




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2022

### **CRIMINAL LAW (RAISING THE AGE OF RESPONSIBILITY) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.26 pm): I rise to oppose the bill as put forward by the Greens which seeks to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14. Firstly, I would like to apply a bit of perspective in the debate because I think the contributions will show how people are affected by the nature of crime. Perhaps some of those points that are made seem valid and rational and make a lot of sense. However, it is difficult to reconcile those with the intent to try to provide some sort of response to the terrible situation in which we find ourselves in places like Mount Isa, Townsville and Cairns. At the moment those things are acute and greatly impact everything we do.

I am going to go through a small manifest of some of the complaints I have received in the last month. There were six cars stolen last night from Discovery caravan park, Mount Isa and five cars were stolen from another caravan park in July. They were driven erratically around town, disturbing and frightening residents. One of my friends chased one of the cars because it was his friend's car and he thought the kids might have been inside. He got in trouble for that. That was during school hours.

There have been violent attacks on tourists in the caravan parks, resulting in loss of revenue and reputation to caravan park owners. This is in the middle of tourist season, too, thanks very much. A stolen car barely missed pedestrians crossing at the shopping village. There were two incidents in the middle of the day with a very young driver.

A customer at the local takeaway unlocked her car to leave. Three young girls got in the car, one in the back, and threatened to kill her if she did not hand over the keys. A month or two ago an 80-year-old in the shopping village was attacked and stabbed when he tried to stop two or three girls because he was sick of seeing them running through the shopping centre and stealing. Laura Johnson Home, our nursing home, is a popular target because there are a lot of elderly residents who cannot defend themselves. One bloke kicked in the security screen. When he was apprehended he said, 'I just want to go back to Cleveland'—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Member for Traeger, with regard to some of those cases, are they before the courts at the moment? Can you give us a guarantee that they are not?

**Mr KATTER:** I cannot guarantee they are not.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask you to move on then.

**Mr KATTER:** I will try to be more discerning with some of the cases. One that I know is not before the courts is the case of two elderly residents who were belted to death about 12 or 15 years ago in Mount Isa. That has all been kept pretty quiet, but that was a home invasion by three youths. An elderly lady known to a friend of mine was attacked multiple times—she died in the last 12 months—but she was seen as a soft target because she could not defend herself in the house and often had cash lying around despite taking all of the security measures.

Businesses are being smashed up every night and there are increasing cases of what we call 'vigilante justice'. Often it is just one of our friends saying, 'Mate, I was just trying to stop the kids taking the car because no-one else is doing anything. I go and grab them and now the police are pointing the

finger at me saying, "Mate, you'll be in trouble." Now we are thinking whether we should be addressing vigilante laws because now it is called vigilantism when you are tackling someone to stop them taking your car. I have a plethora of stories of people getting into trouble for trying to stop or reacting to this.

There have been a number of tragedies in Mount Isa over the last couple of weeks. There has been an increase in the frequency and the severity of these reports. I used to get one or maybe two complaints a year about youth crime when I first got this job. Now almost every day I am getting something. I am pulled up in the street about it and family members and friends are constantly in my ear saying, 'Mate, I just can't live with this anymore.' Tripadvisor is now saying that people should not stop in Mount Isa because it is not safe. I have had people say, 'I'm leaving town, Rob. It's not safe to live here anymore.' This is not a normal setting where we say, 'What's the best thing for these kids?' That is what you say in a perfect world where you have a stabilised situation. This is a highly unstable, volatile situation that needs an acute arrest and at least some succour or some relief for the victims of the crime to say that there is a consequence. If we have true compassion for these kids, it is my belief that we want to send them a message to say, 'Mate, it's not right. You can't do that.' I think some of those kids are begging for some boundaries like that.

I admit that Cleveland is not working—we will agree on that—but we do need some consequences for the kids. I reacted well to it. I am no psychologist, but I have seen kids turned around. I live with these problems and am immersed in them daily and have seen these kids respond. When they are forced to go out to Urandangi they work well. I have seen them calm down and everything starts to work well. They did not go out there willingly; they were forced out there. You might stand there and say, 'You can't do that. That's against his rights.' I cared about the kid. That is why I made him go out there. I did not want to kiss and cuddle him in town and just hope he would get better. Some of them come from bad environments even if there are 10 carers looking after them. The reality of putting these programs in place to save them is that we need to hire someone to go knock on the door and say, 'Is little Johnny going to turn up today?', only to be told, 'No, bugger off.' The reality is it is very hard. There are some well-meaning officers in this space who do their best, but even they have come to me and said, 'Rob, we just can't get people to turn up for these programs.'

Joan Marshall, a First Australian lady of high regard in Mount Isa, pulled me over in the front of my office the other day and said, 'Rob, all these programs are good, but you've got to force the kids to do it. The ones that're supposed to be participating, we can't get them.' She works in that space. You could not get a higher qualified person and she is the one pulling me over telling me what I am already saying. You need to force those kids to get into these programs. That is how we are going to get them to participate. That is a nice notion.

I do in some way believe that the end game is to try and pull kids around at that early age and keep them out of detention, but that is not the situation that we are dealing with. It is a really volatile situation and pretty unpleasant when you are living with it in places like Mount Isa, Townsville and Cairns and we are begging for something a bit more acute that is going to deal with this problem the way it needs to be dealt with at the moment. Half the time for the government it is not even a problem or we are just trying to create some drama or talk it up. I would love not to talk about this. It hurts talking about this. I do not want to say that it is deterring people from living in Mount Isa—I am trying to attract people there—but we have to get some meaningful attention to this issue and try something different.

Coming back to relocation sentencing, as the member for Hill pointed out, we are after a couple of elements here. Firstly, it might not be the best alternative in the long run, academically or in theory, but the best practical alternative we have right now—because I would ask what else do we have—is to force them into a remote area. I have seen these kids in remote areas work well. They calm down with the right influences and, yes, that is when you can have your programs that, as we all agree, can work. However, how do you get them from A to B? I do not know, but you are not going to lure them out with a carrot and a torch at night. I do not know how that is going to work.

**Mr Berkman:** You don't put them in prison.

**Mr KATTER:** I take the interjection that you do not put them in prison. You need to do something with these kids at the moment unless you can give an alternative of how you are going to deal with them; otherwise, you are going to have to explain to my friends in Mount Isa who are constantly being barraged and hit with this. They need some stopgap and some circuit-breaker and I am afraid what you have there now—

**Mr Berkman** interjected.

**Mr KATTER:** The member for Maiwar is laughing. This is not really funny when you are dealing with these people.

**Mr Berkman** interjected.

**Mr KATTER:** No, you think it is funny. I am trying to provide an alternative.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): Through the chair.

**Mr KATTER:** We deal with these people firsthand. The member does not have the mortgage on compassion or the best way to deal with these people. We are trying to provide a real alternative to meet somewhere in the middle. The member for Maiwar might see this as an endorsement of what he is saying, and it is not, but the police are saying, 'We've got to try something different. We know we've got to get in front of this.' Again, I would still default back to him telling me how he is going to get those kids to participate in programs by knocking on the door with the officers from whatever department in Mount Isa, because I can tell him that that is failing. One of the mothers came to my office in Mount Isa and said, 'Don't send another one to my gate because they're doing nothing,' and that is what we have at the moment.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the next speaker, member for Traeger, you were pulled up by the video ref. There was some unparliamentary language. I would ask you to withdraw.

**Mr KATTER:** I withdraw.