




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.05 pm): Firstly, I would like to say that the honour of being re-elected in no way diminishes the second time around. At the outset, I would sincerely like to thank those many volunteers who helped in my campaign for election to the seat of Traeger. They include Alice Nolan, George Tipping, Susie Paterson, Garth Power, Shane McCarthy, Wayne and Diane Reeves and Bill Rutherford. Importantly, I would also like to thank my family. My mother has always been a very big help to me in all my work. I also thank all her friends and party members in Charters Towers. My wife has also been very supportive of me when I have had to spend time away. I am very grateful to all of those people. I also thank my extended family, my cousins and everyone else who helped in the election campaign and on polling day. I am very grateful.

I am overjoyed to be joined by my colleague the member for Hill, Shane Knuth. After the redistribution, he had to seek election to another seat. He had a huge win and has established himself there. That is reflective of his terrific representative of people. I am very pleased to now represent his old patch and be the beneficiary of much of his hard work. I also would like to pay tribute to our new colleague, Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook. What a powerhouse we have from Ingham! I think it may be unprecedented that, after a 3½-week campaign and a very small amount of campaign dollars, someone who was not a member of one of the major parties and who had no political experience won from scratch. That was a huge win.

I was lucky enough to be returned with a very handy majority in the new seat of Traeger, which now includes the town of Charters Towers. I would like to attribute that win to those who have supported me and who had a big part to play in the many outcomes that were procured by Shane Knuth and me for the KAP in this state parliament. Most importantly, I would like to thank those many people in those communities who were affected who drove the majority of these initiatives so that we could enjoy these wonderful results.

I would like to recap some of the achievements of the KAP in the last parliament as a result of taking advantage of the make-up of that parliament. I think that some of those initiatives that were procured in that last parliament were very beneficial to the state. The \$40 million western roads package that was handed down in the first budget of the last parliament was tailored to help many remote councils in all the western regions, including the electorates of Warrego, Gregory and Mount Isa, as it was then known, and also to a lesser extent the Cook electorate. That western roads package acknowledged the drought that was occurring at that time. The councils in those western areas were in dire straits. Road maintenance was identified as one of the best ways to stimulate the communities in those areas. That western roads package was a terrific outcome.

There was also the \$70 million drought package, which was an outcome of the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce, which I chaired. Many initiatives were contained within that package, such as \$12 million for education to help people in the drought and money to drive multiperil insurance. One initiative arising from that task force was for a rural industry development bank. Although that initiative

was unsuccessful, it drove some change in that area. There was more investment in rural offices of government departments and more drought assistance in the form of PIPES. That funding of \$70 million was a big outcome.

A landmark piece of legislation that was passed in the last parliament was one of two private member's bills in relation to the sugar industry. That was a hallmark achievement for the KAP in the last parliament. There was legislation passed to assist the taxi industry in its fight against the illegal encroachment of ridesharing and Uber into the market. There was the first successful ethanol mandate in Queensland's history. After both Labor and LNP had voted it down in the last attempt in the previous parliament, it was brought back in the last parliament and got the full support of the House which was a wonderful outcome. We saw \$1 million invested into the ailing dairy industry following the pressure brought by the KAP's Fair Milk Mark Bill. The bill was voted down by both parties, but following that there was \$1 million invested in a similar type of initiative. It was not enough, but at least it was something for the dairy industry. There was the introduction by the KAP of the blue card bill to assist many in Aboriginal communities to work. There was the introduction of the pub licence fee bill to help bush pubs stay alive.

I mention again that there were nine private members' bills put through. We played a pivotal role in blocking the Labor attempt to drive harsher vegetation management laws in the last parliament. Had the KAP held the balance of power in this parliament we certainly would not have had those laws changed again. Crucial funding was achieved for the Hann Highway, one of the great inland routes of Australia. The billion dollar banana industry is cut off when the Bruce Highway floods. The US Army built the Hann Highway back in the forties because they acknowledged that Australia needed an inland route that was away from the super wet belt and was flood proof. We have not sealed all of it but achieved \$20 million worth of works during that period. There was money also for Punchbowl Bridge and the new Julia Creek Hospital. There was funding achieved for a bitumen seal up to the Age of Dinosaurs in Winton, a wonderful legacy for the late—and I might say great—mayor Butch Lenton. It was something he courageously pushed for. We were able to get a bitumen seal up to that wonderful tourist attraction. I might segue into a quick tribute to mayor Butch Lenton who did a wonderful job in his community. It was with sadness we saw his passing last year.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr KATTER: There was over \$1 million for critical dredging in Karumba to keep live cattle exports going from this port. Karumba is an absolute economic powerhouse. Per person it is arguable that there would be no stronger performer in the Queensland economy than Karumba. It is a wonderful place. It has mining activity, commercial fishing and tourism. It swells from about 600 people to about 4,000 people every year. It has a live export facility, which is a big part of the cattle industry. For a tiny population of 600 people it is a wonderful contributor to this state. We were able to help in a small way to maintain that dredging channel which is one of only two ports in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

We oversaw critical assistance for Mount Isa Mines to keep the business healthy through the downturn. It is certainly not the only large mine in the north-west, but it is a very big player. Sulphur is taken off the copper smelter in Mount Isa and made into sulphuric acid that feeds the phosphate fertiliser plant up the road that employs about 900 people, mostly from Brisbane and Townsville—hardly anyone from the north-west is employed there. The output from that goes to the copper refinery in Townsville which employs close to 200 people. If the copper smelter is not operating in Mount Isa there are some big problems in the state's economy. It was wonderful that we could turn fortunes around there and keep that copper smelter open.

KAP played a significant role in the gas pipeline from the NT going through to Queensland instead of South Australia. It is now connected providing an alternative energy source to the North West Minerals Province. Optic fibre cable funding has gone to Burketown and Karumba so that they can be connected and there is a default route if there are breakdowns in the optic fibre cable network. Finally some of these remote places are catching up with technology. Businesses in Karumba now do not have to write IOU notes to the tourists as they used to when EFTPOS systems regularly shut down. They will be able to avoid that.

The Education office in Mount Isa is again occupied. All the jobs performed in that office have been moved over the years by both LNP and ALP governments. It used to be a fully occupied two-storey building in Mount Isa which was a place where people would take complaints. There was regional autonomy provided by having management there. That was fully empty until last year when people were put back into that office, albeit in another form, but it was good to see that opened.

It is worth noting that in the last parliament nine bills were put to the House by KAP and two were passed. There have only been 13 in Queensland's history. I heard comments in addresses in reply rather unkindly saying that a vote for minor parties delivers nothing. I am not saying that we are terrific,

but I think it is fair to say we play a part. I think we played a significant part in the last parliament. Some of the comments made in addresses in reply were unfair. What is more, it is irreconcilable with the evidence. Quite frankly, I think it is a line people are sick of hearing. From my observations during the campaign, there is deep dissatisfaction in voter land. Some of the rhetoric is getting worn out. More and more people are seeing the major parties bow to special interest groups and scrambling to spend taxpayers dollars to buy people's votes. Cross River Rail and the Townsville sports stadium definitely fit that mould.

I would like to paint members a picture of the Traeger electorate. The social and economic landscape in Traeger remains very challenging. If we do not get the gold medal for continued adversity then we would definitely be on the podium. It is a place of extremes. A quick snapshot of some of the following indicators paints a clear picture of the adversity faced by Western Queenslanders and gulf residents. Some of these are pretty concerning. A person in the electorate of Traeger is 47 per cent more likely to suffer an avoidable death in rural centres than in major urban centres. A person is three times more likely to die because of a transport accident than those living in major cities. Residents close to cities are seeing an 85 per cent growth in professional health services, however, in rural and remote areas they have only grown seven per cent. The most recent removal of birthing and dialysis services has seen a further decline in the livability of regional Queensland.

In relation to economic indicators, the unemployment rate in Brisbane city in the last quarter was 3.9 per cent while in outback Queensland it is 11 per cent. Youth employment in outback Queensland is at a staggering 39.1 per cent and has been hovering around that same number for years.

Looking at social factors, crime rates in North Queensland across a number of offences, including assault, are the highest in Queensland as the government is still yet to respond with some long-term solutions in this regard. Indigenous women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Indigenous men and women. Our first Australians have enormous problems in relation to alcohol, unemployment and family dislocation.

When it comes to the environment, prickly acacia, a species introduced by the government, I might add, and encouraged back in the forties, fifties and sixties to be planted on the Mitchell Grass Downs, one of our greatest natural assets, is an estimated 20 million hectare infestation. It is the cane toad of woody weeds and proportionally nothing has been done. I hear a lot about the reef and tree clearing, but one only has to drive out on the Flinders Highway and have a look at it to see that it is a big problem. Graziers are spending \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year on eradication. Some of these people are as poor as church mice and trying to get by. They are doing the job that the government should be doing. They are getting very little help dealing with what is a big problem.

Returning to crime statistics, Mount Isa has six times the rate of domestic violence than the rest of the state. In Mount Isa, the rate of assaults per 100,000 people is 10 times that of Brisbane and sexual offences are five times that of Brisbane, yet we are still understaffed by almost 20 officers, as it gets harder and harder to encourage people to move to Mount Isa.

The city of Mount Isa continues to be a sinkhole for the region. There are alcohol bans in the Northern Territory, alcohol management plans on Mornington Island and issues with the blue card system. If anyone has a problem, they will come to Mount Isa. We do not get funded by the Northern Territory. Quite frankly, a hopeless job was done with the census, which did not record a lot of the itinerant people in Mount Isa. That places a big burden on our services. Our problems are pretty big. In the past five years, in outback Queensland the population has dropped by six per cent. Over the same period, in Brisbane city the population has increased by 11 per cent.

In the north-west minerals province and Mount Isa, industry power prices are 40 per cent higher than on the coast. That is a big difference. If energy is 40 per cent of the running costs of a mining operation and we are paying \$150 a megawatt hour and in Townsville you can be paying \$80 a megawatt hour, there is a huge difference. When talking about a lot of the new imposts and costs and introducing things across the state, the government needs to bear in mind what we are paying. Through the Mount Isa Water Board, we pay to the state a \$2 million to \$3 million dividend on top of the residents' bills. Outside of Gladstone, no-one else in the state does that. It is a handy little tax that we also pay.

There is a rail fail in Mount Isa. At least \$2.5 billion worth of minerals from the north-west minerals province goes through the Townsville port. Currently, they haul about 3.5 million tonnes on the rail line. Primarily because of the Queensland Competition Authority the rail line is trying to look like a competitive marketing environment, but it is not. The guidelines are hopeless. All that is needed is to talk to industry and unpack this QCA stuff. The roads are now very busy and the trucks do a lot of damage because of the volume of traffic, yet we have a perfectly good rail line that is getting less and less use because fixed costs are applied back on the user. In Queensland, that is the only piece of track that is not subsidised, apart from a little bit in Brisbane. That means that every new bit of cost goes

back on the user. The problem is getting worse. If you need an example of terrible government management of an asset, look no further than that piece of rail line. It needs some work. It is a travesty. It is so disappointing to watch business go off the rail line and on to the road, when something could easily be done.

The cost of flights is an enormous issue. I can tell the House that it is pretty hard to find anything in the state that compares to this in terms of an impost on residents. Take a young single mother who is working hard in Mount Isa. If she wants to visit family or sick parents in Brisbane, on any day of the week she has to pay \$1,000 for a return flight. People cannot afford that. We are being absolutely ripped off. People are exploiting the market and no-one has done anything about it. There has been nothing done by this House. Not a finger has been lifted to help the people. They have just delayed the Senate inquiry for another six months. We feel like we have been left out in the cold and that no-one cares. It is a terrible reflection on the government that that has been allowed to happen.

If I took one message from the last campaign, it is that people intuitively do not want bells and whistles. They do not want school halls, new sports stadiums or traffic tunnels. People know the difference between industry enabling infrastructure and social infrastructure. People know that it means jobs in the end. They know that bills have to be paid by the government. They know that by looking after the rail, water and power, we can build a good economic base that can pay for those things that people deserve. We are happy for a rail tunnel to be built in Brisbane, but let us make sure we can pay for it first. If business in the north-west minerals province is not working well, you cannot afford stuff down here. The government needs to get out there and fix the hard stuff because people know this intuitively. The government needs to listen to what is happening in my electorate. People want a government that will pay attention to these things. There are no votes in it. There are not a lot of people out there who will directly benefit, but they are listening and they are tuning in. They want to see a government that will take the brave steps to try to fix these things.

We can connect Mount Isa to the national electricity grid and bring down our power prices from \$150 a megawatt hour to closer to \$80 a megawatt hour, and then watch how we thrive. Let some water licences go in the Flinders, Einasleigh and Etheridge rivers. There are some wonderful opportunities up on the Gilbert and Einasleigh rivers. Kenny Fryer is kicking goals up there, as is Corbett Tritton at Richmond. We can show the government what we can do for the economy if it just gives us some access to water, but without that access being shrouded in 10 tonnes of regulation and costs. My father got the federal money through for the Hughenden irrigation project, which is a wonderful project that we can make happen in the Flinders area. Richmond and Cloncurry have dam proposals that would help enormously in drought times. I can talk about Indigenous communities, title deeds, AMPs and mini ports in the gulf area. There are wonderful things that we can do in the electorate of Traeger, but the government has to listen.