




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (4.59 pm): I will speak briefly about different elements of the bill until I turn to the part that deals with the Personalised Transport Ombudsman. I support those comments made by the member for Hinchinbrook when he made the observation that people have fallen back in love with coalmining after it was the enemy throughout a period of ideological fervour. Now after the COVID experience people seem to have softened their dislike of the industry knowing the role it plays in the economy, which many of us from regional areas knew intuitively all along. In conversations I have had with mines that have made it through the process of new leases, the nature of their comments has been, 'We don't want to make much noise because we've got it through now. But crikey, I pity anyone who wants to go through the process we just went through.' It is very, very difficult.

To be fair to this government, the layers and layers probably came about when previous governments had their two bob's worth about the processes of getting mines up and going. A significant part of that is certainly needed, but I would say that a lot more is needed than what is being done in this bill to make the process fair and equitable at the front end so that we can ensure there is a mining industry in the future.

In the North West Minerals Province there is over \$600 billion worth of minerals still left in the ground. That does not mean it will be mined because continuity of the operations there now is needed as well as the new ones coming on board. We do not have a great deal coming on board at the moment unless the process can be amended so it is not too onerous. I issue that word of warning to this House that we need measures to unlock that. CopperString is one of the things that is needed to ensure there is continuity in the leases into the future.

On the subject of water, again as was quite rightly pointed out by the member for Hinchinbrook, restrictions and compliance are interesting words to apply to someone who lives in North Queensland where we have the biggest volumes of water but hardly any storage at all. Even in Mount Isa we can talk about restrictions and compliance, but the cost of water has priced us out of being able to use it. People there live in a town that can be a dust bowl but has two massive dams that will still be at 80 per cent capacity in dry periods. However, they do not touch that water because it costs too much. That comes back to providing an artificial scarcity and manipulation of the prices. It is an interesting point to make.

On a bigger scale at a higher level we see big projects like Hells Gates Dam being downsized. We see that dam has been hijacked and derailed to turn it into a smaller version of what it should be. What is now going to be built is something that no-one pushing the project ever intended it to be, which is a small-scale, localised dam for that region, not an enabler to push water west of the Great Divide into the midwest plains and other areas. A lot more needs to be done in that space.

In the remainder of my speech I want to concentrate on the Personalised Transport Ombudsman, which has been a complete waste of taxpayers' money—\$429,000. I assume this was done in part to appease people and all that tension when rideshare was allowed. In fact, rideshare operators were already operating. They treated the government with absolute contempt, saying—and it is in *Hansard*—

'Yes, we understand we're operating illegally in Queensland, but you just need to catch up with the times.' As a person who spends a lot of time down here to legislate for the state, I was completely insulted by that. However, that was a big enough corporation that was not scared of taking the government to court if it had to. He said, 'We're too big and ugly for you as a government. We don't really care what you say and we don't really care about your laws. You had better move with the times and work with us.' The government rolled over for them.

Now there are deficiencies in the provision of disabled transport. Previously there was a mandate on the taxi industry that about 20 per cent of their fleet had to be disabled compliant. Obviously the unregulated rideshare operators do not need to comply with that, so it is not there now. We have heard firsthand accounts from people who have come to us and said that service times are longer or the service does not even exist now when it comes to wheelchair or disabled appropriate transport. It is a real shame that that has happened. There is no real accountability for that other than this bill coming before the parliament now and giving us an opportunity to highlight that, the cost of that legislation and the negligence involved.

When the government presented this to parliament the first time they would have said, 'Don't worry, we will have an ombudsman in place. We know there will be disruption in the industry.' It is the understatement of the decade to say there would be disruption in the industry; the government threw a nuclear bomb into the industry and then put an ombudsman in place. Now it says that the ombudsman did not receive any complaints or it was ineffectual. Doesn't that tell the story? Logic would have it that, if the government is going to throw a nuclear bomb into an industry and the ombudsman proves ineffective, that proves it was a waste of time in the first place. Perhaps it was just a charade or a smokescreen to try to show that it cared. The cost has been very big and very personal.

In the process of that original debate, they would have said, 'Taxidriviers are all rich people who own these things. Why should they have it all their way?' This is the sort of person who would need the use of the ombudsman, and I will talk now about Jeanette and Alex Black from Cairns. This letter states—

Jeanette (64yo) and her husband Alex (73yo) own a taxi licence in Cairns. Alex bought the licence 45 years ago ...

Six years ago Alex had a stroke and was in hospital for three months. After rehabilitation he was able to work again and returned to work as a pilot escort ... he then had three ... mini-strokes ...

At this same time, ridesharing entered the Queensland market.

Two years ago Alex had a significant stroke ... rendered him paralysed ... cannot swallow or feed himself. After two months in hospital the direction was given that Alex needed to move to an aged care home.

Jeanette—

who was still left with the taxi—

secured a bed at the Edmonton Gardens Aged Care Home, at a cost of \$3,000 per month. The pension goes nowhere near to covering that cost.

When Covid-19 hit ... Jeanette received a message from the lessee ... to say they could no longer pay anything for the lease. Then in May 2020, Jeanette lost her job of 17 years due to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

... Jeanette had no income and for the first time in her life had to apply for social security.

This is the face of the people affected by these changes who would normally access something like an ombudsman. Jeanette has since secured some casual work in the aged-care home to try to support the family. These are the sorts of people who had good faith in the government when they said they would have their back and, if they were then displaced of the wealth they had created over their lifetime, there would be compensation.

I understand that last month the Supreme Court directed the Queensland government to mediate in good faith with these taxidriviers to try to resolve this compensation issue because \$20,000 that they were eligible for per licence up to a maximum of not much beyond that falls hopelessly short of what these licences are worth. It astonishes me that there is such a high level of neglect of all these battlers who have invested in this industry and have complied with government regulation for so many years in good faith. We had an ombudsman in place, which was like the scraps that were thrown to them when the legislation was passed, and now the government is pulling it out. It should be pulled out; it was useless; it was a waste of money—\$429,000. Isn't it a shame that it was not used effectively?

It does fall back on the government and the minister to make sure that person or whoever was in that role functioned effectively, looked after people like Jeanette and Alex Black and guided them through that difficult period. What a dreadful waste of people's time and money that was. Perhaps it was deliberate in order to mislead people into thinking they cared about these taxidriviers who were displaced of their income and, in many cases, their lifelong savings.