



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

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Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2017

**AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to take note**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (12.07 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Agriculture and Environment Committee's report No. 42 titled *Consideration of the Auditor-General's report 12: 2016-17—Biosecurity Queensland's management of agricultural pests and diseases*. There is a lot that can be said about this. The important point to make is that this sort of control is vital not only for the environmental values that we would like to sustain in this state but also for agriculture production. The two run hand in hand, particularly in western areas of Queensland like my electorate.

People in these areas are conscious of these things. We live with pigs and feral cats. Pigs throw diseases everywhere. We live with wild dogs. They are linked not just to damage to stock and productivity but also to the environmental values that people would like to see sustained in western areas of Queensland. People do not really have a strong sense of the damage that is being done out in these areas. This report focused on wild dogs. Feral cats and the damage they cause are not talked about enough in this House. They are constantly decimating birds and lizards. This is occurring at a growing rate. This is frightening and something we should be wary of.

The committee report notes the need for milestones and more transparency of biosecurity officers hitting the mark. A lot of that comes back to having people on the ground, not just in the city areas—whether it be in the form of having departmental officers at Richmond or Julia Creek who are quasi-biosecurity officers keeping an eye on cattle stock movements and the like. When it comes to any outbreak of transmitted diseases through pigs, especially up in the gulf or the cape areas, you want officers on the ground who are ready to move, who are familiar with the area and who know how to coordinate. I think there is a severe absence of those people in western areas.

The committee report talks about Biosecurity Queensland's response, management initiatives and milestones, and that is where it is highly relevant to have those people on the ground. Without question, where there were services and people on the ground they have disappeared over the years. Those one or two people in those towns are sorely missed. Everyone now knows the impact of that. In microcosms like Richmond you get a strong sense of what has happened in the biosecurity space.

Strategically there might be some good things put in place that are coordinated from large metropolitan areas, but we do not have the people on the ground. There are continuous reports from the gulf and the cape area of foreign fishing boats that land on our shores or people coming across from Papua New Guinea or pigs carrying diseases through those areas. This is really serious. Those diseases could spread like fire through the cattle industry and damage the Queensland economy in the process.

It is very important to manage the environmental outcomes by managing animals such as pigs, cats and dogs that continue to breed in those areas. Primary producers will be out there trying to shoot pigs to keep numbers down. It does not matter how much they do that, because they keep coming back thicker and thicker. We need to be very proactive in that space.

When it comes to measurables in terms of weeds, I was talking to the member for Ipswich West the other day about the release of bugs or diseases—I think it was in the context of lantana—and they said that they have not got rid of it. The point is that lantana has not expanded in some areas. In some areas you might say that it did not work because it did not get rid of it, but you do not know how good a job it is doing in holding it back from spreading. Those measurables are pretty important.

A lot of this comes back to having people on the ground in those areas. It is too big a task and too high a level when everything is done from a desktop in a metropolitan area—which seems to be the growing trend with all of those sorts of services. They keep leaving the western areas and ending up in Townsville or Brisbane. You cannot keep a handle on biosecurity issues when it is done like that. That is one area of the committee report which vitally needs to be observed by this parliament.

*(Time expired)*