




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Regional and Remote Queensland, Housing

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.49 pm): I rise to speak about housing in remote and regional areas. It was pleasing to see that it was raised as a hot topic at the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils' big conference recently. At the same time we read in the papers about the \$1.8 billion Brisbane city deal. The Prime Minister came up here and, with the Premier, announced that deal, which includes \$250 million for a livability fund for Brisbane and \$450 million for a new bus stop at Woolloongabba. That is all very nice, but I would already give Brisbane a gold star for livability. You have done a pretty good job. It is a livable place. In fact, it is too livable because there is too much congestion down here.

A few years ago I was introduced to the term 'diseconomies of scale'. I had never heard of it. I was told that there are diseconomies of scale when too much of the population merges at once creating bulky infrastructure demands such as you are experiencing right now in Brisbane. It brings to mind a recent conversation I had with my sister. She lives in Brisbane. She said, 'Rob, if you are going to do something in politics do something about housing for my kids. They're never going to be able to afford a house in Brisbane.' I said, 'Tell them to move to Townsville.' That is what I did. I could afford a house in Townsville, but I could not afford a house here. There is an answer there and it is about moving people to the regions. The government has a role to play in that.

Mr Nicholls: I know where your sister lives.

Mr KATTER: I have a few sisters here, member for Clayfield. I want kids to move into the regions. We need to put effort into providing equity by making Mount Isa, Rockhampton or Townsville more livable. That is where the effort is needed, not in Brisbane, which is pretty livable already. Overpopulating this area is exacerbating the issues that we face in the first place. Affordability comes in the regions.

There are some other ways that we can improve affordability. Let us look at home loans. Since 2001 there has been a scheme, which I did not know existed, where the state says, 'We'll give loans to low-income people at two per cent.' The terms and conditions of it are surprising. Last year in Queensland something like 46,000 home loans were approved, but only 17 people took up that scheme. There is a scheme sitting there that you can build on. For years I have stood in this House saying that we need a bank or a government facility that moves outside the traditional lending methods and that can activate loans. Access and affordability of capital is a big inhibitor to making investment in regional and remote areas. Banks do not like loaning out there anymore. Even when we convince someone that it is still livable in the regions, they cannot get money from the banks to buy a business or buy a house. That needs to be fixed and the government needs to play a role, as they have before.

Let us talk about title deeds in First Australian communities. If you want to fix housing there, give those people the same chance that everyone else in Australia has. I think it is the most discriminatory thing that we do in government when, in places like Doomadgee and Normanton, we say, 'Sorry, mate,

but unless you can get your blue card and get a job and start making some money, we're going to deny you the possibility of owning a house here.' There is a process, but even I have struggled to get through it. Let's make it easier for them to buy a house. They should have the same right as anyone else in Australia to buy a house in the town in which they live, and I know they want to do that because many people have approached me about it.

Over the years we have heard a lot about the first home buyers grant from the member for Hinchinbrook. It has been a pet issue of his. We should expand that scheme to existing homes. I was a valuer for 15 years in remote and regional Queensland. To build a house in Hughenden or Richmond will cost about \$400,000 to \$450,000. That is the bare minimum. If you do an RP data search of those areas to try to find a sale in the town footprint for over \$400,000, you will not find one. No-one is going to build a new house because they will not get their money back. The first home buyers scheme extends only to new homes but in none of those places will you get your money back so the scheme does not roll out there. How convenient! We can never access that scheme. We need to allow the scheme to apply to existing homes in the regions and in remote areas so that we too can get some benefit from it; otherwise it is a metropolitan scheme. Call it for what it is.

Lastly, I refer to unlocking rural residential land. Mount Isa is a great example of an urban footprint, plonked in the middle of nowhere, where you need state and federal government assistance to unlock barriers to freeing up land, such as ILUAs and other planning instruments that have shrouded over that. Councils need help with that. I grew up on acreage outside of Charters Towers. You had battlers' blocks and people living in a converted shed for years before moving into a house. That is a big part of the housing project and a big part of regional and remote housing that needs to be considered.

All of these things play a big part in trying to address the housing issue. If we displace some of the population, we can provide opportunities for my nephews in the future so that they will consider the regions to be livable places and they will be able to get funding to build something in those areas.