




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2017

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (12.13 pm): I rise to speak to the report of the review of the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme, to which I made a statement of reservation. I thank the other members of the committee. I think government committee members gained some good insight and, by going out to the areas, learned a lot of things that are probably common knowledge for the members for Dalrymple, Gregory and Warrego. I think everything was done with the best of intentions, and I think everyone in the areas got a pretty good hearing. I commend everyone for their concern and for their application to those hearings.

I think there is a disconnect between the final report and the majority of submissions made. It really goes back to why drought assistance exists. There used to be exceptional circumstances supports in these areas, but DRAS has been a partial replacement of them. The stated objective of DRAS is 'to maintain as far as possible the livestock resource of a property during drought and assist in the return and restoration of that resource after drought'. I think if a drought scheme was brought into this House people would vote in support of it for many more reasons than that. There are many more aspects to drought assistance as there are many more drought related issues—social impacts, economic activity and a whole host of other motivations. I do not think livestock resourcing is the only driver, but it is politically saleable and panders to some interests in large voting areas of this state. That is why it is built in there. I do not disagree with it; I think it is good to look at sustaining through drought and maintaining proper land management practices. I think that is all well and good, but I think the reason we do it is far more broad.

I would like to see the assessment of economic support for rural activities take into consideration unique industry characteristics, including the accumulated knowledge within agricultural industries and the lack of alternative productive application of that knowledge. If there is a drought and we do not provide drought assistance, people go off the land. Rob Katter cannot just go and start cattle grazing. There is a lot of accumulated knowledge. We all think it is a fluid market whereby if replacement capital—an institutional buyer or a foreign investor—comes to drought ravaged areas it will be okay, but it just does not work. People who have worked that land know that you pull cattle off one part of the property at a particular time of the year because if you have good Mitchell grass in that paddock you do not want to stress it. They just know how to manage the land. If you do not have drought assistance, you will end up with foreign owners or institutional investors—they use employed labour; there might be 457 visa workers out there—who do not know the place and do not engage in the same land management practices. I think that important aspect should be taken into account.

Rural communities are dependent on a very small number of industries. Without drought assistance a lot of these small communities will either collapse or come to this parliament crying out for help—cash funding or some other way to stimulate them. I think a much more reasonable solution is to provide some drought assistance to keep producers stabilised so that they do not fall over and they can continue to provide all that economic activity.

I mention the flow-on social and economic impacts to small communities and the loss of agricultural industry and industry concentration. Again, there are very big social impacts. The dark side of the drought we had is very serious. We saw loss of life and loss of people's livelihoods. It is very dark. There are not too many alternative industries out in those towns. I think drought assistance plays a much broader role than just sustaining animal numbers.

The member for Burnett made excellent points with regard to macropod harvesting and education. A lot of issues were acknowledged by the committee in its report, but I think we can do more. The inquiry was carried out with the best intent and the subsequent chairs did a good job of trying to make this something workable. The members for Gregory and Warrego made strong, valid points in relation to dam desilting. The member for Dalrymple and I received many deputations on similar things. They were not included either, which is disappointing. There were still some—

(Time expired)