




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.05 pm): In my speech on the budget for 2025, I would first like to say that I am very grateful for the things that have come to my electorate. I will just capture a cross-section of those, and this is obviously not comprehensive.

The Mount Isa Central State School has funding for an upgrade of \$442,000. That is one of the original buildings in Mount Isa. It is a very old school that celebrated its 100th year recently so that funding is welcomed. The Cloncurry Hospital disappointingly missed out. This has been a growing need as Cloncurry develops. It is not an entirely new hospital that is needed; it is just a wing that is required for a growing economy and growing town. They are doing great things there, but that is the one big thing they have been chasing and are still being denied so that is disappointing. There is some nurse housing at Dajarra that falls within the Cloncurry shire which will be very helpful for that community.

Julia Creek is chasing a substation and was not really expecting to see that in this budget because it links with CopperString, but that is something that will be required in the future. Hughenden Mayor Kate Peddle got funding of \$650,000 for upgrades to the showground, which is very welcome. Previous to that, there had been federal money allocated for finishing off the Hann Highway and the Kennedy Developmental Road. They are still chasing money for sewerage because, like many of those remote councils, there has been an underspend on those things for years. It has been shoved under the carpet and they have to make up for that.

Richmond is chasing a new ambulance centre, which is still not in this budget. In Charters Towers we got funding for a CT scanner across the line in previous budgets, but there is still no hospital. They have a 140-year-old hospital and that is their main item that is still not there. In the Georgetown and Croydon area, there is the Gilbert River Bridge and Savannahlander into Georgetown and Forsayth. They are looking for detailed business case funding for the Gilbert River Bridge.

Normanton and Karumba have funding for upgrades to their sports centre, which is good. There are about 41 new hospital staff across the North West Hospital and Health Service, and we are hoping that will include capacity for renal nurses in Normanton, which is a big priority for the gulf. Burketown got some money for the wharf recreation precinct. That is very good but they still lack funding for the Running Creek and Barkly River crossing which helps both them and Doomadgee. They have been cut off for three to four months during two of the last five years. Mornington Island has a number of issues and there is nothing substantial in the budget. Doomadgee also got \$2.2 million for a bike track, which is excellent.

The big thing for Traeger is the \$2.4 billion in the budget for CopperString. I should mention the previous government for its commitment to CopperString, and I really commend the LNP government now for following through on those commitments and actually putting some dollars against that, which is terrific. I might mention that there is a hell of a long way to go with CopperString. Just putting numbers on a page does not get poles out of the ground. Poles out of the ground need some real delivery and push, which we are still waiting on.

I think it is important for all of us to appreciate that budgets are not about what we can take out of them but what we can put back in to them. How can we contribute collectively to things that build the growth of this state so there will be something to draw on in the future? Why can we not take a bit more of a long-term approach to these? We should be talking about some of the budget builders that we are not seeing here.

How about the inland highway—Cairns to Mareeba? I know the member for Hill mentioned it. It seems crazy that you are talking about the Barron River bridge leading to the Kuranda Range when you still need a big number to get a half-baked solution on the Kuranda Range. They have just built a 12-kilometre tunnel here in Brisbane and have built one up through Mareeba—

Mr Kempton interjected.

Mr KATTER: I am surprised the member for Cook is shaking his head at it. That is exactly the attitude that is going to deny delivery. It is exactly what I am trying to zero in on here. We need some vision in this place that leads us to long-term solutions, not these sugar hits and fast-track solutions working to the election cycle so that we can all claim, 'We have had a win!' when there are some big things we need to go after and have some vision on. Certainly if we do not provide that vision, people and the councils in those areas are not going to follow.

Hells Gates Dam is another one. I am sure there are plenty of other people who want to shake their heads about Hells Gates Dam. There is plenty to shake your head about because it requires vision. It will be tough, but what a wonderful wealth-creating asset that would be. It is similar to Burdekin Dam. I am sure the business case put against that will be exactly the same as what was faced when putting the case up for Fairbairn Dam and Burdekin Dam.

HIPCo, the Hughenden dam, takes three per cent of the Flinders River flow which equals one per cent of what flows into the gulf—three per cent of one per cent—and we are still struggling. There is \$180 million in the federal budget for that, but we are still struggling for any approvals on that.

Ootann Road is an interesting one. Not many people know about Ootann Road. What a great enabler: for about 90 kilometres of bitumen, you could get triple road trains out of Cape York which would really help a lot of graziers in the gulf area. If you can get triple road trains out of the gulf you can really open up that country. It really changes the nature of the cattle industry in the north. That is a real enabler. That grows wealth for this state.

Finishing off the Hann Highway will save up to 13 hours of driving all the produce from Atherton Tablelands in the Far North into the Melbourne and Sydney markets. We will be able to get in there 13 hours earlier once we finish that sealing.

They are budget makers, they are budget builders and they are things that we just do not talk about here. They get denied. We need bold vision; that is what is required in this House. I will also throw in here the budget takers—the big things that are taking money from the budget yet it is argued do quite the opposite—the Olympics and the sports stadiums. They are nice to have, but they are the big draw on your budget. In 20 years, they will be a liability, not something that creates wealth.

It is fantastic that people will get to work 10 minutes earlier with Cross River Rail, but that is a luxury we can ill afford at the moment, given the stage we are at. With regard to more traffic tunnels in Brisbane, we are the most traffic tunnelled city in Australia. We need projects that lessen the waiting and the spreadsheet prejudice from Treasury. It is all on this spreadsheet without vision. It also needs to overcome this disruptive political bias, I think, which was the big driver with Cross River Rail. We need to get past those things or we will be stuck in neutral and always thinking about how much we save out of the budget, instead of how much we can create for the following budgets.

I think there needs to be strategic direction of our major utilities. You cannot consider the budget without thinking, 'What are our utilities doing?' They are not playing the role with the spirit in which they were built. Dams and powerlines and such were built to enable industry. Now they are treated as cash cows, as income earners for the state. That just does not work. That model does not work in rural and remote areas. Again, it is one of these Treasury models. The academics and the kids come out of university saying, 'This is it. We are economic rationalists. We are a free market,' and it is all about this corporatisation model. 'We will apply the accrual accounting standard to our energy assets.' The regulated asset pricing model throws up all these figures from the balance sheet onto our bills, and it does not make sense. It is non-commercial. All the water and energy customers are out there in the market saying, 'Who the hell is running this? Why the hell do you own these assets?'

A great example of this is Lake Julius. I encourage people to listen to this; it is a really important story. Little Eva Mine is the next big copper mine to be built in Queensland. They are trying to get it up and running. I thought, 'Good news, it is 20 kilometres from Lake Julius.' Lake Julius was built with the expansion of the North West Minerals Province in mind—visionary from earlier governments saying, 'Let's build water storage.' So, lucky us—Little Eva has been built 20 to 30 kilometres from Lake Julius.

It is 80 per cent full most of the time. Not many people draw from it because it is expensive water from Sunwater. They are building a bore field on Little Eva. 'Wait! What's that? They are building a bore field on Little Eva? Why?' There is a pipeline from Lake Julius which runs across their lease. Why are they not drawing from Lake Julius? It is too expensive, and even if it were not too expensive, they are not giving us enough water allocation out of Lake Julius. But, hang on, hardly anyone is drawing water out of it. No! After countless meetings, they have said, 'We are following the strategic guidelines we have been given by Treasury to operate this thing and we are not going to give them any water.' Well done! Congratulations, utilities! Who has won out of that? No-one. No-one wins out of that. It is not a big profit maker for the government or the taxpayers. All it is doing is attracting pelicans, birdlife and fish out there.

Some 38 per cent of the rail line use has come off in 12 years. There will probably be more in the near future, too, because the utilities have set the standards; they have to make a profit. They literally cannot lower the price to allow more traffic because those are the standards they have set. It is nuts, it is crazy and you need to address this if you want to improve future budgets.

With regard to sovereign capability, you cannot exist in the political world at the moment without having some consciousness of what is going on around us. We have some responsibilities to the nation in the way we manage our resources and feeding into that.

In order to have fuel security, we need an ethanol mandate to be driven by government. Until we do that, it will not be taken seriously, and it is the only real solution you have for fuel security here in Queensland. It is very effective. The good news is it could help build industry in Queensland at the same time.

Food security was not helped very much with the deregulation of the dairy industry. It decimated our dairy industry. Commercial fishing was decimated in the last parliament and has not been fixed this parliament. Beef and sugar production has been affected by matters such as tree clearing, reef regulations and other restrictions. Those things need to be addressed. If we turn those things around again, we can unlock a lot of latent wealth that is sitting in our resources with which we have been blessed here in Queensland.

Manufacturing and mineral production leads me to CopperString, copper mines, Phosphate Hill and a gas reserve policy. There is no question that you either have CopperString or you can start kissing goodbye to the North West Minerals Province. It has been estimated that about 17,000 indirect jobs are at risk from Townsville to Mount Isa. I do not know if everyone is okay with that, but I think that is a pretty big risk for the state. It is a pretty big risk nationally because everyone said there is no way we could allow the loss of that copper production in Australia. There are only two copper smelters left in Australia. Most of the rest of the world is aggressively trying to build them. The market is distorted because the rest of the world is trying to dominate and shore up copper production. At the moment we are letting this fall over because we are bending to the knee of Glencore who do whatever they want out there. That needs to be addressed.

With regard to Phosphate Hill, we import 80 per cent of our fertiliser in Australia already. Phosphate Hill is subject to the burden of gas prices. One of the silliest things government ever did was sell off our gas without a gas reserve policy, like most of the rest of the world does and like Western Australia did. It enabled industry development over there, including a urea fertiliser plant. It was built on the back of a gas reserve policy. We have gone the opposite way here. We sold it off and let the gas companies make all the money off it. Do not worry about these new six licences, or whatever; that is not going to get you out of trouble. You need to fix the gas price to Phosphate Hill if you are going to save that plant. Even if you do not sell off that plant, you are still going to have a huge problem in the North West Minerals Province.

With regard to the housing policies, we put our ideas on the table. We think the policies are fantastic for rural and remote Queensland. The first home buyer's grant is extending to existing homes.

With regard to a postal bank, there is a postcode bias that exists now in Western Queensland. I know it all too well, having had 15 years experience as a property valuer in western areas. The postal bank was put together by Christine Holgate when she was the head of Australia Post, just like New Zealand—the Kiwi bank over there. All we have to do is replicate that and have a lending institution that will go back into those areas, provide capital and let people buy housing, and private industry can step into the gap so that we are not relying on public housing to fix these problems all the time.

Title deeds in our Aboriginal communities need to be delivered so they can own their homes. The most racist thing in Australia is the fact that we do not allow those Aboriginal communities in Doomadgee and Mornington Island to own their own homes.

An issue I have is with eventide units. To me, this is crazy. There are about 50 home units in Charters Towers at the moment. All we need to do is redesign the hospital. It is not built yet—it is just a plan for a hospital—on the other side of the site that is vacant. These 50 home units are going to be destroyed, when there is a desperate need for them, because people cannot be bothered redrawing the plan for a hospital. I am trying to work with the government to save those units. It would be a damn shame if we didn't.

In the last bit of my contribution, I want to focus on water policies. If we are talking about the Flinders River, the Etheridge River—these things are easy, and it costs us nothing. That water flows out to the sea. Every year, we are watching it go by. Everyone gets tied up on what you are taking. I said before, for one dam you are taking three per cent of that river; that river is one per cent of the gulf flow and we sit here worrying about giving some water out. For goodness sake, give the people some water. They are building the infrastructure. They are taking all the risk. They will do it for you and they will multiply the earning capacity and taxes they pay to the state. The wealth will filter down. All you have to do is hand over the water to them and give them the ability to buy those water licences. That is easy for us to do as a government.