



Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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MOTION

Remote Area Tax Concessions and Payments

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (11.54 am): This is a really important issue to bring before the House because it is a burning issue in my electorate. In any discussion of endemic or pervasive problems in outback areas this will always rank in the top three. At the outset, there must be an acknowledgment in this room of the very real crisis facing outback Queensland. When I looked at the population projections in my electorate the other day, everything is down. Apart from Indigenous communities, the population of every other town in my electorate is projected to decrease.

In terms of future opportunities we face many constraints; for example, if we want to build dams or develop our properties everything works against us. In the outback it began when Queensland Rail was privatised. About 800 jobs from Townsville and Mount Isa evaporated, and we are still dealing with the fallout and social impacts of that. There has been hit after hit. In Mount Isa the liquor and gaming officer—the bloke who used to give you licences and alcohol permits around town when you had events—was moved last year, which makes getting approvals for events enormously difficult now. A few years ago the environmental office said they could not find anyone to move to Mount Isa. For two years there were two jobs they were not able to fill, so they shut it down and moved it to Cairns or Townsville. The mining office in Mount Isa—the mining centre of the state—has been completely gutted and the jobs have gone to Townsville. There is a real problem not only with the level of services but also populating the inland that we need to face, try to arrest and turn around.

Central to that are zone tax offsets. In terms of solutions that we could apply, that is a common denominator. What the Productivity Commission's draft report recommends is very scary. Perhaps there is another story behind it and they are saying that we need to do something completely different or better than that, but I do not think so. I think they are saying to straight out abolish it, which is ridiculous. With regard to a nurse in Mount Isa losing more than \$7,000, I am not sure where that figure comes from. I am sure that must be an accumulation of benefits or a compounding effect.

My understanding of the zone tax rebate is that if you are in Normanton, Julia Creek, Hughenden or Doomadgee—I think that is zone A—it amounts to about \$1,173 a year, and for Cloncurry, Camooweal and Mount Isa it is \$338 per annum. That is ridiculous. If you want to entice people to live in remote areas, displace them from the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast or Brisbane, you have to have jobs and a good enticement. We need people to set forth and prosper out in those western areas and you have to incentivise them.

At the Ernest Henry mine in Cloncurry I think there is a \$10,000 to \$15,000 incentive if you base yourself locally, and they still struggle to attract people with that. They are still struggling out in remote areas—even with an extra \$50,000 or \$100,000—to attract doctors. There is a really big problem. Even \$7,000 does not cut it. There needs to be some very hard decisions made beyond the zone tax rebate to force employees and public servants to work in those areas—not asking politely—because otherwise, if you go and look at the population projections in my electorate, they are all going down. I believe that is a real problem for all of us.

I know there is a sentiment in Brisbane that 'we're already putting enough money out there, we subsidise electricity with equalisation tariffs and we're already doing all these things'. There is a figure that I love to throw back at people. This figure is about four or five years old, but it is still relevant and it would still be close. The gross regional product per person in the north-west is about \$182,000; in Brisbane it is \$62,000. I am not saying that we are all great for doing that by virtue of the fact there are resources there, but you cannot just throw out figures and say that you prop things up. There are all sorts of anomalies in there. The real cost per person of providing health services in remote western areas is less than it is in the cities. It is hard to believe, but members should go and look it up for themselves. We pull our weight, and members need to acknowledge that there are huge problems in outback areas.

I agree with this motion. I am not sure I agree with 'the government backs Queenslanders working in the regions', because there are still things happening out there that are hurting us and must be addressed urgently.