




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMEMDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.34 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The first point I want to touch on is that pertaining to activists. Obviously the KAP would take a very strong position against those protests that have been happening on farms. I would ask members of the House to consider for a moment—and I am sure many of them have—the fact that trespassing in an urban area is certainly unwelcome, but trespassing in rural surrounds has various other components to it that make it much worse in that you are further away from help, you feel isolated and you are sitting on a business that is your livelihood and you feel very protective of it.

I have never lived on a farm, but I have noticed that people can be very funny about others going onto their place and bringing in weeds. Talking to the member for Hill, he mentioned how funny people on banana plantations can be about Panama disease getting on their farms. People are highly sensitive to that. Not surprisingly, a lot of people in the city would be oblivious to those risks and would not see the harm in that. There needs to be a strong message sent to these people that it is over and above just a simple trespass; it is highly inflammatory to the people who live in these areas and highly confronting when you see a group of more than a handful—anything over more than a handful—come up to your place in a remote area. That is very disconcerting to say the least and needs to be treated as more than just a simple trespassing activity. It is much worse when you put some context around that.

The bill deals with a lot of relatively minor issues such as animals in hot cars. I was interested in expanding access to farm business debt mediation. Quite clearly that is a practical measure, but I go back to the genesis of that farm debt mediation. It is good, but it was there as a replacement or as an alternative to the reconstruction board bill that I introduced in the last parliament. After seeing this issue come back to the House again, I have pangs of regret that we were not able to deliver that and now we are looking at farm debt mediation and trying to tidy that up. Farm debt mediation is not unwelcome, but it certainly does not do the job that is needed out there in rural areas compared to a reconstruction board.

I am very concerned about the use of body worn cameras on authorised officers and inspectors. I can think of scenarios of inspectors looking at tree clearing and such who will pop up on a place. It might not be their intention, but they will catch people unaware who might say things that incriminate them unintentionally or put pressure on them. These people are in a work environment and they are not thinking about the reams of legislation that they are supposed to be complying with and the language that they are supposed to be using. I cannot think of a good case in point to give members right now, but I am sure that there will be officers who are au fait or across all of the rules and regulations who will go onto a farm and someone on that farm says the wrong thing—a slip of the tongue—that is unintentional but will be caught on camera.

If that person was in a more controlled environment, such as in town visiting the inspector's office, they may perhaps give a completely different response that would not have any impact on them. It concerns me that that process lends itself to adverse outcomes. In tidying up those areas we may lose the latitude for officers to use common sense and practice as they have in the past.

Finally I would like to talk about agricultural colleges. It is out of my electorate and I have not been across it as closely as I should have been, but certainly it will impact on me. I have had some very emotive calls from people all around Queensland. Some were ex-students, but some were future students who have seen that that will not now be available to them. It is very sad and perhaps a turning point in these western areas.

I would like to make a point that I am pretty sure would not have been raised yet: it is a good time to reflect on the approach of economic rationalism to services in the bush. Invariably there is a review done on a college or an industry that is ailing and Professor Coaldrake comes in and says, 'Guess what? It is not working. The numbers are down. Let us shut it down.' For once why not look at the source of the problem, which is why are there not more people going through it and can we fix that. If we could stimulate the agricultural or beef industry or had better ways of procuring more young workers there would be more need for it. I am sure that is put aside and it is decided that this is costing us too much money and there are not enough people coming through.

The same language gets used on TAFE courses in Mount Isa in the north-west. It is always the same criticism for businesses or people on the ground: if they made more effort in this space we would be putting more people through the door. There is always a bigger picture. Not surprisingly we pay the price in the bush. Another service is taken away. I am utterly unconvinced that there was not an opportunity for the government to step in and drive some interest into those agriculture colleges and try to reinvigorate them. It is with a sense of bitterness that we see that coming back in the House.

I think it is a terrible shame that we have had closures of ag colleges in Dalby, Burdekin, Emerald and Longreach. It sends a strong signal to people in rural areas and families who want to build communities and a future for their families. Even people like myself who live in town but want to know we will have families out there in the future. We are sending a signal that there is no future and we will shut it down. There will be other courses, but nothing will be the same as having training in situ. I have had personal friends go through the college and friends who have worked there. It is a terrible shame and a blight on the actions of the government. Those are the main issues that I have with the bill and I will leave my comments at that.