




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 26 February 2019

LIQUOR (RURAL HOTELS CONCESSION) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.30 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I proudly stand before the House today and say that the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill 2018 all started with the letter that I hold in my hot little hand from Alan Start at the Einasleigh Hotel. He said in the letter that his pub is small and it takes three weeks of trading to pay off his pub licence fee, which is ridiculous. He also said that large hotels that earn a hell of a lot more than him pay the same as him. He said he is struggling to stay afloat and his accountant tells him to shut. He does not want to, but the writing is on the wall. He said he would be just another dole bludger, to quote the song *From Little Things Big Things Grow*.

Alan wrote that letter to me in 2013 and five years later here we are addressing this issue. Good on him for bringing that up. I hope that in this House tonight we can come together to help people like him. Alan is not at the Einasleigh Hotel anymore. He has handed that hotel over to someone else.

Here we are debating the Liquor (Rural Hotels Concession) Amendment Bill. I believe historically the licence fee was based on the litres sold. That meant there was some relativity between the size of the pub and how much the licensee was charged. That was changed. I am told that as soon as a bill relates to turnover, the number of people who attend a venue or its size, that becomes the taxation domain of the federal parliament.

An easy formula had to be proposed that would fit within the constraints of the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation. I am the first to admit that this is not perfect legislation, but it is as good as we are going to get to try to get something through the parliament, particularly from a non-government position. We picked the ABS statistical division of very remote and the nominal discount from \$3,700 to \$370. That reflects the type of businesses these small pubs are.

This is not a game changer. I do not pretend it is going to solve the problems of the world for small pubs, but it will really help. I think it is a good message from all sides of this parliament that we can work collaboratively to help the battlers out there. We have people from a lot of towns driving to larger centres to go to big bottle shops like Dan Murphy's that have discount liquor. They will drive four hours to pick up liquor instead of getting it at the local pub. Sometimes that is killing the pubs. There are a number of factors involved.

What I have said throughout the debate on pub licensing fees for small and remote pubs is that these pubs serve a completely different function to pubs like the Breakfast Creek Hotel, the Hamilton Hotel or the Story Bridge Hotel in Brisbane, which are big commercial operations and entities. There is critical mass in the market and if one fails there are usually a lot of competitors in the market.

In small towns the pub is often the only business. If people are going into town and they need some cash or need to make a phone call because their phone is out of service, there is often only one business in the town and that is the pub. They end up performing a lot of commercial functions. They are often the only community hub. If people want to catch up and socialise—they may not even drink alcohol—they will meet at the pub.

They are also important for tourism. We all talk about this year being the Year of Outback Tourism. If a lot of these pubs, just like Alan Start's Einasleigh Hotel, are struggling to survive or are not there we will not have outback tourism. Do not waste time. We have to do everything possible to keep these pubs alive. This goes some way to relieving some of the cost pressures they face like insurance and electricity. This is one way we can help.

I will keep my contribution brief because it is very important we get through this debate tonight. I believe there are time constraints in order for this to rollout by 1 July when the next bill cycle comes around. We have truncated debates in this parliament so it is very important to get this through.

I acknowledge the support of the government. I am very appreciative of that. I will give credit where credit is due. They acknowledged this problem, particularly in times of flood and drought. I acknowledge the support of the opposition. The member for Gregory has been a very strong supporter of this proposal, as have my colleagues in KAP and on the crossbench.

This is a good news story. It is about doing something specific for remote areas. Small pubs are feeling a lot of pain. I am very pleased to be the person bringing this bill to the House on behalf of KAP. I hope the House will support this bill and help the struggling pubs everywhere.