




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2024

CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (7.49 pm): I rise to speak on the Cheaper Power (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill 2024. As I understand it, this bill is set to cost taxpayers. We will get our own money back to the tune of \$2.27 billion.

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr Martin interjected.

Mr KATTER: It is still our money. It is still taxpayers' money. Royalties are still taxpayers' money, so taxpayers' money is coming back. I will take those interjections and they can keep listening because they will get some more argument here that they can yell out about. The money that has come in becomes the taxpayers' money. Wherever it comes from, it all goes into the same bucket and that is the taxpayers' money coming back to us.

Mr Martin interjected.

Mr KATTER: Let's just wait and listen. Good things come—slowly, slowly, catchee monkey.

Government members interjected.

Mr KATTER: Treasury announced a \$3 billion deficit coming up, so we have got \$2.27 billion. I always enjoy the government laughing at me on these sorts of things because the funny thing is that the further away from Brisbane I get the more I hear people laughing at the government for coming up with these things. It is all captured on video so that is fine. Laugh all you want here.

Mr Dick: We're laughing with you.

Mr KATTER: I will take that interjection. This is about making power bills cheaper. You cannot remove this debate, in my view, from the climate change debate. I am not a person who will stand up in here and debate climate change for 10 hours because it is a very involved and complicated science. I have said this before in the House and I will say it again now because it is highly relevant: we are told, 'It's a consensus. Just listen to everyone. They're all saying it.' Well, everyone was saying that we needed vegetation management laws because we have got so much rate of clearing, then when a discerning person asked, 'How much regrowth do we have in trees?' they were told, 'We don't know. We don't count that. We don't measure that.' How do we know we have a problem then? Everyone was saying, 'It's a general consensus. We need this and we've got to act on tree clearing.'

Then we heard that the Great Barrier Reef was dying. We were told that David Attenborough himself was saying that the Great Barrier Reef was dying, but the Australian Institute of Marine Science is putting out data that shows there have been two years of record growth. The general consensus again has failed me because it does not marry up with the science. Now we are being told, 'This is the big social imperative. Everything we have to do now is to pursue these renewables that will impact on the power price.' That is something we are going to argue because I know you are saying it is not, but we will get to that. This is all based on an ideological pursuit to address climate change. We can take that debate further and say that, until China and India embrace that, we are a drop in the ocean.

This empirical data is only from the last year, but it says that the cost of power bills in Queensland in 2023 was \$315 per quarter and today in 2024 a year later it is \$458 per quarter. I fall off my chair when I get my own household power bills now. I think it is \$8,000 a year in our house in Mount Isa with the pool pump, the pressure pump for the town water and whatever. We all know it is bad and that is why this bill is here. We get it, but what has driven the price so high? The price has gone way beyond CPI. The Ergon workers are not getting paid that much more and the depots have not been renewed—certainly not in my area anyway. What has been the big change in the electricity industry over the last 10 years that has driven these prices so high?

We are told that renewables are not responsible for it, but I draw on my other personal experience. I saw a big wind farm built in Queensland and it was sitting there for about two years before it was connected to the grid. I thought, 'My goodness me. That's \$200 million or maybe \$300 million spent on an electricity generator and they haven't gone broke but they haven't put any energy into the system.' If that is not subsidised in some way, there is no way that business survived through that period, but I am told, 'No, these things make money. It's cheap.' On top of that, you build these networks and you build the pumped hydro and everything to build capacity, but that all comes at a cost. We know that; that is indisputable. I draw back again that this becomes a thing about climate change and those targets and that is what we are dealing with here. If we give money back to people, that is great—we all appreciate it—but this makes the power bills cheaper in the short term; it does not make power cheaper.

The member for Hinchinbrook went into some detail about the grid and these alternative supplies on the grid. Then you get the gaming of the system and people take advantage of those dispatchable base load systems that still come in there. It is an enormous disruption to the grid, forcing prices up. That has been a huge factor in all of this.

This idea has been suggested in many meetings I have had with ministers and the government. If you want to go on this charge towards renewables and it is all about saving the environment, I stand to be corrected but I would have thought the starting point would have been the remote areas, the towns that are disconnected from the grid, where there would have been the most benefit and surely the most buy-in from people. Instead of putting rooftop solar to compete with all the coal-fired base load that we have along the east coast, why didn't we start out west? There would be hundreds of thousands of stock watering facilities in remote Queensland that are burning diesel and petrol to pump water right now. Wouldn't that have been a great place to start? The cow cockies themselves would have paid 90 per cent of that price. They love solar out there on their houses and that might have been the best place to start. Instead, we were subsidising at a much greater rate to get people to put it on their roofs in the suburbs. That did not make any sense to me.

I want to talk about nuclear. That is another one where everyone says, 'It's too expensive.' There is a good reason it is too expensive, if anybody bothered to listen to the other side of the argument. They had a regulatory body in the US when the last one was built there. The regulatory body had all the antinuclear people on it who said they did not want it and they put in all these regulations so that you would never build one to that standard, but nor do you need all the regulatory burdens that they put on that.

Here is the interesting argument with nuclear. Everyone says, 'You wouldn't build it because it's too expensive,' but that is not a reason to ban something. You do not ban something because it is too expensive. Let the market make that decision. Everyone is a free marketeer in here. Let the market decide that. That is not a reason to keep it banned. We can have a debate about its safety or the location—and we have a great location out in Mount Isa where it could be built—but let the market decide that. There are all sorts of experts, but I have spoken to engineers who have said, 'I can guarantee this because I did my PhD on this.' This is a very complicated topic and it is pretty hard to distil it down to a lineal response to say it is cheaper, but they said it is the most efficient provider of long-term energy but we are not even talking about it. We are jumping straight onto chasing rainbows around the place and putting wind farms and solar farms everywhere. Some of this is ridiculous.

Doug Scouller in Normanton was one of the very early guys in this. He had a very practical application of solar and it was actually a good thing for the government to support. Doug Scouller was at the end of the line at Karumba. That follows the Kidston line, so it basically used base load coming as far from Gladstone pumping through the line up to Normanton. It is very unreliable because it is at the end of the line, so that is an unreliable supply. He saw an advantage there because it is expensive to pump electricity or there are transmission losses. He built a significant solar farm out there—I am going to say it is a five-megawatt system—and he is now being told he is not going to get that price anymore. I think he is being offered close to zero to sell back into the grid in the future. That is one that

did make sense. The seller out there is offering a product where you can provide a reliable generator supply at the end of it, but it is so incompetent the way this has been managed to provide cheaper prices. Poor old Doug Scouler was pushing it out there and was offering something to bring prices down. It is unreasonable.