




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 12 May 2016

ADJOURNMENT

Local Procurement Policy

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (9.46 pm): I rise tonight to talk about local procurement policies and the punishing effect they are having on bush towns. On the weekend I had a phone call from stalwart quintessential western town resident Joey Bakhsh from Cloncurry, who rang me very distressed. Joey is an OAM. He spent most of his years—many years—on the railways and in the auxiliary fire service. He is a pillar of Cloncurry. He rang me very distressed because progressively over the years he has seen more and more of the contracts in Cloncurry going to out-of-town larger contractors.

In this age of compliance, the bar is just becoming too high for many of these local contractors, who are collectively in most cases the most reliable, cost-effective and efficient operators. More importantly, they make up the fabric of those towns. When they miss out on that work it has devastating effects on the towns. The fact that these people are more efficient was endorsed empirically by the NDRRA day labour trials, which showed savings of \$160 million to the taxpayers of Queensland in the context of roadworks. Locals know where the gravel pits are. People live locally, so they are not paying travel costs. They can do deals with other local contractors. Things can just happen. You do not have as many hiccups and things can be done, but that does not always show up on the department's desk when they are awarding these tenders.

I know there are challenges about these procurement policies, but we have to acknowledge that there is a real problem and the job can be done better by a smaller contractor who is locally based. It is important work to the community, but it is an important saving to the taxpayer. We have a real problem because, while some of these guys do not have the compliance, they will do a safer and more reliable job. The fact that they do not have a piece of paper to protect them is a false economy and we assume a false level of safety. It would be a great thing for taxpayers if the bar were lowered and we accepted some risk with these operations. There will be failures in some cases, but the net benefit to the taxpayer has been proven. It is so desperately important to these bush towns, because in this age of compliance the problem will become more acute. It is definitely a growing problem affecting bush towns, and it is really distressing people in many towns because they can see that as a policy it is killing our towns. This needs to be addressed.