




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; DUTIES AND  
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (5.37 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation Bill. I start by saying that I think those in high-ranking positions in the government who have been a lot closer to the action than I have been would admit there are a lot of big numbers at play in any budget that are very difficult to interpret and very difficult for us to make a comment on as to how they are arrived at. The one thing we all inherently understand is that there are ever-increasing demands on services and expectations from the public within this period of a diminishing ability to recover those costs. I speak very much of the downturn in the resources industry and many other industries in my patch of the world. It is a challenge for any party in government, and I have a lot of respect for the people in Treasury trying to deal with that issue.

The point I would like to make—and hopefully it is a point of difference—is that a way to reconcile those expectations with our ability to get that revenue is to have less focus on that fiscal balance and more focus on unemployment and industry, particularly that building of industry. That is easy to put into words, but I think it can be done and there can be a change in government if governments get their hands dirty and play a part in how that industry builds.

The mantra for a long time in this state has been that it must be delivered through private industry. That can often be the best case, but we are in desperate need of new industries to be formed in this state and that sometimes takes the intervention of government. An example of that would be in the ethanol industry. I am pleased to say that we played a role in making sure that biofuels will now be mandated in this state. It is a new industry coming from nowhere and it builds jobs and produces something that goes some way to address that. There are many other opportunities that require intervention.

I think we can always do a lot better in that space. Whilst it is important to acknowledge and address that fiscal budget in the long term, there is no point in high-fiving and air punching in 10 years time if we have achieved budgetary balance—if we have balanced the books—but we have left industry in tatters around the state. That is a very hard thing to balance. In the long term, in the context of the current economy the focus on industry policy is more important than that fiscal balance. That is the commentary I would make on the overall direction of the budget.

I am very grateful for the contribution to the Hann Highway. I make a public thankyou to the Treasurer and the respective ministers. It has been talked about a lot. Some years ago a \$30 million contribution for the Hann Highway was made federally through my father. Since then, there has not been a lot of investment. There has been a lot of talk about it and there have been election commitments, but now we are seeing money in the budget. Irrespective of what happens in the federal election, that should trigger a response and some action for something that is really a collaborative

initiative. I say that as the Hann Highway is located within the Mount Isa electorate, but I think it benefits more electorates outside of Mount Isa. It particularly benefits the banana industry and the growers of fresh produce on the Atherton Tablelands as it is fast-tracked to Sydney and Melbourne where it is readily consumed. The Blenners Transport and the Mackay bananas are much more a fan of the Hann Highway than other industries within my electorate because they will be the big beneficiaries. It is wonderful to see that funding there and I am very grateful for it. I see the minister for roads. That money is there; that is a big contribution and it is something for which we are very grateful.

There is some money for the refurbishment of some health buildings in Cloncurry. There are some buildings that look like they are from the 1950s and 1960s—probably because they are—and they are full of asbestos. There are three little huts. Most people in Cloncurry said, 'That is okay. We will put up with that,' but they are really unacceptable in this day and age. It is an embarrassment that those health buildings in Cloncurry are still being used. They will finally be replaced. I think that the practical outcome of not building all new buildings but refurbishing a modern government building in Cloncurry that is vacant at the moment is a good outcome for everyone.

I turn to the extension of roads money into TIDS. The western roads package in last year's budget had a phenomenal impact on western areas and there is money still flowing through from that. With additional years of TIDS, that is a terrific benefit to all those western councils who rely on the vital money they get for roadworks. The TIDS funding went down to \$30 million and then it was \$40 million under the previous government. It has now been upped to \$70 million and that will extend for another year or two, which is very good news for regional Queensland.

Whilst it did not come through in this budget, I will make mention of the investment of \$25 million for the rail line between Townsville and Mount Isa. That is the sort of thing that builds industry. If more trains can be fitted along that rail and it is maintained there will be a more efficient rail service and more mines and more cattle can get on that line. That is good for everyone in the state. The \$25 million investment in that line and another \$12 million on culverts is a big investment on that Townsville to Mount Isa rail line from which many people outside the Mount Isa electorate benefit. I think that is an excellent spend of government money.

The rural assistance package cannot be underestimated. It has been a very long journey in making and forming those resolutions. I make reference to the rural debt task force and again thank the member for Ipswich West and the member for Nanango for supporting our efforts there and supporting that initiative. There was broad consensus with the majority of the recommendations in the chairman's report, and the majority of those recommendations have been delivered in this budget. The intent was to recognise that there are some very big structural problems in Western Queensland. I really have trouble putting into words the gravity of the problems that exist there and what it is going to take to turn those around. We were looking to those recommendations of that task force for measures that were sympathetic to the taxpayer but have the ability for some sustainable outcomes that really create generational change. I will just to elaborate on some of those points.

Honourable members may think it is a minor thing, but everyone has said that everyone needs financial coaching; we need to get on these farms and help these people understand their business. Another part of looking after people in rural areas is multiperil insurance. It is an initiative which is understated and lot of people do not understand the impact it has. Multiperil insurance is what people have when they do not have exceptional circumstances money. In the past, if people on cattle stations or farms were wiped out by flood or drought they used to have access to federal money for exceptional circumstances. Those days have gone; we will never see that money again. In relation to multiperil insurance, if we can create an industry whereby the industry can look after itself then they can self-fund some protection against exceptional circumstances.

To start up a multiperil insurance industry overnight data collection is needed. To get data collection people need to be encouraged to provide financial statements and get good, clear statements on their productivity and their financial position, which also helps enhance their financial strength and the robustness of their business, which is something that is also strongly advocated by the agricultural groups. These people need help with financial coaching, so we could kill two birds with the one stone. If the multiperil insurance industry participants get more data on productivity and on financials from people, they can then start to offer packages to these people out there. They can then protect themselves via insurance from things like drought and floods. This could be the start of something big. Generational change is being made with that amount of \$2,500 per farm that is made available in Queensland. It is following what has been a great initiative in New South Wales where the industry is taking off. That is a small point that is made in that rural assistance package. It has very big ramifications and is the start of something big.

The stamp duty concessions have not received enough air time. I believe that is a really good thing for rural people. There are a lot of people stuck out there at the moment who cannot afford to get off the farm. Mum and dad cannot afford to leave because there is not enough in it for them to buy a house in town and let the new generation take over. There might be a reluctance to take over because things are tough. With the reduction in stamp duty, that could result in up to \$300,000 on the average place in the Mount Isa electorate. Using that figure of \$300,000, that would be enough for mum and dad to buy a house on the coast and retire and let the kids take over the station, ensuring there is generational change. That is at a pretty big cost to the government. Getting that concession was not an easy thing to yield. Through the fullness of time I think many Queenslanders will benefit from that. Everyone around the state will benefit from the fact that we have enabled a newer generation to have that opportunity to come on and take over the primary production business from their parents.

The \$3.7 million package for education support in drought-affected areas is something that came from a lot of people—a lot of mums—coming forward who were very distressed that they could afford to send their kids away. That required a further input, even though there has been a seven per cent increase in LAFHA in the last couple of years. We have made some progress there.

That \$3.7 million package will allow them the right to have an education. The comment that remains with me came from a very distressed mum one night. She said, 'We chose this lifestyle, and we will put up with not earning any money so we can stay out here, but what really hurts us is that we have had to pull our kids out of school because we cannot afford to send them away. They may not have a chance, and perhaps we have committed them to another pathway. That is what distresses us the most.' Something that would hit at the heart of any Queenslander is that people cannot afford to send their kids to school and they have no other choice, so that \$3.7 million will come in very handy for some people.

I detected a bit of criticism about the Office of Rural Affairs out of DAF, and I accept the criticism that often people do not want more bureaucracy, but the question is what do you do? Do you accept how things are operating now? With the emergence of the rural debt issue, what has been identified is that there was not enough analysis or focus from a policy level in DAF to acknowledge that the problem existed. Someone needs to be quarantined from the other section of the department and commissioned with identifying where these problems lie. That is an important thing to recognise, and this is where we have landed now.

I remember sitting in various meetings with both this government and the previous government, and time after time DAF officers told me that we have good drought assistance measures in place and drought concession loans are doing their job. It was not really a shock to me to learn that, as at December 2015, of the 265 drought concession loans that had gone out in Queensland, four of them had been in the Mount Isa electorate. Out of the worst drought-affected areas, over a third of Queensland, and four loans went out in my area. That tells members how useful they were in western and north-western Queensland. They were absolutely useless, and everyone was sitting around telling me how good they are. Yes, you always have problems with reporting from departments, but something needs to happen. Something needs to change in that space.

The same applies to the shakeup of QRAA. I think that was a comment from both sides of the House and the task force in addressing QRAA and the way that things are being delivered from there. There needs to be different attitudes taken towards how we address the problem of rural debt. We have a bill before the House, and that is an enabler to facilitate that to happen. I gave the example of drought concession loans. Something needs to be shaken up there because things were not being delivered and messages were not getting through to government. You can sit around and do nothing or you can make changes, so we appreciate the changes and I think they will have an impact.

I have some other information in my speech, which I will incorporate about the other components of the package. We could always do with more, but we are very appreciative of that coming through. It is a big change, but more needs to be done. I am sure that a lot of those issues will have a big impact and go some way to changing some of that.

Something that I strongly object to in the budget package is the strategy for monitoring vegetation. I do not want to go too much into the whole debate on vegetation management, but the focus is always to put money into monitoring areas. So much money is needed to fix up feral cats and pigs and prickly acacia—and I acknowledge that there has been an increase in the budget for prickly acacia—but if we stopped worrying about monitoring and punishing all the time and just tried to get some money into these areas where there are really big problems with callitrope bush, prickly acacia, pigs and cats, if we could channel some money in there or fix up some of the national parks in my area where they are degrading, that is where that money should be spent, not on increasing the monitoring.

The other thing I welcome is the \$19 million for biofuels. There are enormous efforts in this country from the oil companies to stem the rollout of biofuels, which will inevitably cost them money, but there are great opportunities for Queensland and this country to deliver a biofuels industry. I would like to think that we played some part in that \$19 million being put towards the biofuels industry. I think that will be a great thing for Queenslanders.

I would like to table some letters of support on another issue from community members and a nonconforming petition from the member for Dalrymple in support of the continuation of a generalist councillor position at the Ravenshoe Community Centre.

*Tabled paper:* Nonconforming petition regarding the continuation of a generalist councillor position at Ravenshoe Community Centre [999].

*Tabled paper:* Bundle of letters regarding the continuation of a generalist councillor position at Ravenshoe Community Centre [1000].

I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech into *Hansard*. I have received approval from the Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

The KAP has continued to assert ourselves in Parliament for our communities and all those outside of major city centres. It's resulted in rural Queensland and the Mount Isa electorate securing some wins in the 2016-17 State Budget. The delivery of the budget with funding for a number of key projects was validation of the influence of the crossbenchers.

In the Mount Isa electorate, these projects will create much needed jobs and stimulate the economies of our rural towns. It has been a long and hard-fought battle, but I'm proud to say we've been successful in delivering for the bush in the 2016-17 state budget. I have worked hard to put the focus back on the bush, championing for important rural and regional issues. The budget is a great example of what a minor party can achieve in a hung parliament. The focus on regional Queensland, particularly the implementation of many recommendations from the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce, which I chaired, is welcome and very much needed.

There are some positive measures within the \$77.9 million Rural Assistance and Drought Package to assist rural producers and communities which was the culmination of hard work towards improving the outlook for rural towns. This will include almost \$42 million to extend existing drought relief arrangements and \$36 million to tackle rural debt and to provide other assistance, such as wild dog control and weed management.

One of the most pleasing aspects in the Farm Transfer Duty exemption, offering long overdue relief for stamp duty which will help inter-generational transfers of property and make it easier for the family farm to survive.

Education support for those in drought-affected areas will also assist in ensuring kids from the bush are receiving the best possible learning outcomes through \$3.7 million across three years. Many of these initiatives are the result of the hard work of the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce and the input from the people of rural communities. Communities hit hard by drought will get support to extend measures to boost mental health initiatives and financial assistance, along with electricity relief for farm irrigation. The Office of Rural Affairs, another recommendation of the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce Report, will collect specific rural data and report to government on the best way forward.

Funding for pest and weed management, boosting regional phone coverage, a review into Biosecurity capabilities and a new agricultural economy for food-based research and development are also positive measures. A commitment to transition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders from prison into ongoing employment in the resource sector through the Jail to Jobs program is a welcome initiative to get more people back into work.

Then there's \$5 million over three years for the Youth Justice Transition to Success Program, providing additional funding to reduce recidivism and increasing participation in education and vocational training activities. There is also a raft of important commitment to the biofuels industry, which the KAP has advocated strongly for, and will continue to push for expansion. The Biofuels Mandate Implementation and Consumer Education Campaign will market research and development into this vital industry through a community awareness campaign around the benefits of Biofuels. This adds to the implementation of the biofuels mandate (Environment) to develop best practice environmental standards as part of the Biofuels mandate. The \$5.3 million Advance Queensland Biofutures 10 year roadmap and Action Plan will help build sustainable export orientated industrial biotechnology and bio products sector, creating regional high value jobs. A \$14 million Biofutures Industry Development Fund will also be established to enable businesses to access venture capital.

In the Mount Isa electorate, the Western Roads Upgrade Program will deliver \$32.4 million in 2016 out of a \$40 million total, due for completion in June 2017. One of the hallmarks of the budget is the long-awaited commitment to seal the Hann Highway, with almost \$20 million to deliver this critical piece of nation-building infrastructure. Other key roads include \$1.72 million in 2016-17 to strengthen and widen the Flinders Hwy (Richmond Julia Creek), \$1.2 million in 2016-17 for sealing the Richmond-Winton Rd, south of Richmond and \$1.2 million in 2016-17 to strengthen and widen Wills Developmental Rd and Julia Creek to Burke & Wills Junction.

For education there's more than \$6 million for schools in Mount Isa electorate. Schools in Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Winton and Normanton will benefit from upgrades to improve learning outcomes. At Winton State School, there's \$540,000 to complete the Manual Arts refurbishment and \$640,000 to complete the Home Economics Kitchen refurbishment. Normanton State School will receive 327,000 for Sports Court Shade Structure through the School Subsidy Scheme. Mornington Island State School will get more than \$3 million for infrastructure upgrades, including a nutritional centre. Through the School Infrastructure Enhancement Program, Mount Isa Central State School has \$210,000 for refurbishments. Doomadgee State School will receive more than \$2 million for refurbishments and Cloncurry State School more than \$200,000 for upgrades. Three key health projects will also be funded, with the Alan Ticehurst Building scoring almost \$1 million for refurbishments.

There is \$300,000 in 2016-17 with a \$2 million total for the Boulia Community Hospital refurbishment and in McKinlay there is \$5 million for the multi-purpose health service to be refurbished and expanded. I've always said investment in infrastructure is a great industry enabler, and we will continue to pressure Government to commit to more funding in this area.

Some of the key infrastructure projects in the Mount Isa electorate include \$1 million for each of the Mount Isa and Richmond fire stations for upgrades, benefitting our hardworking firefighters. On Mornington Island, there is \$1,152,900 in 2016-17 as part of a \$1,647,000 commitment to improve community resilience through the Gununa Jetty and Barge Landing Redevelopment Project Stage 1. \$500,000 has been allocated as part of a \$215.4 million commitment over two years to provide a new Water Reservoir to Georgetown.

After being tragically destroyed by fire recently, there is a welcome \$840,000 in 2016-17 (\$1.2 million total) for the Waltzing Matilda Centre in Winton. In Camooweal, there is \$500,000 in 2016-17 for a solar generation project a welcome initiative which I hope is just the start of more investment in the renewables space. The McKinlay Shire also benefits from \$425,000 in 2016-17 (\$1.4 million total) for Punchbowl Bridge replacement. All of this is on top of the already announced \$25 million to upgrade the Mount Isa to Townsville Rail Line.

Whilst pleased to deliver for the bush, this is only the beginning of our constant pressure on Government to send a larger allocation of funds to rural and regional Queensland. The work will never be done and of course, there were some announcement within the budget that we questioned. The government is spending almost \$8 million dollars over three years and ongoing funding of 1.5 million for satellite imagery of rural and remote Queensland to assist with vegetation management. It's disappointing they will spend millions on spying on our primary producers, because apparently they don't trust our farmers to be responsible managers of their own properties. The government is spending \$10.8 million on the Queensland Art Gallery to bring International and 'blockbuster' exhibits to Brisbane, but sadly leave our primary producers struggling to make ends meet. The government is also going to invest in South East Queensland rail with an exorbitant amount on Cross River Rail with reckless abandon but mentions nothing of investment west of the Great Dividing Range.

There will always be negatives and we will never be fully satisfied, but this has been one of the best budgets in recent times for rural and regional Queensland. The delivery of the budget was validation of the influence of the crossbenchers and has only reinforced our position as champions of the bush. I commend the Bill to the House.