




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.20 am): I rise to make my contribution on the budget. I always like to start with being appreciative of the money that comes into the electorate. Whether I think that is enough or not is something I will discuss further on. I will go through some of the things that have been delivered.

There is money for the Kennedy Development Road, and that has been a big thing ever since I was elected to parliament. It was formerly known as the Hann Highway and is an inland highway for Queensland. If operators take a triple road train down the inland of Queensland that would take two B-doubles off the Bruce Highway. That saves a lot of maintenance and provides a lot of safety. It is a dry run in the wet season as it is away from the wet parts to the east of the Great Dividing Range. Once west of that, it is more traversable in the wet season and it is shorter. They estimate they burn 13 hours less diesel travelling from the tropical north down to Melbourne taking that inland route. It has been a very strategic piece of infrastructure and it is required.

The next most significant road of that nature for industry to be opened up is Ootann Road, which goes through the cape. I am sure the member for Hill mentioned that earlier. They are good projects. Not a lot of people live up there on those roads. It is not very enticing for the government because it is not going to be a great vote winner, but it sure would be great for the economy and the people of Queensland would appreciate it in the future.

It is good to see that money for which people in the community of Hughenden worked very hard. People like Les Carter and Greg Jones, the former mayor, fought very hard for that money. We are very pleased to see the roads sealed almost all the way through. I know that the Premier has now started talking about the inland highway—and that is good to hear—but there is still a lot of work to be done on crossings etcetera to make sure we can start getting triples through the inland. Some of those things do not cost a lot of money considering the benefits they can provide.

There is money for the Flinders Highway, but the next one I will mention is the Aramac to Torrens Creek road, which is also part of that inland link. That is something that has been a passion of Bill Bode, a councillor in Hughenden, for many years. It forms part of that vital link for the trucks. Just the other day I heard Blenners on the *Country Hour* on ABC radio saying how wonderful it would be if we could take those trucks on the inland—and he specifically mentioned the Torrens Creek to Aramac road. That money is there now. I notice that this is also in partnership with the federal government and we acknowledge their contribution as well.

I have made special mention of the Cloncurry to Dajarra road. Probably not many people here would know where that is. That was another thorn in my side for years. Incitec Pivot, the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere, is located on that road. We have the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere and they have been waiting for about 15 kilometres of seal to be completed ever

since I have been in parliament, 10 years. Maybe that reflects poorly on me as the member for that area, but it certainly reflects poorly on the government as well. If we cannot seal a road for consumables into that mine site for the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere, we are not doing our job. That is after the mine itself had already contributed a great deal of material to be used for that road, so there had already been a big contribution from the mine.

I like using this road as an example in here because a lot of the roads down here are great and thousands of people a day get to use them. Not many people get to use these roads I am speaking about. They do not buy a lot of votes but they contribute a lot to the state. If this road is built, it would carry a lot of consumables in and out. It is a good piece of infrastructure that helps create wealth. It means a lot to me as a politician when we spend money there because it is good value; it ensures it contributes to the long-term wealth of the state, not just these short-term sugar hits that the government seems to be addicted to.

Health is an interesting issue for me and one that has really galvanised my curiosity over the last six months. I have become attuned to the massive deficit in health in facilities in remote Western Queensland. It is bewildering to see some of the things that people go through due to a lack of resources or a lack of facilities. Quite recently our board of the North West HHS was effectively stood down for simply saying for the last few years, 'There's just not enough money here to do the job that we're expected to do and to provide the services we provide.' I find it difficult to see how almost everything else in this budget has priority over critical dialysis chairs, renal chairs or a new X-ray machine for Charters Towers because they need one that works. The hospital in Charters Towers had maggots falling through the ceiling and has rats eating the wires in the building, so they have data problems. They are pretty real problems.

We also do not have mental health inpatient facilities in Mount Isa. We have a flood of people coming in through the Northern Territory clogging up the health system, but the problem apparently was the board. The problem was not that we are not getting enough money to conduct the service we have; we have money to employ doctors and nurses in those remote areas. Health is a massive problem and it is a really big drama for the government to fix. When I hear the nonsense about Olympic Games bids and \$7 billion being spent on Cross River Rail and then I see those things still are not provided for in my own electorate—and in other parts of Western Queensland—it really makes me quite angry.

There was some social infrastructure provided for in my electorate that I should be grateful for. It is pleasing to have that. There is the upgrade at the footy park in Normanton and Gallipoli Park in Mount Isa, which is enjoyed by a lot of people as well as the Family Fun Precinct. They are things that do enhance livability and we are appreciative of them. I am sure people in the electorate will also be very appreciative of that.

There are some other aspects of the budget I do want to talk about. There is the claim that 60 per cent of the budget—and I know this was also addressed by my colleagues, the member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Hill. There is always a lot of deception with budgets. It is really unfair for people out there who try to interpret what is the real deal. Health is a good example because when we heard the talk about health, it was said there was an increase in spending. I guess it would be fair for everyone in my electorate to believe that means an increase in services or infrastructure, but there is nothing new. There is nothing new in there in terms of those critical elements such as CT scanners or renal chairs.

Another thing that I found deceptive was the assertion that 60 per cent of the budget is spent in regional Queensland. Regional Queensland as I define it does not include the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba and the Gold Coast. They are important places, but the layperson would not consider them as regional. When that is flipped around it goes back to 60 per cent and 40 per cent. That is all right if they want to spend 60 per cent and 40 per cent; maybe there is a good reason for it. However, the government should not say that to people out there because it is misleading.

On the subject of mining royalties, the only comment I can make—and I have to comment on mining royalties because the income is such a big part of my electorate—is that obviously the total amount was depleted this year but we expect it to go up. It seems to have dulled down a little bit but the coal bashing always comes out. I notice the member for Callide still pledges his support and I know the KAP would like to register their strong support. A lot of people seem to be warming to coal a little bit, but it was very frosty in here a few years ago. When we were talking about coal it was very frosty indeed. We all seem to be friends again with coal. Let's just keep that in mind because it is really helping us in the budget and it will help us in the future. Let's be careful about how much we pick on it when it becomes trendy again in the political sphere. We are concerned about royalties.

The big thing for me is the absence of money-making projects. For many years there has been a defocus. Water infrastructure just gets bogged down in a quagmire of green tape and business case after business case. In relation to the North West Minerals Province one mayor said to State

Development, 'Please do not come to me again for a contribution to another study of the North West. You've done it three times, I've told you the same thing and none of it has been delivered, so stop coming to ask me to contribute to these forums on North West business cases.'

We have the world's most expensive power in North-West Queensland. Fix it by connecting us to the NEM. It is pretty easy: build a transmission line. The government has the power to do that now. We could regulate that line now. The government could own CopperString and turn us into a powerhouse out there. We can contribute so much and help you pay for Cross River Rail and your Olympics bid, but we cannot if you just say tokenistic words like, 'We support it.' Do not say that you support it; go and build it. Make sure it is done. Do not do another study of another dam. Build it. Build these things to lay the platform for industry—money-making projects, not money-absorbing projects.

In terms of infrastructure, there seems to be a really dangerous, misleading inclusion of social infrastructure, which should be separately defined from industry-enabling infrastructure. All too often in this House and in the budget we hear about infrastructure spending. I do not define that to include Cross River Rail. Technically it is infrastructure—I get that—but in my mind I am thinking, 'We need to build some things that have a legacy and make money for this state,' and that is not it. That is something you build after you have made the money from building your transmission line. Building the transmission line will make you money. You will learn about this in the future, because you will run out of money. It is \$7 billion now—it will keep costing more—and it does not make money. It is just like your Olympics Games. The Olympics Games do not make money, either.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Comments will come through the chair.

Mr KATTER: You keep selling these things to the public, but I will tell you what makes money. All of the business cases say that dams do not make money. That is what they said about the Fairbairn Dam. That is what they said about just about every dam in Queensland, but that infrastructure lays the platform. It is not a great thing to announce before an election—it does not win you votes—but they are the mature decisions that are needed in this House to take this state forward. There is a complete absence of that in this budget.

That is a real problem that I see going forward. It has been a problem for a long time. I have a front row seat to that, because I live in a part of Queensland that is highly undeveloped. It has a large amount of untapped resources. There is four million megalitres running down the Flinders at the moment. Hardly a drop of it is being taken out. There is hundreds of thousands of acres of blacksoil plain, all lending itself to irrigable farming. Half the people in the city say, 'We're running out of food to feed ourselves across the world.' That is just crazy. We have so much resource up there that could enhance the productivity of Queensland—more taxes, more revenue—but we are not talking about that in this budget; we are talking about more pieces of social infrastructure. That will cost us money into the future—no question. They are the biggest issues I have.

I would like to finish on a positive note. This budget makes some very good contributions to the schools in my electorate. We have some good details on that. We have some very pleased principals. I rang them today. Some of them were not aware of that money coming in. I mention the elevator at Barkly Highway State School in Mount Isa. There will be upgrades at Sunset State School and Spinifex State College. Phil Sweeney and Chris Pocock do a wonderful job there. They have attracted a lot of money to these upgrades. Happy Valley State School, with Elissa Chambers, has almost \$600,000 for playground equipment and extra classrooms. A bit of money will be spent throughout the schools in my electorate. We appreciate that. That will be put to very good use.