




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2017

MOTION: TULLY-MILLSTREAM HYDRO-ELECTRIC PROJECT

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (6.21 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the motion moved by the member for Dalrymple. I think the debate cuts to the heart of the tension in politics between the environmental movement and public good. I am very proud of the environmental credentials of the many people who live in the north who are affected by the decisions of this government. Here is one project that has fallen victim to the decisions of this government.

Many would say that this is the low-hanging fruit in terms of renewable energy. We built the Snowy Mountains scheme and it had some real environmental impacts. It impacted some lovely countryside, but resulted in great public benefit. I am sure we could have trotted out a lot of feasibility studies back then. If the environmental movement existed then it would have said that the scheme would never make money.

In this case, the fundamentals are good. The proposal was to build a 600 megawatt power station. This is good clean energy that people would benefit from. I would much prefer to see this sort of infrastructure built in the north than more social infrastructure like football stadiums. To me, social infrastructure is subordinate to hard infrastructure that builds jobs and builds sustainable industries in the north. We desperately need sustainable industry.

Most people would be aware that the bulk of the power generated for the north suffers transmissions losses coming from Gladstone. I think most people in the House would acknowledge that we need baseload power established north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Here is the prime opportunity to do that. The feasibility study was done in 1988. I was playing under-12s Rugby League in North Queensland at the time. I was a young fellow then—a great vintage back then.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr KATTER: I played with Paul Bowman at that time. The point I make is that that was a long time ago. We have had a lot of changes in the political spectrum since then. There has been a lot of growth in the green movement. Unfortunately, this project has fallen victim to that. I think the people of North Queensland have fallen victim to them.

We had a terrific opportunity to provide clean green power from this source. Yes, there is an environmental impact. Yes, I am sure some of the Atherton antechinus, a lovely looking marsupial, will be impacted. That is the way of the world. When we need industry there will be some impact. We have to weigh up the impact versus the benefits. I think everyone would agree that having a magnificent clean green power generator like this hooked into the north where we need it would be wonderful. It would result in energy prices reducing for industry. I think the fact that the feasibility studies have already been done and have been sitting there for that long and it has not been built speaks poorly of us as a state.

I make the distinction between the environmental political movement and environmentalists. I believe a lot of environmentalists out there have a good case to prosecute, but there are a lot of people who do it disingenuously and are more about the politics of it rather than the outcomes. I think we need

a robust debate weighing up the costs versus the benefits. I think the pendulum has swung too far in favour of the environmental movement and that has hamstrung all sorts of developments in the north. I think we are a bit of a punching bag on that front because it does not affect as many voters up there. It is easy to stop development up there. We are paying the price for that in terms of the energy prices we pay and the transmission losses from our existing generators.

I thank the member for Dalrymple for bringing this issue forward. I understand he has a long attachment to that area. I think his father worked at the Kareeya plant in his day. It is certainly something that he has mentioned to me before. It is very close to his heart. I hope we have the maturity as a government to acknowledge that there would be some impacts on the environment but the benefits to industry from having clean green energy from a magnificent project like this would last for years to come in North Queensland.