




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (10.55 am): On behalf of KAP I think it is appropriate to give a little bit of background about where I come from. I have Irish and Lebanese Christian Maronite heritage. They were both chased out of their countries at the time. That is part of my ancestry. The Katter side of my family landed in North-West Queensland in the 1890s and has been there ever since. They came onto land that had been occupied by Aboriginal people for 65,000 years, and I would assume they had some indifference to colonisation and many of the atrocities that went along with that period. I am proud of the legacy of my family in Cloncurry. I am told they were the first employers of full-time Aboriginal people in their store in Cloncurry, which at the time was a socially unpopular thing to do. As I said, they were still classed as immigrants and they were quite indifferent to that. When I was first elected, a lady off a cattle station wrote me a letter and said, 'I just want to commend your grandfather, because when they first bought the cinema—they had the cinema in Cloncurry—they ripped up the segregation line.' It was the first thing they did.

Then my family entered politics. If you are in politics to solve problems, then in the Gulf Country of Western Queensland you will be buried in issues relating to First Australians because there are lot of problems and some people are crying out for help. That is a bit of the background about where we are coming from with this. That does not give me any more right to speak or any more moral claim for anything really; I am just trying to give some context. I was brought up—and I think KAP are characterised—as someone who just wants to fix things. As we see it, we are very focused on fixing problems the best way, and that is where I have a real problem with this.

I do not have any problem with acknowledging the past and telling stories. I think that is very virtuous. I do not have any problem with recognising that bad things were done. What I do find morally interesting is that much of the debate has focused on colonisation, we took the land, there was no treaty formed, sovereignty exists and those sorts of things. If I morally project that forward, if you believe in that then we must think about giving it back. If it was theirs and we took it, the right thing to do is give it back. I am not sure what we should do with that. That just seems to be the logical conclusion to what you are saying. I am not sure how that would play into land tenure around the country and the economy as we know it, but I am happy to hear the other side of the argument on that. That is what has been generated from a lot of the contributions I have heard here.

We are primarily interested in fixing things. I am very accustomed to modern day governments using words instead of actions and subordinating actions; for example, saying 'Blue cards are a problem to getting people employment, but we won't fix that now. We're going to work on treaty.' 'We're not going to fix grocery prices out here at the moment. We'll do treaty first.'

The first conversation I ever heard in parliament about treaty was a good, collegiate conversation. I was politely holding back, listening to what people said we need to do to help Aboriginal communities. I do not have all the answers; I know that. I was listening politely. One of the comments made by a member from Brisbane was, 'The first thing we have to do to help people is treaty.' I thought crikey, I thought the first thing we should be doing is giving them home ownership, or fixing the renal unit in

Doomadgee, or giving them extra renal chairs in Mount Isa, or fixing grocery prices, or helping with parenting and support for parents. This is the main thing. Then another person said, 'Well, you can do both.' Well, maybe you can, but that has not been my experience in government.

In the short 11 years I have had in parliament, I have seen a lot of talk not followed up with action. It makes us pretty angry when we are vilified. We will be called all sorts of names because we oppose this, but we are the ones in the trenches. I would say that at least 50 per cent of my time is spent dealing with the hardship and terrible outcomes we have at the moment. My electorate is a relatively small part of the population, but we are being told that this is going to be fixed with treaty. Hang on, I have all of these other things that need fixing, but in the meantime this is going to take \$300 million and all of this effort and resources over the next few years. I am not sure I am for that because I want these other things fixed. That is the basis for our position on this.

I will talk about some of the outcomes. In crime, Indigenous children account for 60 per cent of Queensland's youth detention population, despite making up five per cent of the population. That is something we need to fix. Also in crime, Indigenous adults are 10 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous adults, and a lot of that is for ridiculous reasons that could easily be fixed. The unemployment rate for Indigenous working age people is 3.8 times that of non-Indigenous people. That is something we definitely could have fixed with the blue card, but no-one has chosen to do anything about that for nine years. Despite us putting it on the table, looking for answers, looking for alternatives, nothing has been done there. In education, the year 12 attainment rate for Indigenous students in very remote areas sits at around 38 per cent, compared with 85 per cent in major cities. In health, I will not go into much detail but these figures will make you cry. Indigenous Queenslanders by and large have a lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Queenslanders, being 17 years less for males and almost 20 years less for females.

Those are some terrible things that need to be fixed. I cannot help but feel like we are setting people up to fail. I think there is a lot of expectation that this is the government delivering. There are a lot of people who genuinely have good, virtuous support of this, and I accept that, but I think there are expectations on the back end of that that this is going to solve all of these problems—that the \$300 million is going to pour into these areas that need help—but it is not.

I have no problem with telling truth stories and getting the stories out there. I love Queensland's history with all of its warts, bruises and ugly pieces. It is fascinating and we celebrate it in Mount Isa. The Kalkadoon people are proudly the only people who forced back the white men in Australia. They battled them for many years. It is a proud story that is told across all the kitchen tables in the north-west. They are great stories, and some of them are very tragic and very terrible. Yes, it is good to acknowledge our history, but I would certainly like to see \$300 million spent on grocery prices or renal units in the gulf in my electorate rather than doing that.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr KATTER: I will take that interjection that it is not being taken away. It is not, but I am pretty sure I will still be looking at these same issues in five years time. I will still be in parliament talking about blue cards and everything else. You can shake your head all you like but I am sure I will be back in the trenches in five years time getting these stories of hardship from people who are saying, 'Can you please help me, Rob? Can you please help me get a job? I don't understand it. I did nothing wrong but I can't get a blue card.' I will still hear these stories in five years time. I will come in here and put my fourth blue card bill in next parliament to try to get some action on that. I will hear a lot of words in parliament from well-meaning people but we will not get action. Someone at some point has got to say, 'Come on, guys. We don't want to hear about closing the gap anymore.' We heard a lot about closing the gap, but how did we go with that? We are no better off.

My response many times with this has been that I am indifferent to the outcome. I think it would be good if it helps people generate that spirit, as has been said, and people acknowledge the First Australians. I think it will help, but in 10 years time when they say, 'Hang on. We got the treaty but we're still living in the same conditions in Doomadgee and Mornington,' they are going to be angrier than they are now. They are expecting outcomes from this and that people are genuine, but I do not think enough people are genuine, which is evidenced by the fact of where we are now. There have been plenty of things to fix in the meantime and it has not been done. To say that this is the panacea that is going to fix everything is setting up people.

Ms Boyd: No-one is saying that.

Mr KATTER: I will take that interjection. It does not matter what you say; it is implied by your actions. Unfortunately for you, you have been part of the inaction in these areas—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Through the chair.

Mr KATTER: I take that interjection. I should be speaking through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am just trying to make the point that we are in this situation because of the inactions. We are in a situation where people are going to expect life will improve, their conditions will improve and things will get easier because the government is now listening, but I fear nothing will change from this. I am indifferent to the outcome. Whether it changes or not, I know I am still going to be back here in a couple of years talking about exactly the same things and trying to get outcomes for these people who are crying out for help. There is a lot of indifference to this because they know there are priorities on the ground now that are not being acted on or not listened to, and they will still be there in the future.