




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:  
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (8.24 pm): The first issue I raised at the estimates hearing was multiperil insurance. I was very pleased to be a part of the push for that with the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce. We were pleased to hear that a million dollars in grants came through in the 2016-17 budget and that work has been done in that area. Multiperil insurance is really how we tackle the need to give out drought assistance in the future. It allows farmers and primary producers to cover themselves, but the cost is prohibitive at the moment—until they get assistance to get more financial data on the ground. That is what the million dollars in grants is for. I think it is an excellent incentive. I am pleased to have been part of initiating that with the government. That is something positive that came out of that.

The next issue of interest to me was prickly acacia. The Desert Channels estimate that the cost to production in their region alone is about \$24 million. That represents only a portion—perhaps a third or a half—of the region that is covered by it. We heard in the media last week that Robert Hacon is spending \$140,000 a year and most people are spending anywhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a year to try to stop this weed and do the job the government would typically do in helping to combat weeds. This weed covered zero hectares in the 1960s, but now 20 million hectares are infested. It is a bit hard to hear so much about the Great Barrier Reef when western areas are facing problems with feral cats and prickly acacia. This weed taking over represents an environmental disaster. We heard that there is only a million dollars in the budget for measures to address this weed. That falls hopelessly short of what is required to fix the problem. Talk is cheap and we need more money into that area.

The next thing I asked about was water allocations. This is perhaps one of the most critical things in terms of the prosperity of the western areas, particularly in the north-west, where enormous volumes of water go through our river systems only in a short period of the year. The Murray-Darling system has 50 per cent of its water taken out when it is there. We are taking about three per cent out of our river systems. We know now that this government and governments before it have taken \$10 million in tenders—people buying water that still has not been used. There is no infrastructure associated with that—no dams are built, nothing—but the government is taking \$10 million off people to apply for water that has never been used or developed. The problem is that the water is priced. It does not need to be priced. The water should be given away. There is nothing to be gained from it. No-one is developing it. All we want is access to that water so that we are more productive in those areas and we can better ride out the droughts. We need only 10 per cent of that flow, not 50 per cent like the Murray-Darling takes. Ten or 20 per cent would give us enough to start farming in these little towns and create those critical 10 or 20 jobs per town that would be just wonderful to have. I appreciate the efforts of the Minister for Natural Resources in consulting with us in trying to get those tenders out, but it is just not working. The price is the problem.

I am very proud that the KAP has been pivotal in delivering, along with the government, intergenerational farm transfers. That has led to 592 transactions and has saved \$22.4 million so that kids could take over stations and stay on the land, so that properties were not handed over to big corporations or amalgamated into bigger entities that are then out of reach of smaller people and families. That is something that is appreciated and that I was pleased to see.

I asked the agriculture minister a question about dairy cooperatives. I appreciated his response that he respects the right to collective bargaining for workers so therefore he should for farmers as well. That is a principle of our party that I hold very dear. I appreciated those comments, because I think a lot of work can be done with cooperatives in the dairy industry. There is research that we look forward to being funded by the government to help that.

Lastly, I refer to national parks. There are little councils in our area. Everyone loves building these national parks, but no-one gives these poor little councils the wherewithal to cope. Many thousands of cars every year now go down Lawn Hill Road to Boodjamulla National Park. Bourke Shire Council cannot keep up with it and is paying the price for an asset that the rest of Australia gets to appreciate and keep. They do not get rates from that, either. Something needs to be done about the national parks to help the councils.