




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE  
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.27 am): I rise to speak in the debate on the appropriation bills. I will draw to the attention of the House some of the more positive aspects of the budget that relate to my electorate. There has been a concerted effort in relation to health and education spending in my electorate. There are 38 schools in my electorate. There is some \$10 million in schools funding for my electorate, which I appreciate. When there is money coming in for schools and hospitals I always try to give credit to whoever is in government.

Other residual items that are for outback Queensland include upgrades to the Gregory Development Road, the Lind Highway, the Gregory Downs Camooweal Road and the Hann Highway. That is residual money that has been fought for before. It is nice to see that spending. There is no new large infrastructure spends in the electorate which is something that I would like to talk about.

Clearly the government has decided to address the regions in the budget. It is trying to appeal to the regions after changing positions on the coal industry and the Carmichael mine. There has been a concerted effort to re-engage with the regions, which has brought a particular focus onto the north-west minerals province, with which obviously I am very familiar. It is interesting to see some new players starting to talk about the north-west minerals province, which has attracted some interest. It is an issue that I have often spoken about in this House over the years. However, it is pretty frustrating to hear some of the commentary around it.

As I have said many times before, the rail line on the north-west minerals province is unique in that the track between Mount Isa and Townsville, which is still owned by the taxpayers, is one of the only pieces of track in Queensland that is not subsidised by the taxpayers in terms of maintenance. It is all cost recovered by the customers. A couple of years ago, a customer reported that they had had a 70 per cent increase on their price. Over the past few years, large volumes of traffic have been going onto the roads instead of the rail. We do not make any money when freight goes on the road. We do make money when freight goes on the rail. In addition, enormous safety issues are raised when the road is congested. Over the past few years we have had many deaths associated with road trains and bulk haulage on the road network. That begs the question: if you have a rail line, why on earth wouldn't you try to use it more? There is a problem when a rail line is available and progressively more people use the road networks.

For many years I have said that the Queensland Competition Authority guidelines that govern the business that operates over that line need to be unpacked. As I understand it, a review will come out in 2020, but that does not necessarily mean that there will be any action. The rules that govern the pricing need to be unpacked. The solutions that sit there will not necessarily cost the taxpayer anything. We have not addressed the QCA charges or framework. A discount has been put on it, which I welcome and I have said that publicly. We welcome the discount. Finally we have addressed the fact that price is an issue, but we have not addressed the QCA charges. What concerns me about the \$380 million investment that has been talked about is that that could quite possibly all go back on the price. It would

in fact raise the price, which would be entirely counterintuitive to the discount that is being applied. Members can understand my concern that the pricing issue has been addressed by offering a discount. When the system works, the cost goes straight back onto the user. Spending \$380 million might completely offset any discount being offered in the first place. There needs to be some clarity around that.

During my discussions with the major stakeholders and customers over the past couple of days, they have not been fist pumping the air or high-fiving themselves, because we do not know what the impact of the \$380 million will be. It is enormously frustrating to hear people commenting on this, because it would take only a five- or 10-minute phone call to the major customers and stakeholders on that line to gain an understanding of how the issues need to be resolved. It is very frustrating to hear people clumsily saying in the media, 'We support the north-west minerals province now', when a five- or 10-minute phone call would give them a greater understanding. My phone line is always open for anyone who wants to discuss this. It has been spoken about so many times in this place. I have had a number of meetings with the relevant ministers and department heads, so they are quite aware of how to solve the problems.

It was very disappointing to hear both LNP and government commentary about energy in the outback and the north-west minerals province. How anyone can talk about that but not talk about CopperString is beyond me. It is a ridiculous situation when someone talks about energy in the outback but does not mention CopperString. That project has the ability to bring the price of energy in the north-west minerals province down by a third—I repeat: down by a third. If a mine is spending \$200 million a year, that would mean quite a significant discount and a great opportunity for growth in mining, if that can be done.

Here is the thing: that project would not necessarily require much funding from the state government. It could be funded by the stakeholders and the proponent, but it needs a little backing. In all the talk about the north-west minerals province, there has been a complete absence of discussion about CopperString. If you go out there, that is what all of the customers and major stakeholders want to talk to you about. It is very disappointing for people to be flying the kite or waving the flag and saying, 'We're here to support the north-west minerals province.' That is great and I appreciate the intent, but anyone who is serious should talk to the people out there. If they did, I think they would hear different commentary to what we have heard so far. That has been very disappointing.

There is a lot of talk about investment in infrastructure, but we want to see nation-building infrastructure. If you are talking about that, you cannot go past water storage. The federal government has committed \$180 million to the Hughenden Irrigation Scheme and there is another \$50 million for Hells Gates Dam and Big Rocks Weir in Charters Towers. In this House we should be talking about those sorts of projects over and over again. They are terrific investments for the state government, from which we would reap benefits for many years to come. If we can provide another 40,000 acres of irrigated farming land around Hughenden, we would do a wonderful thing for our state. That would be a great legacy in terms of investment.

The government talks about \$90 billion worth of debt and that is a huge problem. To repay \$90 billion of debt, you have to start to look at investments, but there is nothing about that in the budget. If I were a punter sitting at home and I saw a government investing in dams, transmission lines, rail and road in our large industry base areas, I would start to wake up and say, 'These guys are serious about turning things around in industry. They're not just trying to buy votes via social infrastructure in the larger metropolitan areas.' That is where I think the government could really win over the punters who are sitting at home and wondering whether this budget really will help them in the long run. It is not about buying jobs; it is about creating jobs and creating industry. That is where I think there is a real deficiency in the budget and where it has been very disappointing.

There has been a lot of support for tourism, but some critical areas in my electorate really need attention. This actually relates to the portfolio of roads. I note that again today the Premier mentioned the Year of Outback Tourism. About 50 kilometres of unsealed road leads to Lawn Hill, the Boodjamulla National Park and Adels Grove, which is the jewel in the crown of tourism in the north-west and the gulf. As I have said before in this House, the last time I drove in there I blew two tyres, because the road can get overused by the many people who love to go and see those places. If the roads in remote areas are not fixed, there is no point encouraging more people to go out there. The critical infrastructure that takes people to those remote areas must be fixed. The roads to Cobbold Gorge, Lawn Hill and Adels Grove need to be fixed. It is disappointing not to see that funding in the budget.

Another example of a critical road in the electorate is the Cloncurry to Dajarra Road. There is still about 11 kilometres of unsealed road to the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere, the Incitec Pivot phosphate plant. I have been chasing that for years and bringing it to the attention of the government. If it cannot do that then it is not really serious about helping the resources industry.

These roads are in critical need of assistance and they are not addressed in this budget. The Torrens Creek to Aramac road is an extension of the Hann Highway. That road can save trucks that are carting produce from the Tropical North and Far North to the markets in Sydney and Melbourne time. The banana industry is one of those industries. Produce could get down to the markets in Melbourne 13 hours faster if the truck drivers used the Hann Highway, but they will not use it until that sealing is finished.

We were pleased that we procured around \$20 million for the Hann Highway in the last parliament, but it still needs finishing. That means extending the sealing down the Torrens Creek to Aramac road. That is a strategic spend. If the government is serious about nation building then it would look at a road like that and say that that is where we can get good bang for our buck. By doing that it would not only help people in the immediate region but also help all the farmers in Far North Queensland.

Imagine the amount of diesel saved and how much more efficient it would be if a farmer could get their bananas to market 13 hours quicker. They would be going down the inland route and would be away from the high flood areas. It would get those B-doubles off the Bruce Highway. It would reduce the wear and tear and congestion on the Bruce Highway. That would be a wonderful thing to do. Again, that was not addressed in this budget despite many calls to fix it.

There are also issues like the imposition on councils of things such as the waste levy. I could talk about the impositions on water in Mount Isa. The Mount Isa Water Board pays a dividend to the state. There is about \$4 million or \$5 million that goes to the state every year which then gets put onto ratepayers and does not need to be.

The government in Queensland needs to ask itself whether it wants the rail, water and energy assets to be cash cows and treated like ATMs or whether it wants to treat them as industry enablers. Industries are buying water. Ratepayers are buying water. It is an indirect tax on these utilities. A lot of that money is best spent in the economy and put back into the pockets of householders or business. They will put that money to better use than the government will when they are going to build social infrastructure in vote buying areas. That philosophical approach needs to be changed when we are talking about utilities and the way government treats them in those areas.

If the government is going to talk about the north-west minerals province and rejuvenating or stimulating mining then they need to get serious about it and talk to the people on the ground because otherwise they are wasting everyone's time.