. The good news is that this is not just a local road that is used for cattle; this is a road that Blenners Transport Mackay and the Australian banana industry use. It is churning out hundreds of millions of dollars of bananas each year. Most of their bananas are sold in Sydney and Melbourne. They can get them there eight hours earlier via the inland route. They can take triple road trains up the middle instead of taking B-doubles along the coast where there is more traffic load. That would mean fewer trucks on the Bruce Highway and more trucks that get down south eight hours earlier. Most of the benefits are felt in the Tablelands and Cairns. Even though the road goes through my electorate, the benefits are widespread. That is why Advance Cairns and the like put this as one of its priority projects.

It must be funded. The games between the federal and state governments about who is going to go first have to stop. Everyone talks about funding this highway. It absolutely needs that funding to gain these advantages. The problem in my electorate is that we have Georgetown and Hughenden—two towns on their knees—that desperately need work. Their problems are very serious. They are losing critical numbers and teachers at their schools. That precipitates into more families leaving town. Businesses are closing down. In these small towns there are no alternate industries at the moment. There is an opportunity ahead. There is a future ahead. They need these industry-enabling projects that will pay themselves off in the long run. They will benefit all of Queensland. They need to be done.