




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

---

Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2024

**RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;  
MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.18 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate. I have made a quick assessment of the combined 557 pages of the cognate bills. In terms of mining and agriculture—not so much health and safety—when I see that amount of pages I often wonder what is hidden in there. We do our best to analyse, scrutinise and find everything that is in there. One thing that was not in those pages but will be dealt with by an amendment is probably one of the most welcome things we have seen from Labor in its nine years in power. That relates to the Great Artesian Basin. It is perhaps the first positive thing I would say about a Labor government in terms of agriculture.

It was a peculiar set of circumstances. I will even put my own hand up and admit that I was slow to the party on what was going on there. I think my complacency was associated with disbelief that we would even contemplate letting a global commodity trader have access to what they say is one of the greatest—if not the greatest—natural, pristine underground water supplies on the planet. We were going to let a global commodity trader do that based on their advice, with their desktop study, that it would be fine to do. The basis of their argument was that it is just like soda water. We all knew that BOC has had a shortage of CO<sub>2</sub>, so they would have gladly taken it off them, if it was so good, for carbonated drinks. They could have sold that into the soft drink industry. However, that was not the case at all. There was risk associated with it.

We have seen in this House the reef regulations were predicated on the precautionary principle where it was well acknowledged that there was no evidence at all of sediment or nitrogen of any significance getting onto the reef and having any impact—

**Mr Dametto:** On the outer reefs.

**Mr KATTER:**—but we always default to that precautionary principle—on the outer reefs, as corrected by the member for Hinchinbrook. It was all based on the precautionary principle. With the GAB, the Great Artesian Basin, both sides of the House and federally were saying to wave it through and, in fact, put taxpayers' money towards it. Then it came to the state and it was looking like it was all going to be waved through. A lot of us were kicking and screaming, and it was not just one question in the House or a timid raising of awareness of the issue. A lot of us started jerking into gear and we joined the party as well. We in the KAP felt we played a strong role, but that is not to diminish the excellent effort from AgForce, Queensland Farmers' Federation and a number of private individuals who all put their shoulder to the wheel. We stopped that from happening and thank goodness for that. Let's not forget that the GAB does not stop at the Queensland borders, so there is still action required federally to stop that. I give credit where credit is due; we are very grateful to the government for putting those amendments into the bill.

Buried in the explanatory notes it states 'recognises that Queensland's resource and agricultural sectors are vital to the state's economy and the success of its regions'. I could not agree more with those words, but so often words cannot be reconciled with the actions of the government in this House. Why are we taxing coal royalties in the state from 15 to 40 per cent when we heard in the House again tonight that the coal industry is on its way out? Why are we saying that when we have the largest solar player in the world, India, now saying they will not invest another cent into Queensland because of the way they have been treated in Queensland in the coal business? How do we reconcile that with that statement in the explanatory notes? There are projects in the long term leaving town or quietly glazing over Queensland when it comes to investment because of some of these moves.

Agriculture is so vital. Crikey! Let's take a stroll down memory lane regarding the treatment of agriculture in this House. From this government we have had the veg management laws, the reef regulations, the banning of gillnets and the shutdown of the Longreach pastoral college. The timber industry is hanging on by a thread. Cane farmers, which I think I already mentioned, were smashed by reef regulations and then there are all the difficulties we have getting water out of our systems for irrigated agriculture. It seems entirely hypocritical, to say the least, to put words like that into the bill.

The coal seam gas, the land access, the coexistence—there is so much hyperbole around that. If honourable members go and talk to people on the ground, they will see that those problems that were there before have not been resolved. I do not care what people say, they have not been resolved; there are still unresolved tensions. One example is that there can be a flood irrigation block next door to the coal seam gas wells. When the coal seam gas wells go down, bang! There is then subsidence on the neighbouring property whose owner has no recourse. The guy with the wells on his property can get his money off the gas company; he has done his deal. However, the landholder next door cannot. We are finding all these inadvertent effects and impacts on landholders and the protections are not there. These things were just steamrolled in. It was one of the biggest mining and resource developments in a century for Australia—not just Queensland—and it was rolled out within years. Many corners were cut, many deals were made and favours were given to an industry that has created enormous disruption in agriculture, and this falls well short of resolving those issues.

We still look forward—and I say that sarcastically. I think we have enormous challenges moving forward with strategic agricultural land and the tension between that and the renewable energy rollout. We are only scratching the surface in terms of the number of solar panels and wind farms to roll out. A lot of them are already in the footprint of some cane assignment areas. Mills are struggling for viability. I am sure there are a lot of greenies out there who will be chomping at the bit to see more renewable energy going into the cane production areas so they can shut down more sugarmills.

In terms of the Resources Safety and Health Legislation Amendment Bill, in my experience most people on both sides of the House have been pretty good about safety and trying to improve things in the mining industry. One area where I will say the government has not been good and has not acted is in that space of contract labour force and FIFO. It has not been without effort. I am not going to say there has been no effort. I can see firsthand in Mount Isa—and I spoke about this in the House this morning. The only legislation that has been introduced regarding FIFO states that it cannot be 100 per cent FIFO. It can be 99.9 per cent FIFO but not 100 per cent. That is falling well short. Contract workforce and FIFO are directly correlated with some safety risks and I will not be convinced otherwise. If there is a permanent workforce—and I have spoken to a number of mine managers about this—there can be problems. However, I will tell honourable members any day of the week that it will result in a better safety record. It stands to reason that if someone is familiar with the ore body, the dirt, what is competent ground and what is not, where to go and where not to, where the risks are and where the risks are on the plant operating—it is hard to quantify that on a spreadsheet and a risk matrix. Fundamentally, we know that, but there is a huge trend the other way—contract workforce and FIFO—and there has been nothing significant done here to stem any of that. I have a front row seat in Mount Isa.

Like I said, the population of Mount Isa has gone down, but tonight it has been reported that 120 people are looking for a house in Mount Isa, so what does that tell us? There are plenty of people there, but they do not live in Mount Isa. That cannot be healthy for any community or any society and there is nothing to address that in this legislation. Until the government addresses these things, they will constantly be risking people's lives on mine sites. It is a challenge; I grant them that. It is very hard to find people to man these mines now. It has been left unattended by government for so long that the free market has prevailed in the labour market. Mines have been allowed to do what they want for 20 years and so it is now hard to turn that ship around, but we must make a start. There is nothing in here that addresses that, which is a root cause of that safety problem.

We watch these things with caution. There could be other things in here that we are not sure of. I do commend the government for taking that position on the Great Artesian Basin.