




Speech By
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**FARM BUSINESS DEBT MEDIATION BILL; RURAL AND REGIONAL
ADJUSTMENT (DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (10.03 pm): It is my honour to rise tonight to speak on the Rural and Regional Adjustment (Development Assistance) Amendment Bill 2016. Rural and regional Queensland has suffered years of drought. Tonight I hope that we can do something to ease the financial hardship of farmers in Queensland. KAP has been the champion of primary producers in regional communities to resolve the issue of debt that has been caused through no fault of their own but years of drought and the ban on live exports.

I want to explain how the banning of live exports has devastated rural and regional Queensland. We had the drought and then the federal Labor government banned live exports. Then there were no markets. Then the meatworks screwed down the prices. Then the cattle were dying. Then the graziers and landowners through rural and regional Queensland had no choice but to flood the market. Then there was no return on their cattle. Then they had debt.

Had there been a reconstruction board in place when all this was happening those problems would have been alleviated. It would not have caused the catastrophic situation that we face today. Had we not sold QIDC we would not be in the situation we are in at the moment. There are still properties that are being repossessed by banks at this time. That is why we need a royal commission into the banking sector.

It is time that the federal government stopped dodging, weaving and hiding when it comes to something that is so important. We have seen property after property repossessed as a result of federal governments of both persuasions backing the banking sector. This is why the KAP called for the rural debt summit. It was first held in Richmond.

KAP initiated the rural debt crisis summit in Winton. This is where Barnaby Joyce told the audience that he may have trouble convincing the federal Liberal Party to help our struggling primary producers. He was spot on. At that time we issued an ultimatum to the banks that we would name and shame any bank that repossessed properties given the drought and the live export ban. As a result of our name-and-shame policy we saved up to 40 properties from being repossessed.

Passion was also running high at the debt summit in Charters Towers. Once again, this was initiated by KAP. To the credit of the government—after the minister for primary industries was rocked by landowners for not supporting or helping them one iota—offered a token gesture and initiated the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce.

I heard the member for Beaudesert talk about the wonderful amendments that the LNP will move and what a great job the shadow minister has done. The Premier listened to a grazier's wife whose son committed suicide in Charters Towers as a result of financial issues. The rural debt task force was formulated from that very moment.

We had pushed for that from the beginning because they were crying out for help. Nothing has changed. We have had a little bit of rain, but what we are seeing at the moment is that landowners have sold their prime cattle because they were dying. Now they are trying to build up their herds and the price is about \$3 or \$4 a head, which they cannot afford. It will take them years to build up their herds.

This is why we need a reconstruction board. When we have a government induced problem such as the live export ban and drought these things hit hard. These problems have caused a lot of rural communities to suffer and people to leave. We see rural communities declining. It will take years to re-establish them.

This is the reason the member for Mount Isa put this bill before the House. He is passionate about this bill. It is not about politics. He cares about these communities. He is not out there year in and year out, day in and day out talking on the radio or to the Premier about this reconstruction board because it is an illusion. It is fair dinkum; it is real. That is why he put this bill before the House.

They have included different provisions in the government bill such as provisions related to medicinal cannabis, which is a fine thing. This is a reconstruction bill, but if they want to put medical cannabis provisions into legislation they can. The bill has provisions related to biosecurity and rabbits. We do all these things. Something that we are very passionate about is that people have lost their properties. People owe the banks millions of dollars. We have rural communities in decline. This is something that we are very passionate about.

I would like to mention some key points made by the task force. Years of natural disasters and poor policy settings by both state and federal governments have seen rural and regional Queensland show signs of increasing economic pressure and as a consequence this has had a huge impact on rural and regional towns. Not only farmers, graziers and producers are affected by this; small business is also affected. There are fewer children in schools and government services are no longer viable. This has devastated whole communities.

The issue of debt was seen as a massive burden on rural communities and the sector that spanned across most, if not all, rural industries. More people are employed in rural industries than any other industry in Western Queensland, outside of government services. Restoring the health of these industries will reinstate the viability of regional towns. This will be a way for the government to strengthen Queensland regions and enable the agricultural industry to rebuild.

A survey of participants attending forums found that 35 per cent engaged in farm build-up programs, 25 per cent had been requested by banks to sell off-farm assets, 19 per cent had been requested by banks to sell by a nominated time, 39 per cent would sell if a fair value was available and 57 per cent would need to renegotiate borrowings in 2016. These figures prove that there is a policy failure to the detriment of primary producers in Queensland. The member for Mount Isa, as I said, has worked hard for this and he is committed to a better deal for rural and regional Queensland. The member for Mount Isa is to be applauded for his hard work and determination.

The Rural and Regional Adjustment (Development Assistance) Amendment Bill 2016 is simple. We want to amend the Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994 to include a capacity to raise money to provide financial assistance that will foster development of a more stable, productive and sustainable rural and regional sector in Queensland.

The issue of state government debt is being noted as a key issue with the bill. The feedback that we are getting is that this government already has so much debt, so why would it bail out farmers? As the member for Mount Isa said, when it comes to spending \$5 billion on a 10-kilometre underground railway line everyone applauds it and says how wonderful it is. When it comes to bailing out our farmers, it is received with condemnation virtually—'How dare you do that?'—when we are trying to do something constructive.

I note that there are all of these other amendments to be moved to make the bill look much sweeter than something Robbie Katter has worked on for the last four to five years. We will also be moving an amendment. The amendment allows for the supply of industrial cannabis seed to people who hold cannabis research licences or medicinal cannabis licences under the Narcotic Drugs Act 1967 to use as allowed under that act. We have also added some of the amendments that the government have put in their bill, and I see that the opposition has also put forward amendments, but I say that this is not a game. This is something that is very serious and something that we are very passionate about. It is disappointing that we moved a motion so that there was an opportunity for the LNP and the Labor Party to vote on either bill—the KAP bill or the Labor bill—and the LNP voted with Labor to oppose that motion which would have given us an opportunity to vote. We will not even have the opportunity to have a vote tonight on something that we have been working on for the last three years. I commend Robbie Katter's bill to the House.

(Time expired)