




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (5.04 pm): I would first like to thank the many volunteers and workers who helped me personally across 23 booths in Traeger and 428,000 square kilometres. It is a massive effort and it is pretty hard to put into words my thanks for all those people who stand out in the hot sun for you. I extend that to all the KAP booth workers right across seats where we ran candidates. We very much value what they do. I would even mention those other booth workers for the other parties. Many of those people believe in something and it is wonderful that we live in a democracy where they have the freedom to do so.

I have made the observation—and I think this is the best time to bring it up—that two weeks of pre-poll voting is absolute garbage. It is hard enough to get volunteers out there and a lot of them are elderly now. Making them stand in the hot sun for two weeks so it makes it more convenient for the Electoral Commission to do their job is not on. I do not think anyone is a winner there. If people within our electorates cannot get down to a polling booth to vote within one week, we have a real problem; there is something wrong. They do not deserve to have a vote. One week is more than what people need. That really needs to be changed. I would be pretty surprised if any volunteer within all of the party groups would disagree with us there.

I want to thank my staff personally. The KAP staff always put in 100 per cent effort. We owe a really big debt of thanks to Benny Fusco and his team. There are so many people who work for nothing.

With regard to my fellow KAP MPs here, what can I say? We are a small team with big areas with a lot of problems, and I think we do a competent job in representing our areas. I think they have done a terrific job getting themselves re-elected time and time again.

I have to mention a really negative part of the campaign. In the last few days there was signage that went up. There was some funny stuff—memes that had me hugging in a loving embrace the now opposition leader on the *Titanic*. That is funny; I get it. I can wear that, but saying I did a deal with Labor and seeing that and having to stand in front of it on election day was poor. It was really poor form. We can throw insults and innuendo, but saying that we had done a deal with Labor is a known lie. To propagate that was damaging. Well done! It might have even cost us a seat in one place, but it really takes away from the LNP's win, I believe.

It was an undignified way to win in those areas. It is a shame, because the Premier had done a sterling job of being an opposition leader before the election, worked very hard and deserved much of that win that was there from the hard work that was done. I think that was something that really took away from that win and something that upset me deeply. I wonder where the bottom is on this, because now can we all just tell lies every election without thought of any consequence? Someone said to me on polling day, 'Labor did it to us one election.' I said, 'That has nothing to do with me.'

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Furner): Member for Traeger, I ask you to withdraw the unparliamentary language, thank you.

Mr KATTER: I am not sure what that is. I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. That has to be addressed—there should be some consequence for any political party that tells a lie. You can throw mud if you want, but do not tell a lie.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Traeger, you are repeating the unparliamentary language. I once again ask you to withdraw.

Mr KATTER: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am not sure how else to say that.

A government member: An untruth.

Mr KATTER: Untruth, thank you. I will go through the issues raised in the election that we saw as significant. Crime was an outstanding issue—and everywhere in elections beforehand—and we set out not to address every element of it but the areas where we thought it really needed some work: bush sentencing; relocation sentencing; Adult Crime, Adult Time; mandatory minimum sentencing; and the right to smack, which a lot of people reeled at and said, 'That is terrible.' Interestingly, that is probably the main issue I hear from the Indigenous communities in my electorate. They say, 'We have lost a lot of discipline and control of our kids,' so we introduced that as something to campaign on as well during the election.

A big issue that was raised was the itinerant population and the impact that has had in the Traeger electorate. It has had a very big social impact. There has been no control around that and no real effort made to this point to address that.

Airline prices are a perennial problem with some difficult solutions. FIFO and workplace composition is an issue. Nothing has been done in that space and it continues to be a cancer of the bush.

Housing and insurance were raised as issues. We have put forward solutions on the basis of first home buyer grant amendments to include existing homes and for the Australia Post banking service to fill the gaps where there is postcode discrimination so that the lack of private investment in rural and remote areas can at least be challenged.

Issues were raised about energy prices, climate tax and the pursuit of net zero and the impact it is having. We thought we had some pretty clear ground on that issue, as opposed to the majors. I think a lot of people had a strong appetite to see the pursuit of net zero thrown in the bin.

Roads and crossings in the Traeger electorate are really big issues because communities like Burketown and Doomadgee have been cut off for three or four months for a couple of years in a row. We need to get the Hann Highway finished. We need the upgrades to the Hann Highway at the Einasleigh River and the Bundock Creek crossings; at White Cliffs. We need improvements to Burketown and Doomadgee access with the Barkly River crossing, Running Creek and the Gregory River Bridge. We need an upgrade of the Gilbert River Bridge and upgrades to the Flinders Highway. Roads are a big issue, as you can imagine, because in that area most goods and freight travel by road.

Water came up a lot as an issue. Water is the future for us out there. We have a very dry monsoonal climate. If you do not have waterholes late in the year, the only water you get is what you store. We have not been permitted by the government for many years now to build any water storage. We continue to have big flood events, but we are not allowed to capture that water. There is a deep sense of frustration that takes away from the faith we can have in future prosperity when we are not allowed to take advantage of those natural assets.

Health is always, again, a perennial problem with the deficits there. New hospitals, renal units for Normanton, Cloncurry and Charters Towers, and upgrades to Mount Isa always come up. Renal units will continue to be a huge problem in my electorate. The patient travel subsidy and the ambulance station at Richmond are issues that came up.

As inspiration for this speech, I recently read a book on Alfred Traeger, who the seat of Traeger is named after. He, along with Reverend John Flynn—amongst doing other things—founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service. In fact, his legacy is much bigger than that. He went out in a busted old glorified horse cart, powered by a combustion engine, up to the gulf, down through Birdsville and everywhere putting up radios that he had engineered and pioneered in that era. He was personally known to my family at the time when they were using Cloncurry as their base. For the first time, Mornington Island station properties were connected to the rest of the world and those barriers of connectivity were beaten down.

More to the point, I drew out of this that he had a vision and he saw something that needed to be done for his country much more than himself. He had a sense of nationalism and a sense of duty. He served his whole life with incredible ingenuity and competency but did not use that to make himself or his friends rich. He did it as a vocation to make life better for others. Much of my electorate feels the

same. We work at Mount Isa and all the other towns out there in Traeger. You put up with a lot, but you know you are doing something for the country. That is embedded in why people stay out there and put up with the adversity.

When I talk about adversity, let me build you a picture. Unlike in Brisbane where if you are buying a house you think, 'I will get capital growth on the house or the business premise. It is a good investment. Let's invest,' you might say the opposite out in my electorate, where the population projection is minus 0.9 per cent. It is not really a good prospect when you look forward. Health outcomes are challenging, with 27 per cent to 45 per cent higher potentially avoidable deaths. Specialist health services are a couple of hours driving distance from a hospital. We are a 20-hour drive from Brisbane and a 10-hour drive from Townsville, so then you are left with the connectivity issues of airline travel. The last time we checked it cost \$800 one way to Brisbane from Mount Isa. On the same day it cost \$200 to Melbourne which is a similar distance. We have full planes all the time, I can assure you. Interestingly, Qantas started to provide connectivity in my electorate of Traeger but now it an impediment to connectivity. Big corporates and free markets have allowed this activity that takes advantage of us in remote areas.

Let me go on: there is hidden postcode discrimination if you go to get a bank loan. Even if you disregard the fact that it will be hard to gain capital growth on your house, if you go to the bank for a loan—they will not say this to you and they do not broadcast it on the streets, but if you are in a remote area they will apply 40 per cent to 50 per cent LVR to you, not 80 per cent or 90 per cent like you will get in Brisbane. If you try getting a loan out in these remote areas, they will say, 'We will lend to you, for sure, but the terms are non-commercial,' so it is very hard to get a loan from a bank. That is why we always say you need a government bank to go into those places to fill the gap.

If we forget that for a second and go to grocery prices, if you are a family on Mornington Island, you do not pay \$300 a week for your groceries; you pay \$600 a week for your groceries. If you are on Mornington, that same person supplying for his family is in the lowest income bracket for Queensland now, based on the 2021 census data. Despite being on the lowest income on Mornington Island, if you are living there, even if you get a job to break out of the poverty system, you will have trouble because you still have the blue card system working against you. Even if you have a job and you have a blue card, you cannot buy a house on Mornington Island, so you can never really progress yourself anyway. That is the adversity that you experience if you live in Traeger. In Traeger, if you have home insurance, you can look forward to paying \$4,000 a year, not \$1,000 a year like you pay in Brisbane. It is much worse in Townsville and the coastal areas in North Queensland. You will be paying \$2 a litre for fuel, not \$1.50 like you do here.

It is very frustrating for us because we have to look at all of the natural assets that we sit on. We can see the benefit of the minerals, water and land. We cannot clear the trees, we cannot take the water and we cannot take the minerals like we used to be able to without enormous handbrakes being put on by this parliament in Brisbane, so we are very frustrated. I will be expressing that frustration for my entire time down here because it is just a reflection of what you will get when you go to these areas.

I think the antidote for all this is leadership. After the federal election I heard an interview on the radio where an MP was saying that we needed to use ChatGPT to see where we went wrong in the election. I reflected on that and I thought, 'That has to be the problem, hasn't it?' You are trying to follow polling to see what people are thinking and then trying to jump in front of it—I think it has been called 'triangulation' in politics—instead of taking a value-based approach to this and say, 'I don't really care what the public think. I'm going to do this.' I think there is real yearning in the public for leadership of that nature. We all say it in the backrooms. I have said it myself: 'I would love to do that but it is just not going to fly in the electorate. People aren't going to go for it.' Collectively I reach out to people to think: can we just lean away from that a little bit going forward? Unless we do, we will not address some of those burning issues that are out there that need addressing.

This is my fifth term in this place, and I am compelled to look more discerningly at the things I want to change. Surely we are not all here just to get better parks and sports venues for our electorates. Surely, collectively there are some big things we want to address. That leads us to asking: are there some problems out there? Do we see some fundamental problems out there in Queensland? In the way that we see the world in our party there certainly are. I think we are lacking that nation-building activity, that long-term approach to prosperity and working to our traditional strengths. It is not just about better roads, transmission lines, rail, ports and dams. Governments have geared off those things for many years. Turning away from that, we have now diminished in so many ways.

There are a few factors that I think really tell the story. We had 1,970 dairy farmers in 1990; we are left with 230 now as a result of free market policy saying deregulation was a great provider. Manufacturing across all of Australia in 1975 accounted for 25 per cent of GDP; in 2024 it is six per cent. In terms of our gas reserve policy, we were competitive in gas and we had a huge advantage. That has been sold and it is now one of the big barriers we have in trying to do business in this place.

So much of this comes back to worshipping the free market and using it as a hammer and seeing the whole world as a nail—that we will fix everything with this free market hammer. It really needs a reset.

Recently in Townsville I listened intently to Dr John Coyne from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. I think he said it quite well when he said you set your strategic objectives. You say, 'We want to produce these things in the state,' or, 'It is important for Queensland to have a copper industry'—copper-processing facilities in the case of Traeger—or, 'It is important for us to have dairy farming.' I think nationally we have all of these objectives that we need to tie into. I do not think we can be blind to that as individuals in this place. All of that has fallen in front of our eyes. Dr John Coyne said—

Unfortunately, we've been on the globalisation train ... We thought that globalisation was here to stay. The economic reality hasn't changed ... Our approach in Australia to that economic reality, user pays, just in time supply chains, centralisation of production, let the market forces roll, don't work like they once did, and that's because the market is distorted.

Either we will be left swinging in the breeze or we can get in front of some of these objectives and play an active role in activating some of them. I will be using my time here to oppose so many of those policies that constrain where we can be as a state and tapping into our strengths.

There are some big infrastructure items such as Hells Gates Dam. When I talk about these big infrastructure items, I am sure the Treasury boffins—all the advisers who gave the previous government advice and who are now giving this government advice—will not like any of these things. They will see them on a spreadsheet and say, 'We don't understand that.' They do not have vision. They do not see where we can be as a state. They do not see our potential. They are just going to give an accountant's view on a spreadsheet. Here is some of the infrastructure that we think will take this state forward.

Hells Gates Dam would unlock the potential of North Queensland by taking water from the high flooded areas—the electorates of the member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Hill flooded at the beginning of this year. A lot of that water could be diverted across the Great Dividing Range and the black soil plains. There are literally millions of acres of arable land that just needs some water. We could do that in Australia but it continues to be ignored.

We could also build an inland highway from Cairns to Mareeba. Mulgrave Mill is under threat because they are going to run out of cane production land because Cairns is expanding onto the cane fields because they cannot expand anywhere else. They could expand up to Mareeba. It would take 20 minutes to go through two kilometres of tunnel. They have just built 12 kilometres of tunnel under the river here. We could build a tunnel two kilometres through that range and we could expand all we like. That would also unlock the North East Minerals Province, which no-one has ever really heard of because it is economically stranded at the moment. The tunnel would allow them to get product down to the Cairns port, which would pay for the tunnel. That is nation-building infrastructure but everyone says, 'Don't even talk about it. It's not going to happen.' Why is it not going to happen? It is because none of us are willing to talk about it, have that vision or take that long-term approach collectively.

Then there is CopperString, which would unlock \$740 billion worth of mineral wealth, but we are still sitting here saying, 'Gee whiz, we can't get it past Hughenden. I don't know if that will add up.' The HIPCo dam on the Flinders River at Hughenden is a no-brainer. Currently close to four billion megalitres a year on average is being let run out of the mouth of the Flinders. Right now we are taking two or three per cent. According to the greenies in this country, we are allowed to take 20 per cent or 30 per cent, yet we are still squabbling over taking two per cent or three per cent from the Flinders and we cannot build a dam. We need to make water licences more accessible. That would cost us nothing for the Flinders River, the Etheridge River and the Gilbert River.

We need to build Ootann Road to allow triple road trains out of the cape to get cattle out in greater volumes. We should be turning our utilities—our dams, our roads and our rail lines—into economic enablers. Years ago the Treasury boffins, the economists, said about this privatisation model, 'Let's make these things all make money and act privately,' and it has been disastrous. It is nuts what is happening in the Traeger electorate with these utilities trying to act like they are commercial when they should be economic enablers unlocking these things.

In my remaining time, I want to tell members what people were not interested in during this election. People in regional Queensland, remote Queensland and North Queensland were not interested in talking about the Olympics. They did not want to hear about the Olympics. They did not want to hear about Cross River Rail and how it will get people to work here in Brisbane 10 minutes earlier. They did not want to hear about climate change. They were not interested in how we were going to try to save the planet. They did not want to hear about the Path to Treaty and that our efforts to advance First Nations people in any other way were so bad. They did not want to hear about more barriers to tree clearing, reef regulations and things like that.

In conclusion, we will suck it up. Like Alfred Traeger, we will do our job out there. Even if the government wants to bring in daylight savings and those sorts of things, we will still suck it up out there. However, I hope that in this place we think more about the long-term future and unlock this wealth.