




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (10.44 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Appropriation Bill. I have listened with curiosity to many of the contributions made. I certainly feel that I have a significant contribution to make on behalf of the people of Traeger and perhaps on behalf of a lot of the people of regional and Western Queensland.

I think it behoves me always at the start to be gracious and thank the government on behalf of the electorate for some of those things that did come in. The first thing I would point out is dialysis in Charters Towers. That fight has been going since before I took the seat. It is with a sense of slight bitterness that I reflect on that, because as a member in a rural electorate when you talk about dialysis it means that people leave town forever to get treatment. Or at least they are busting themselves trying to get to Townsville, which is a three-hour round trip two to three times a week, and it places enormous stress on people. I hear people around the state demand a sports stadium, a new sporting field in the suburbs of Brisbane or a new park or bike paths, but all we are asking for is dialysis, one of the most primary healthcare elements for a rural electorate.

The issue of dialysis is interesting. In rural electorates the requirement for dialysis is likely to keep increasing but they will often say, 'You don't have the numbers to justify getting a machine.' That is because half of the last lot just left town for good. They wanted to stay, but they left. The response is that the numbers are not there. That is a very good case in point as to why we see a bleeding of the population from those western areas. We are being told that it is not viable because you do not have enough numbers, but at some point you need to start turning that around. I will say that I am very grateful for that, and some families who have already received news of that are indeed very grateful.

In relation to Big Rocks Weir, before the election it was announced that there was \$30 million for that. I will make the distinction that it is a weir and not a dam. That is a small project that is a pilot project for the Hells Gates Dam project at Charters Towers. It will have a big impact. That is a good thing to spend money on. That is an 'excellent' tick, but it did not come without some lobbying and some pressure. There is funding there so we are very grateful for that. CopperString is in there. That was 10 years in the making and it is not built yet, but there has been assistance there and we are appreciative of that. It took a lot of effort to get people interested in that in the first place. There were crickets chirping at the start, but here we are. It is there and it has a lot of momentum now, so we are grateful for that.

The comment that keeps coming from the Treasurer is that debt is okay if you spend it on schools and hospitals. I am paraphrasing, but that is perhaps close to his words. It is a curious statement. I am no economist and I am not an academic, but I do understand the distinction between monetarism, supply side economics and Keynesian economics. Perhaps someone forgot to read the second chapter of the Keynesian model, because it is about spending money to build the economy. Whilst hospitals and schools are virtuous and terrific things to provide, they do not grow the economy. There is no

economic benefit or legacy there. It is social infrastructure that you build when you have the money to do that. You say that you are increasing spending and you are going to go and build these things, but you have to think about how you are going to pay for it. Sure, you will draw criticism that people get obsessed with fiscal balance, and that is true too. You can be obsessed with that.

I do agree with the first part of the statement. Debt is not always a bad thing, but it must be spent on the right things. I would like to mention what I think the right things are. A lot of these things are not very popular and they do not get a lot of votes in Brisbane where you can win the state election, but they are needed. The problem in this House is that these things are needed where the population is and you do not get the votes, and environmentally they are not popular, but here is the drum: there are resources and assets out there that need to be capitalised on.

Mr Harper: What about Glencore, Robbie?

Mr KATTER: I would like to hear more from the member for Thuringowa because I would be very interested to hear some of his thoughts on this. He has mentioned CopperString again. It is very interesting that the member for Thuringowa mentions CopperString. He did not know what it was 12 months ago. He turned up to media conferences not knowing what to talk about.

Mr HARPER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I absolutely take offence and I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Member for Traeger, the member has taken personal offence. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Mr KATTER: I withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, I do not need your assistance.

Mr KATTER: I welcome the comments from the member for Thuringowa because I would be very interested to see his input beyond the last 12 months on CopperString. It was very interesting to watch some of his inputs at some of those media conferences. We will let the public judge on what the input has been because this has been a 10-year journey but we welcome you along at the end, mate. It is very good to pat yourselves on the back at the end. I do thank the government for it. They did come in the end. It was very interesting that the member for Thuringowa would talk up on that.

I would also like to talk about Hells Gates Dam. There is a lot of talk about this. Originally, it was always, 'Let's raise the Burdekin Dam wall instead,' and that actually came from the Labor Party first, for the member for Thuringowa's benefit. It was Jackie Trad, the former member for South Brisbane, who mentioned for the first time the raising of the Burdekin Dam wall.

Hells Gates Dam is a big project, make no bones about it. These are the things that will never look good on a profit and loss statement when they first come out. That is what everyone says when it comes to the cost of water: 'We'll have to look at the business case'—which seems to be the new excuse for never building anything now—and that is if they get through any environmental rigours, which they never seem to. We have had previous proposals and business cases done on these same projects that would stand a foot high, all to do with the Bradfield scheme. Hells Gates Dam is the start of the Bradfield scheme. At the back end of these, someone needs to make a judgement call. There will never be absolute certainty on any of these projects that, 'Yes, they definitely will show a strong economic return. And, no, there will be no environmental impact.'

Someone has to have the intestinal fortitude to make a judgement call on any of these projects. That is why I have no faith at all that this project will be built under the current government. It is such a big project and it needs vision, which is what we want to see in the budget. That is the sort of thing that takes us out of the position we are in now in the economy. Even before COVID, we were in a position where we needed industry development and investment. We need those construction jobs on the front end, but it is very important to have that legacy benefit on the back end of it. That is why something like Hells Gates is important.

The HIPCo dam is an interesting one. There is \$180 million from the federal government sitting there right now for a dam in Hughenden. Barely a drop is taken out of the Flinders River system. It depends on what figures are used, but about four million megalitres a year runs out into the sea and there are one or maybe two farmers who take a little bit of that water. It runs past hundreds of thousands of acres of rolling black soil plains that are open, that do not need to be cleared and that could be farmed immediately. There are barriers that have been put along anything that needs to be built—any farming, any water allocations you want to take out of there.

Governments and departments are obsessed with pricing and 'You need to have a business case to get up there.' If you want any of that done, someone needs to say to the farmers who live along that river and have been battling away for years, 'Just take the water. We'll price it as cheap as we can. You're the pioneers. No-one is showing you how to do anything up here. We don't have a DPI station up here. Just have a go, take some water and we'll make it as cheap as possible for you.'

At the moment, we have only released some 200,000 megalitres or more out of the four million megalitres a year that runs out there. You are allowed to take 30 per cent out of these systems; we are allowing for five or six per cent out of the Flinders system and we are squabbling over the Hughenden dam. There is \$180 million from the federal government to build that right now, but it is just locked up with the state and I expect it will be for another five years. There will be every excuse in the book as to why it cannot be built.

It is really hard to see where the economic benefit is from here but people in the past have seen it. The people who built the Fairbairn Dam were faced with exactly the same proposition, but it was built and it is a wonderful thing. It is a beautiful asset and it is an economic provider. It has provided a legacy, far beyond any construction jobs or benefit from the economic boom at the start. It is that legacy that everyone benefits from, but it requires that vision from the government of the day. There is \$180 million sitting there from the federal government right now and it has been there for over a year. It cannot be captured and it may just be thrown in the bin because it will not be allowed to be built.

Another issue is the Galilee rail line, and this was a policy of our party. Fair enough if you do not like coalmining and you do not want any more coalmining, but there is an opportunity for 100 million tonnes of coal a year to go out of that Galilee Basin in the next five years. Instead, there is a commitment for Cross River Rail, and I believe the estimate for Cross River Rail is now over \$10 billion. Why would the government spend that money first on social infrastructure here, when \$3 billion would build the 200 to 300 kilometres of rail line to Abbot Point where a new port can be built all in one—

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr KATTER: No, you do need a new port. It is really difficult to take interjections from the member for Thuringowa because he seems to put his mouth into gear before his—

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Thuringowa, your interjections are not being taken. Member for Traeger, if you are going to respond, you need to do it through the chair.

Mr KATTER: Through the chair, I will respond to the member for Thuringowa. I will give him an education. He said there is a port berth that is vacant that would need to be developed. Yes, there is a port and I think we all realise there is a port at Abbot Point, but there is no open berth available for more coal. He should go and talk to the users. I talk to the users who are there, but clearly the member for Thuringowa does not, and that is probably the problem. They are now locked in there and they cannot get the ore out. The people of Queensland can own a port berth for \$3 billion—I forget which number port berth it is—and the rail line going in there would be paid for by the users. Within five years, there would be half a billion dollars in royalties—and that is royalties alone, not the economic benefit into the state. That is the sort of thing you can do if you have the will.

The next topic I would like to mention is Ootan Road, which is an interesting road. This is not in my electorate. I will admit that there is money in the budget for roads, and I am not going to criticise this government on their capacity to spend on roads. There is good money for the Hann Highway and the Torrens Creek Aramac Road. We have done well with that in the past. Ootan Road is an important piece of infrastructure and should be a priority. That is something that can make money for people because you can get triple road trains out of Cape York. The local member should be mentioning this because this is not in my electorate. There are great resources in Cape York. There is farming activity up there right now but it is constrained because you have to unhook in Mareeba if you are bringing produce down. If you can bring triple road trains down from Cape York, you are in business and that is why the CSIRO identified it as one of the highest value beef roads in Queensland in terms of potential.

The other thing I want to talk about is ethanol. One of the buzz words used was hydrogen cars. I see hydrogen as akin to the biofuels push which was used about three or four years ago. With the biofuels push, not one fine has been issued by the government and I figure the large oil companies now just treat the mandate as a joke because the government is not being strong and enforcing that.

The really disappointing thing for me was that one of the two biofuels plants actually closed down during the election campaign. They appealed to the government for assistance. They could have made hand sanitiser and they needed assistance from the state government to facilitate upgrading it into hand sanitiser so we did not have to import it from the Chinese, but that assistance was not there. That is

exactly the job of government. That is exactly what a government is supposed to do—facilitate the manufacturing of biofuels. How can we take the government seriously when they are talking about hydrogen when they did that with biofuels? Even the funding for the biofuels app that we had out there was dropped earlier this year. It is very disappointing that we are moving onto a different thing when that was not even properly handled. I think we have every right to be entirely cynical about talking new and emerging industries when that was not handled properly.

The last thing I will mention quickly is the \$5 billion Future Fund that was announced before the election. A portion of that should be quarantined for regional—and I think specifically for North Queensland—investment. In that way, we would know that that fund would be used for money-making infrastructure. It would be adequately used.