




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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**ANTI-DISCRIMINATION (RIGHT TO USE GENDER-SPECIFIC LANGUAGE)  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.41 pm), in reply: I rise to close the debate on this bill and perhaps even try to address some of the concerns raised by members. I will work backwards and start with the member for Logan, who made some very valid points. I will address the question: who is worse off? Perhaps not a lot. There will be some students, and perhaps Rob Katter, who choose to still use the words 'he' and 'she' and inadvertently put those words in a university assignment or whatever else happens in the future. I was told that I was jumping the gun, that there were no penalties, but we were starting to get calls from people. Without any effort at all, I was contacted by people saying, 'I have been discriminated against,' so there are some people. That may not be significant. The member's point remains valid that others still may be offended. There is a counter point there; I acknowledge that.

In addressing that question, the second point of my bill is that sporting organisations, cafes, private businesses and schools may also have to install a third toilet lest they be subject to a discrimination claim. That is something that this bill practically addresses. If someone puts in a third toilet at a cafe, I think that is great—I have no problem with that—but if someone cannot afford to or does not do it and is punished, I think they should have their rights protected.

I can just about address everyone's argument that has been raised in this House—and it became very emotive—by saying that I am not trying to force anyone else to speak anything; I am trying to preserve a place for other people who say, 'I would like to retain the vernacular that I am accustomed to as my primary vernacular.' I think that I and others should be allowed to use that without fear of discrimination. That was described as hate speech and as weaponising language. How does it do that? I have not proposed to force anything on anyone with this legislation. I have simply said that if you happen to have an alternative view then you should have some rights as well. However, it would appear that someone like me who wants to continue to use the words 'he' and 'she' in the foreseeable future will not have their rights preserved.

I agree that if someone says, 'Can you not call me "he" or "she"? Can you call me something else?', most Queenslanders would say, 'Sure, mate, no problem. I totally respect your choices in life and I will call you whatever you prefer.' The thing is, do I want to change my primary vernacular? No, I do not. At the very least, if we are going to make these big seismic shifts in language, let's debate it in parliament. I do not think anyone should have a problem with that.

The member for Capalaba made some pretty good points. Yes, there are other priorities, but we see incremental changes. Many people in my electorate will say, 'Hang on. When did this all happen? When did I start to be penalised just for using that language? I have full respect for people. I don't want to offend anyone, but when did I start getting punished for using these words? I have been discriminated against. My kid got penalised in an assignment because I told them to use the word "forefathers" and it is now "founding signatories" or something.' There should be a point at which this is brought to a head and a line is drawn in the sand. It might seem minor, but I think it is significant. That is why I have brought this bill into the parliament.

There was a double standards argument raised—that you have to walk in other people’s shoes. Again, we are not forcing anyone to use language or trying to impose our language on anyone, if I can put it that way. It is not trying to change anyone else’s language; it is preserving the right for people to say, ‘I prefer to use gender-specific language.’ I do not see how there is a problem with that.

The point was made that I am bringing issues to parliament that are not significant, that we should be talking about jobs and so on. That is a circular debate because I can say that the government brings in bills that are insignificant all the time. That is probably being argumentative to bring up that point. I thought it was a silly thing to bring up.

Mental issues and suicide are very real issues. I understand that. It is important to recognise that people do struggle in this regard. However, is maintaining the right to use words like ‘he’ and ‘she’ as my primary vernacular weaponising language? Again, I refer members to my earlier comments that most people in Queensland are respectful and compassionate and do not want to offend people. What they do not like is having their rights taken away in regard to freedom of language.

We are starting to regulate language by stealth and I think that is unhealthy. I remember at the start of this debate everyone saying that there is no need for this. I think one of the comments made was, ‘Well, it’s only a couple of uni students.’ That is pretty significant. Even if only one or two people are affected, that is still significant. I say again: look at Jordan Peterson. He was kicked out of the University of Canada for exactly the same sentiment. He was saying, ‘I have no problem in addressing people the way they prefer to be addressed, but it is a dangerous thing when people start forcing language on people’—incremental changes not voted on by the people. That is why this is here.

For those who still ask, ‘Well, what is the point? Why do we need this?’, let me give some examples. There was a call for compulsory dedicated gender-neutral bathrooms to be part of the building code. The Queensland government committed to build awareness and education around transgender identities in schools by providing information to principals about gender-neutral school uniforms, school camps, use of toilets and participation in sport. There were changes to the Queensland driver’s licence to remove a person’s sex or gender and changes to details on birth, death and marriage certificates not based on a person’s natural sex—male or female.

The University of Queensland has policies to mark down students for language that could be considered gender exclusive, even if that language is grammatically correct. This is curious because they publicly said that that policy did not exist and it did not happen. That contradicted what a number of students who contacted us said. I have observed since then that it is in policy online. It is curious that they felt it necessary to defend the proposition that it was not. The state funded the University of Queensland to the tune of \$34.9 million in 2017, which is significant.

Commonwealth Games volunteers were told to use gender-neutral language to avoid causing offence. Qantas’s Words at Work HR resource recommended language such as ‘partner’ instead of ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’ or ‘husband’ and ‘wife’. The ADF guide encourages the use of certain language and the outlines potential bullying impact of not using sensitive language. ‘They’ day is here in the Victorian public service.

There is a big push to change and encroach on our language. We are not saying that we cannot allow that or we should not do that; I am just trying to point out that it is a real thing. My bill is not saying that no-one can use that language; nor is it advising or recommending that people not use it. It is just saying that if people choose not to use it then they should not be discriminated against. I cannot see how that will have a big impact. I fail to see how this can be associated with words like ‘weaponising’ that the member for South Brisbane mentioned—weaponising the language.

These are important points to make. I would also like to address the comment made by the member for Bulimba, who asked why we need to change things when they are heading in the right direction. I would argue that we are not trying to change anything in here. If I do not want to change the language that I use from day to day, I should have that right preserved. As long as there is no intent to offend, I do not see how that is an offensive proposition. The big question in response to that is: what is it that we are not allowed to say now? If people choose to use different language, they are quite welcome to use it. All we are saying is that if people do not want to use it they have their rights preserved.

The big questions for me remain. If this bill passes, what is the impact on people? The member for South Brisbane made a contribution. I did not hear all of it. I heard one thing. The big thing was the reference to weaponising language. The use of ‘his’ and ‘her’ is not really weaponising language. They are words we have been using for years. I will say ad nauseam that I am not sure weaponising language is consistent with someone saying, ‘I am going to maintain using “his” and “her” as my primary vernacular. If someone else prefers an alternative to those gender pronouns I am happy to consider those, but I would prefer to retain my primary vernacular.’ What is wrong with protecting someone who

is at risk of inadvertently offending someone or causing damage—if any damage could be done—and therefore being subject to a discrimination complaint? I just do not see how there can be a problem with that.

The member for Capalaba asked whether this is needed. I think it is. I think it is important to bring these things here for debate, draw a line in the sand and question whether this is the way we want to go forward. If the opposition and government want to vote against this, that is all right, but I think it is important that members have an opportunity to vote on this and people can see how their members of parliament vote.

I think this bill works in exactly the reverse way to what I have been accused of here, which is promoting hate speech. It is always fun to throw names around in the House. People were referring to Fraser Anning before and trying to tie that into this debate. It hardly warrants a response, but this has absolutely nothing to do with any period in our party or any member who has ever joined our party.

It is a sensible proposition that has been put forward for debate. I think it is an important time to have the debate. There is discussion about this. Not everything we debate in here is about jobs and the economy. Yes, we do like to focus on those things, but there are social and cultural issues that are important to us. We think it is important to stand up for those members of the community who want some rights preserved.

I would certainly be against anyone taking a bigoted approach to this. Any reasonable person would have that attitude. Do not try to paint me into a corner or characterise what I am trying to do in that way. To me this is reverse intolerance. I have a certain set of cultural values. Embedded in that is respect for people from all walks of life. I should be afforded the same respect when it comes to my cultural values and norms. I think that is a pretty reasonable proposition to put to the parliament.

The last point I wanted to make is that it is important to recognise that it is not so much that cultural norms do not exist but that they are different throughout the state. We get people from all walks of life and different cultures in remote Queensland, and that is a wonderful thing. It is sometimes the case that we have the advantage of looking from the outside in, without a lot of the noise created in the media in the big city. It becomes easier to make judgement calls in terms of where one thinks their standards lie.

This is an issue that I think is relevant to bring up for regional Queensland. It is not just tied to North Queensland. It is important to give people choice in terms of the way they use language. It is a discreet way of preserving rights. If this offends people then we are in trouble in the future, because it would seem to me that we could offend anyone by saying anything.

It is very important to recognise that we should not be regulating all of this. There is far too much regulation around where we are going with these things. We should rely on people's goodwill and good nature in how they interact with each other and stop trying to ram things down people throats. It almost seems contradictory in that I am trying to put this in legislation. I pointed out the evidence where this is continually incrementally encroaching on our lives. This has never been done in parliament.

I put this bill to the parliament and I seek support for it. It is a primary right that should be preserved. We should protect people from discrimination if they continue to want to use words like 'he' or 'she'.