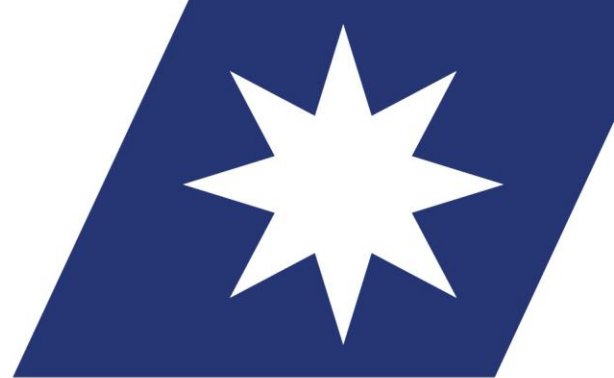


ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

30 May, 2022

KAP CALLS FOR FEDS TO COUGH UP FEES FOR FUTURE EDUCATORS

Katter's Australian Party Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter has called on the newly-elected Albanese Federal Government to provide free tertiary education to Australia's future early childhood educators in return for them pledging to work in rural and remote communities for a minimum period of five years.

His calls follow news this week that yet another childcare facility in his rural electorate is facing closure, with the Normanton Childcare Centre due to be temporarily closed next month if it cannot urgently find staff.

At present, it costs around \$4,000 for a Commonwealth-supported student to study a *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education)* at university and around \$1,105 for a subsidised student to study *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* at TAFE.

But Mr Katter wants these fees completely subsidised in return for graduates committing to work rurally for a set period in a bid to plug the major staffing shortfall that exists across outback Australia's childcare and early childhood education sectors.

"The newly elected Federal Government has promised free childcare, but seem oblivious to the fact that childcare is not an option for families in many areas across Australia due to nation-wide shortages in this field," Mr Katter said.

"Maybe a portion of the money should instead be spent on enticing people to study and stay in these roles, particularly in the regions where the shortfalls are dire."

Mr Katter said the well-being of Queensland "bush kids" was being compromised by the State and Federal Governments' failure to address the chronic under-staffing problem, and called on the new Prime Minister to act.

Recently the *North West Star* newspaper brought to light a study conducted by Victoria University's Mitchell Institute that showed almost a third of children in the Kennedy electorate were starting school developmentally vulnerable.¹

This is more than twice the rate when compared to children living in the inner-western Brisbane seat of Ryan.

The study also identified a trend that high rates of developmentally vulnerable children were often affected by reduced access to childcare places.

Mr Katter said the study's findings spoke for themselves, and implored all levels of government to collaborate on the issue of childcare service availability.

¹ <https://www.northweststar.com.au/story/7744358/kennedy-highest-ranked-for-development-vulnerability-in-qld-children/>

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“The situation that this study warns about is exactly what we are experiencing in our rural and remote towns across Traeger, and rural and regional Queensland more broadly,” he said.

“For example, Julia Creek Early Learning Centre has been trying to recruit a director since the start of this year with no luck.”

At present, the Julia Creek Early Learning Centre is currently only open four days per week due to the reduced staff.

McKinlay Shire Council CEO Trevor Williams said the community desperately needed the centre to remain open, and if no one could educate and mind local children, parents would be forced to stay home.

“A parent forced to stay home to care for their children is a member of the community taken out of our workforce,” he said.

“In a small town such as Julia Creek that can have damaging impacts on the area in which they were working.”

Mr Williams said there were regulations in place that state for a centre to operate the centre must have access to an early childhood teacher, which the centre did not currently have.

“The government has given us a waiver for 12 months, but if that is exceeded the future of the centre will be unknown.”

“The government also offers funding through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme (QKFS), which is designed to assist services with the cost of implementing and delivering an approved kindergarten learning program.

“To qualify for this funding the program must be delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher, so we currently are ineligible for this also.”

Mr Katter said while the issue was among its most acute in Julia Creek, the childcare staffing shortage was replicated across most communities in rural and regional Queensland.

“These types of issues have a direct correlation with the liveability of a rural town such as Julia Creek,” he said.

“It’s a great, friendly town, with very minimal crime - the perfect place to bring up a young family.

“It seems unrealistic however for families to make the move, or stay in the town even, if a child-minding facility is not an option.

“It appears that this is a national issue and not enough people are pursuing education in early childhood, and those that are educated are leaving in droves.

“We need to intervene in this trend,” Mr Katter said.

—ENDS—

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