




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Blue Cards

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.46 pm): I rise in the House to touch on a couple of issues surrounding youth crime. The issue of youth crime is thrown around a lot in this parliament. We hear a lot about issues on the coast in Cairns and Townsville, but not much is said about the very serious problems in Mount Isa. I can see what the solutions are, but sadly they are not talked about enough in this House. I say to members listening today that we can do something meaningful and substantial in that area.

Particularly in communities of our First Australians in the gulf and in places such as Palm Island and Cherbourg, one of the biggest barriers to meaningful employment is the blue card. It is done with the best intentions. The notion of keeping kids safe is great. Unfortunately, the inadvertent effects of needing a blue card in those Aboriginal communities are killing jobs for locals. It is so acute now.

Members in this House only have to take a trip to Doomadgee or to Mornington Island and talk to people. Talk to Alf Lacey in Townsville and ask him how it is impacting his community. I have had conversation after conversation. There are well-meaning people who have had some troubles in the past. Ironically, on Mornington Island it might be issues with alcohol. When there is an alcohol ban, there are home brew offences and those people cannot get a blue card. The officers in Mount Isa are saying, 'This person is terrific for the job. The whole community would love to have that person teaching their kids,' but someone in Brisbane ticks off and says, 'No, they cannot have the job.'

Unfortunately, many of the jobs requiring a blue card do not relate only to children. If you are a builder in Doomadgee and you are trying to get a job with QBAS—one of the only forms of employment there—because they work in schools and hospitals they need a blue card. Ninety per cent of the jobs in those communities now need a blue card, but a lot of people cannot get a blue card. It is not just about appealing and getting access; it is also about the time it takes to get a blue card. The first message they usually get when applying for a job is, 'Go home, mate. We'll try to get you a blue card on appeal.' It does not work.

The government needs to listen to this because it is a really big issue. The secret to getting kids off the street is having a functional family. Families are not functional if mum and dad cannot get access to work. One of the biggest barriers to getting access to work in those communities at the moment is the blue card. On my last few trips to Doomadgee and Mornington I did not get people coming up to me saying, 'Rob, can you get me some more money off the government?' I did not hear that. What I did hear was, 'Rob, can you help me get a job?' People want to work and we are blocking them from getting a job through the blue card policy. It is done with the best intentions, but it needs reviewing. It is a cost that is impacting on social areas right across this state and it needs to be taken care of.

Another issue I would like to touch on is our party's relocation sentencing policy. In any form it can be adopted and play a vital role in turning lives around. We have the Cleveland Detention Centre, but we need to get kids out of town into a remote, rural area—I stress the word 'remote'—where there is a peaceful environment and they are taught meaningful skills.

They are not learning things at places like Cleveland. It is not the right place to turn people's lives around. In the bush less security is needed. There is nowhere for kids to run when they are 200 kilometres from the nearest town. That is where they will think about what they have done and start to turn their life around. That is the best spot. It needs to be done in a very concise, well-considered manner at an institutional level. We cannot just dip our toes in the water. There needs to be a real commitment to that, because it is part of the answer. It is part of turning these people's lives around. If we want to address issues such as crime on the street, we need to go back to the root of these problems. It is not the sum total of the problem but a significant part is the break-up of families because they do not have access to work. Meaningful work is part of the solution to turning this around in the long term.

Undeniably, a big issue at the moment is blue cards. I get sick and tired of people saying, 'You're trying to water it down.' We are not talking about removing disqualifying offences. We are talking about the decision-making. Most of these communities do not have more than 2,000 people. I think they are in a lot better position to say, 'You can work with my kids and you can have a blue card that is applicable to Doomadgee only and nowhere else. I know you; I am happy for you to work with my kids.' They should be given the right to make that decision—not us or someone down here in Brisbane—when it is the barrier to them getting work. It is undeniable that it is stopping people from getting jobs and it is leading to bigger social issues. We should be dealing with it here in this House. It is a very important thing to take care of.