



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Traeger Electorate, Stock Route Expansion; Eventide Aged Care Facility**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.55 pm): I wish to bring to the attention of the House what has become apparent to me as an insidious land grab that is occurring out in the western areas of Queensland, certainly in the electorate of Traeger. I have had several station holders come to my office in recent times complaining—outraged—over a proposed stock route expansion. They tell me that the lands department has said, 'We need to expand the stock route in your area,' about which they were bemused. Anyone who has been out there for a long time knows that for 30 to 50 years no-one has walked cattle along those stock routes or used them. Why all of a sudden are we talking about expanding the stock routes? This is a problem that has vexed me for probably 12 months now. Then on 22 March I heard Tanya Plibersek saying, 'Labor's landmark Saving Australia's Bushland Program will bring 30 per cent of Australian land under protection.' I will come back to that, but protection from what?

We are currently at 22 per cent. Somehow they are going to go from 22 per cent of land under protection to 30 per cent. What a magnificent way to achieve that. They do not have to pay any compensation. I am going to take a case in point here. One of the several people who have come to me is Betty Witherspoon, a battler who has been out on Maroola Station for 37 years. They have come to her and said, 'No. That little strip of stock route that has never been used in the 37 years you have been there—we need to expand it to 800 metres.' Then she gets a letter from her bank saying, 'We might have a problem here because, if they are going to take that much land off you and you are only running a thousand head here, we might have to reassess your loans.' She is not entitled to compensation. What she has to do is fence off that land and put grids in according to the specifications they have given her. She is also going to have to put in watering points there because there is no existing watering point on that section of her station.

They are saying, 'We will make it harder for you. We will take some land off you and we won't compensate you for that.' For what? Is there suddenly a big influx of cattle workers willing to go out on horseback and put cattle back on stock routes? That dried up about 50 years ago. Maybe there is going to be an influx of labourers into this state who will participate in this. I do not think so. Then you have to ask: why are they expanding stock routes all over the Traeger electorate? The stock routes are not being used more. There must be a reason someone has been given a direction in the department—this has been going on for years now—that we have to expand the stock routes. It is interesting, isn't it, that at the same time Plibersek is saying, 'We need to get 30 per cent of this land under protection.'

Back on Betty Witherspoon's place, she is the only person who has been spending money out in that district on prickly acacia treatment. She has a beautiful clear block because she spent the money there. She put the bore down back in the nineties at the expense of her entire station to improve the place. She has been toiling out there, maintaining that place. Once the land goes under 'protection',

you can guarantee there will be no prickly acacia treatment and there will be no shooting of feral cats and pigs out there because it will not be her problem anymore; it will be the state's problem or it might be lumped on to the council that does not want it.

This is just an insidious land grab. It makes no sense. There will be a greater burden on the taxpayer to look after more land. We are already not looking after national parks and all of these reserves adequately. You are going to lump them with more land because the likes of Tanya Plibersek want to wave this stuff around UNESCO and say, 'Look at what a good job we're doing.' Who wins out of this so-called protection where you are grabbing this land? Land husbandry is currently being done for free. There are people looking after it for you who are containing pests and doing prickly acacia treatment. You want to take it back off them so they can make taxpayers do it, presumably for a political deal. It is not right!

In my remaining time I would also like to talk about the Eventide home in Charters Towers. There are some 48 units sitting there at the moment that are under-utilised. They have been sitting there for years. People in Charters Towers drive past and say, 'What the hell are you doing with these units?' We have an accommodation shortage in Charters Towers, especially for the elderly and aged, and we are looking at these empty units. I was not consulted on where the new hospital will be. They are going to bulldoze all of those units to jam the proposed new hospital onto that site when there is a perfectly good site on the other end that is cleared, levelled and connected to services. It is ready to go. It does not make any sense. It will be an absolute tragedy.

We have a private investor who has come onboard and said, 'I'll develop that and at cost we'll let that back out to residents in Charters Towers.' That is a beautiful, cost-saving solution for housing, for the government and Charters Towers. All we need is a design change in the way that the Charters Towers Hospital would be built on the other side of the Eventide site. We could all have a win out of that. It would be a good use of government resources, a big saving to taxpayers and a great project to deliver back to the people of Charters Towers.