



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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## **MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

### **North Queensland, Water Infrastructure**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.38 pm): You cannot develop North Queensland without developing water storage. The attitude of this government and the Minister for Water towards the development of water in the north really shows how much they care about North Queensland. At every turn the minister and his department have thrown a spoke in the wheel of any development we have tried to do in the north-west and Etheridge shire.

We stagnate not only as a region but as a state and a nation if the starting point for everything is to keep everything pristine. I am convinced that is the attitude of the department. You have to prove that nothing will be unsettled downstream before you even get a project. Normally, going by our history, the government comes up with some leadership and says that it wants to facilitate development in the area: 'Let's build the infrastructure. Let's build Lake Julius, Lake Moondarra, the Burdekin Dam. We will build it and let's see what happens with private industry.' This has all happened the other way around. We have some poor sods out there who are trying their best, risking all of their capital and making it their life's work. They are calling out for the government to give them a bit of the water that is flowing out into the river every year—3.8 million megalitres—and it throws a spoke in every wheel so they cannot do it.

It is entirely acting the other way. When we put a cooperative together like HIPCo, they got \$180 million off the federal government. They won a tender, which eventually just ended up being who has the most money in a tender, not who has the best project. It is not the one which has the most regional development; it is just who has the most money to offer for water. The government have demonstrated that they are happy for everyone to just sit on these sleeper licences. Once they get through the process, every condition in the book is thrown at them, and some of them are absolutely farcical. You cannot look at this without drawing the conclusion that these people do not want anything to develop in this area.

I will just give one of the clangers that came out in the tender process. If you won the tender process in the Flinders and paid top dollar for the water, you had to go to every user in the Flinders downstream from you and say, 'Would you mind signing an indemnity letter?' If you affected them downstream anything up to one per cent, you had to get an indemnity letter off them. This is everyone you just competed against in the tender, so you have got Buckley's of doing that. No-one is going to agree to that. No-one who just competed with you about the same water is going to sign a letter to say, 'No problem. I'm happy for you to have the water.' That was just one of the many conditions put in there that was designed to fail. That is not my assessment; that was an assessment done for the department in December last year. The minister's own press release said—

... the Gulf Water Plan Performance Assessment Report found ... it did not support growth in irrigated agriculture and in the emerging minerals industry.

They probably should have told all these people, like Andrew Pauli, who is busting himself out at Richmond in the hot sun trying to keep old machinery alive and maintaining it himself. He is trying to make a go of things, trying to get a little bit of water out of this river. He put 20 grand of his own money up there and he just lost it in the tender process. Shouldn't the minister have told him that first if he said that nothing in there was to 'support growth in irrigated agriculture'? If the government does not want us to survive up there in the north-west, please tell us now.

We need access to some of these resources if we are going to progress in the future. That was done in the south-west and all through Central Queensland; they got to do that as they developed. That is how Emerald, St George, Mareeba and Burdekin have developed. That is how they got their toehold in and they built towns around that, and then other industries can come in on top of that. This does not happen by sitting passively here in Brisbane hoping someone else does it. The government has to be proactive; that is how it works. The government is not being proactive, but people up there are being proactive and the government is throwing everything possible in front of them to say that they do not want it to go ahead. I am absolutely convinced that is the case.

Let me get to some of the facts. The surface water available in the Flinders is two million megalitres, with 3.8 million megalitres of average annual flow. Even on the two million, that is four times the water in Sydney Harbour going down there every year. It used to be six million megalitres in the 1980s but CSIRO recalibrated that. The data is all patchy because a lot of it relies on stream flow records. If that stream flow record from the 2019 floods is accurate—where we saw an ocean of water going up through the gulf—I am a monkey's uncle. It is not being measured properly and there are myriad examples where there are flaws in the data. The government is so precisely relying on that and carefully holding on to that. There are about 107,000 megalitres being used at the moment out of this whole thing, which means about 200,000 megalitres is not being used.

*(Time expired)*