




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.39 pm): I rise to speak to the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. There is a lot to this bill. I will qualify my contribution by saying it is very difficult to get around a large electorate and then come down here and be across something so big when we do not have parliamentary staff. We do our best to pick up on some of the points that we feel impact and stand out to us, so I will reflect on those. I am sure there are some parts of this bill that are very practical and will improve the current legislation that is in place. I will try to be balanced in my contribution.

The first thing I would like to discuss is the removal of the requirement to table an annual report on foreign ownership. Discussions about foreign ownership often get dragged into discussions about being xenophobic. However, I think foreign ownership is a really important issue in rural Queensland. We cannot talk about it without really investigating people's concerns. I think that was best articulated by Dr Mark McGovern, who talked about levels of rural debt, the composition of ownership in those rural areas and how that is perhaps changing. The question is not so much who owns it or who is coming in. It does not have to be bogged down in, 'We do not want foreign owners,' or, 'We want to reduce the level of foreign ownership.' It is not always about that; it is about their motivation in buying here and how they can compete with our Aussie farming families in these circumstances. That becomes a question, and a completely different subject, about access to capital and overseas subsidies versus our Australian farmers, who are not supported in the same way by their government. There is obviously clear motivation for overseas governments to provide incentives for their people to expand their agricultural base and I would argue we do not do the same thing here.

It is very important to monitor foreign ownership and its impacts on other policies or things we are not doing in terms of agriculture or even acknowledging that that might be a problem. I really think it is a problem. The towns I represent are all suffering population decline and decline in services in so many ways. That comes back to the composition of what is happening out there and the composition of the ownership of the family farms. Foreign ownership is a really important issue that impacts much more broadly on the towns and the few cities that exist in rural Queensland, so it is a really important part of government policy. Along with the KAP, I must strongly oppose any reduction in transparency.

The other issue that stood out to me was the measure to facilitate balanced gender representation on category 2 water authority boards and modernise the selection and appointment process for directors. I appreciate the sentiment behind what the government is trying to do. I have no problem with women expanding their presence in the workforce, but I really object to setting defined targets of half female representation on a board, of having direct, quantifiable targets. We believe it should be merit based. The member for Hinchinbrook is sitting beside me and I know there has been an issue with the Herbert River drainage board, which is a category 2 water authority. It creates a lot of tension, especially in rural communities where we do not often have a broad base of people to draw from. We do not see blokes trying to get on the CWA board or other boards that they may not be suited to. Likewise, on occasion there might not be people available with the skills or the merit to be appointed

to these category 2 boards. In those cases we will deliberately be devaluing—and that works both ways. It will work in the same way if it is a women's board and we are forcing men onto it. I think that is a clumsy way of trying to address the issue of promoting more females to those positions. We would strongly object to that.

There are provisions that tidy up some things in the Vegetation Management Act, and we appreciate that. I hope the government will reciprocate in the same way with the amendments I will be introducing to the Vegetation Management Act into the parliament in the future.

The last issue I raise is private holder land rights. Again, I am not fully across that one, but it certainly rings alarm bells because there is a lot of tension in that space and a lot of the moves by the government in those remote areas and rural areas cause a lot of grief and are often unnecessary. There are some real concerns for us there. At the start of this contribution I acknowledged that there are some positive components to this legislation—and I can see what the government is trying to achieve there—but there are definitely some components of this bill that the KAP and I are bitterly opposed to.