



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**


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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.00 pm): I rise to respond to this year's budget. As a spokesperson for a large part of regional Queensland and as the Leader of the KAP, we say that it lacks vision. I think there is a fundamental difference in the way the KAP looks at the economy in Queensland to the way the government does—that is, we believe in creating jobs, not buying them. That is a fundamental difference that I would like to come back to in my contribution.

I do need to say thank you. There were some generous contributions made by the government. It is important to be thankful for those things. In particular, there were some good contributions for roads and education. There is a massive deficit in health. I note that this morning the Premier said to go back and talk to people in our electorates. I am not sure that anyone would want to hear the feedback that I get in my electorate about health because there are enormous deficits. People are very angry about the standard of health we put up with because of those deficits, whether you are talking about CT scanners or renal chairs.

Last year on the ABC Min Gaulai said, 'I'd rather die and stay in Mount Isa if I cannot get access to a renal chair.' It would cost a paltry \$3 million or \$4 million to add another 10 chairs in Mount Isa. He said, 'I'd rather die than have to move back to Cairns away from my family.' That is the sort of thing I hear regularly, whether it be in Charters Towers, Hughenden, Richmond, Mount Isa or any other town. That is a huge shortfall.

**Mrs Gilbert:** You got new chairs in Charters Towers.

**Mr KATTER:** I take that interjection. I was at the opening in Charters Towers. It is still a massive shortfall. That is fine but it is still just catching up because of the massive deficit. We did not have anything there for 10 years. Mount Isa now has 10 chairs when Alice Springs has 70. They have a similar size footprint, yet they have 70 chairs and we have 10! I do not think anyone on that side of the House would want to talk about renal chairs and the support that the government has given.

There is money towards a \$2 million spend for the Burketown Police Station. That is good. There is money for new accommodation for police in Mount Isa. That is excellent, because we are unique in Mount Isa and accommodation is fundamental to attracting the new constables. We rely on having first-year connies out there. We cannot force others to come out there otherwise. Having accommodation in the north-west is a good thing to have in respect of their experience.

There is \$7 million for the rail line in Mount Isa. That is a wolf in sheep's clothing, but I will come back to that. That is about the way the government manage their utilities and the accounting standards they apply to that.

The money allocated for the crossing at Scrubby Creek is excellent. I have had a lot of complaints about that crossing. It is along the Flinders Highway and the black soil plains where the road is constantly moving. There are more and more trucks on that highway because rail has been poorly managed by the government over many years since it has been privatised. That means more trucks are smashing the culverts—the concrete where it meets the bitumen—and that does more damage, so it is about safety. There is \$27 million to fix Scrubby Creek. That is a bad problem, so that is good.

There is an allocation for progressive sealing works on the Kennedy Developmental Road. That is about the inland highway. Trucks can save 13 hours by going from the Far North down to Melbourne via the inland highway. If you are interested in reducing your carbon footprint and if you are interested in competitive markets—that is, making our fruit and vegetables in the Far North more competitive in getting them down to the markets in Sydney and Melbourne—you should be investing in that road to make sure triple road trains can travel down the inland highway, away from the flooding on the coast.

The US government built that road initially during the war for that purpose when they said, 'You need a second route from the Far North.' That is how it started. We are close to finishing that now. There is money for the Alick Creek floodway upgrades and there is a lot of money for schools. I will not go through them individually, but there is some good money for education. That is the good part of the budget. Now I will go to the critical part.

The energy crisis, which we are still right smack bang in the middle of, has given us many reminders in a lot of ways. On reflection, you can see the value that coal has to our economy. Regardless of your ideologies and your sentiment towards intermittent renewable energy supply, we are in no position to switch over. We have just had a working example, a trial, of that and we cannot do it. Everyone can stop slagging off coal. We are stuck with it for a long time. The government better start reinvesting in these generators. After the recent by-election in Callide, the people working in maintenance teams on those generators were saying that there is not the funding there to keep the generators going. There are some big problems looming.

I received a terrible response to my question this week on the gas reserve policy. That is a real blight on the government—the fact that they were part of that original decision. I think we heard earlier that it is the essence of neoliberalism—economic rationalists. They say we should have a free market for everything: 'Let's sell off our competitive gas advantage.' When we turned the LNG taps on, studies said back then, 'For every dollar you earn from selling this overseas you will forgo \$21 in lost industrial output.' That is exactly how it has played out.

Incitec Pivot said they were going to build plants right along the east coast. They are shutting down Gibson Island—no gas reserve policy. It is not about price or tinkering with elements at the edges. It is straight out about having a gas reserve policy and not the mickey mouse one that the state had in the Surat Basin for some individual users. We need a comprehensive gas reserve policy to make sure that we can guarantee domestic industry a pathway going forward. That is a long-term vision. That is where you say to them, 'We're going to look after you first before we worry about selling it to Santos, British Gas or overseas partners. We are worried about you first and the future of Queensland manufacturing.' That is how you look after manufacturing. That is how you lay the platform.

How do we create jobs? Setting up a new state development office somewhere or putting consultants in some of these towns is fine but that is buying jobs. Creating jobs is where you have a farm in Richmond in the north-west where, if you irrigate the land, you can get four times the production out of it and you can put on another three workers. Now you have created three jobs where people are paying \$40,000 tax a year and putting \$30,000 into the economy by buying things with the money they make. You have created those jobs from the latent resource that was sitting there. It cost the taxpayer nothing. You just gave them the water to do it and then, whoosh, you are away—you can start to pay for public transport and Brisbane hospitals.

You need to concern yourself with creating jobs, activating the resources to create jobs, not buying jobs. All we do at the moment is more studies. We pay consultants to look at projects. None of them ever get built. It is the people at the end of this who need to create the revenue so they can spend it out there. That would then build the hospitals, but they never get built. It is a circular thing in the economy. The cash dissipates. There must be a reckoning at some point.

That brings me to ethanol. That is another way to create jobs. It is sitting out there. We all spoke about biofuels in the House. Everyone loved biofuels and said, 'We are going to activate this. We are going to stimulate farming and clean up the air.' There are studies out there that say that if you power a car from biofuels it has a lower carbon footprint than an EV. Also, photosynthesis is a pretty good solar panel to have for bioenergy. Where has the effort gone for that?

Not one fine has been handed out for not adhering to the E10 mandate we have. Not one fine has been issued for the E10 mandate of four per cent that the KAP got across the line. No-one has been serious about it. The oil companies are saying, 'You guys aren't serious.' The US was serious and

63 other countries in the world were serious. You cannot import a vehicle into this country now without detuning it to non-E10 fuels. They have to detune them because we are the only backward you-know-what country that does not keep up. Biofuels have a strong future. If you love the environment, like we do in the KAP, using E10 in your tank can reduce your tail pipe emissions by 30 per cent.

That is the equivalent of taking 30 per cent of the petrol fuelled vehicles off the road in Queensland. That is a pretty good environmental outcome, if you ask me, for something we are already doing anyway. Guess how much that costs the taxpayers? Nothing. If anything, it has the potential to bring the price of fuel down or arrest rising fuel prices. It would address fuel security and stimulate agriculture. Why are we not pursuing that? Instead, we have jumped straight on to hydrogen. This is the new buzzword, a thing far off in the future. It will be great if it takes off; I will be fully supportive. But what about biofuels? They are sitting there now ready to be taken advantage of and we are not. If you go and talk to anyone involved in the industry, we are not. The United Ethanol plant has shut down, which is a shame. Shame on this government, because that represented future manufacturing jobs in that industry.

In relation to CopperString, we have a beautiful piece of infrastructure there and it is waiting to go. The Treasurer was criticising the federal government for not putting money in—which was completely valid for him to do—but we need to get that across the line. If we do not aggressively pursue those things now, they are not going to be there in the future. If that is not a priority and the Olympics are, then I have a problem with the budget.

I talked about the rail line before. I remember celebrating when there was \$20 million or \$30 million in the budget years ago. One of the managers from the mine tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Rob, that's not that good, you know, because you know they just pass that price back on to us.' Already we are resisting using rail because of the price, so when they do the upgrades on this it will be user pays. It is a fixed cost coming on to a diminishing number of users on the line, so there are more trucks on the road. A lot of them do not pay any road fees, so they are paying a bigger road bill on the Flinders Highway. There are at least a million tonnes that are on the road now that could be on rail generating funds for Queenslanders, but that all goes back to the economic rationalists who thought it was a brilliant idea to privatise all this. They lost 800 jobs from Townsville to Mount Isa. A lot of first Australian people out in those small towns never got employment again, and this was all a good idea? Executive salaries soared. They bumped up all of the salaries of the big executives in Aurizon and whatnot, sacked all the workers on the ground, and have diminishing use of that rail line. It needs a hell of a lot of work. It does not even need money; it just needs some effort to make it work again for the people of Queensland. Let's look at these utilities now as industry enablers, not cash cows.

In relation to water pricing on the Flinders, the first element in the tender is price. What are we trying to do with the water? Someone can come along who just wants to build one big cotton farm. They will fly in all of the workers and do all of their servicing down south. There is no benefit to outlying towns, but based on price they will get it. Would the government not want to step in at some point and say, 'Hang on, that doesn't really demonstrate much community benefit. We can't see how that plugs into the cattle industry very well. Let's pull that back?' There is no ability to do that. It is just based on price. That tells the story about all of these utilities. You are gouging all of the energy assets. You are treating them like privatised assets, which you should not need to because you rejected privatisation. But you signed up to these national accords so they have to act like they are private companies and you are ripping profits out of them, which all falls back on to these businesses, big or small. It puts the handbrake on the economy. That is where you lack a long-term approach by doing cash grabs in the short term—you not thinking about how this plays out in the long term.

About \$124 billion from the COVID stimulus came into the state. It is pretty hard for any government, whether it is Labor or whoever, to pat themselves on the back and say, 'Gee, we did a good job on the economy.' Of course you did: \$124 billion in cash was circulated into the economy. There was some downturn to counter that, but at the same time that is a pretty big cash injection. That is going to dissipate. You cannot just keep pumping an economy with cash all the time. You have to build some long-term industries and job-creating—not job-buying—industries. That means new industries. That means up the Flinders getting some dams built. It means making these rail lines work so there are more mines opening up and building transmission lines so there are more mines opening up, putting royalties into your economy. You have to be thinking beyond where we are now and not just about the big cash grab.

I do not have enough time to talk about the Olympics, but doesn't that really just say it all?

I will return to the COVID stimulus. There is a saying that the rising tide floats all boats. Stamp duty, bang, up \$2 billion in this budget cycle. That is a pretty big bump. Not everyone is saying, 'Yay, it's because the Queensland government's done a brilliant job keeping us safe.' They are just sick of

being down there and seeing the freedom up here and cheap property prices. I am not trying to say it has nothing to do with the government, but you cannot get all of the glory from that. You are jumping on to the Olympics. I table this report.

*Tabled paper:* Article from *InQueensland*, undated, titled 'Tokyo closes the book on its troubled Olympics—with a final cost of \$19 billion [951](#).

The total cost for Tokyo came in at \$19 billion. They said it would be something similar in Australia. It started off at a figure below \$10 billion. It was \$19 billion. How can you commit to something like that without taking from something else in the future? That is something you build once you have made some money. Once we build some dams, we start building transmission lines and we get some more taxes off industry, that is when we can start to do these things—not before. They are not the things that create the industry: they are the things you build industry for so we can pay the bills.

The First Home Buyers' Grant is to extend to existing homes so the regions can get a crack at this. We could turn post offices—this is a federal issue, but the state can get behind it—into a state bank or a Commonwealth bank so they can do loans in regional areas. There are big gaps in health that still need to be cleaned up. The budget falls well short of delivering for Queensland.