

ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

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CATTLE TRAINS REMAIN OFF THE RAILS IN NORTH-WEST QLD

Despite weeks of “constructive talks” and direct calls for action from Traeger MP and Katter’s Australian Party (KAP) Leader Robbie Katter to the Queensland Transport Minister, only a dismal fraction of cattle freight has resumed on the Great Northern Line (GNL).

Mr Katter said tensions were now simmering between operators in the continued fall-out of Labor’s privatisation of Queensland’s rail.

In March, Mr Katter made both private and public calls for immediate intervention from the State Government to address the fiasco which sparked an indefinite shutdown of cattle freight on the GNL.

As a result, the director of current operator Watco East West publicly stated that the company was involved in ongoing constructive talks with previous operator Aurizon and the State Government and hoped for a resolution by late April.

Since then, a small number of consignments has resumed, but the vast majority of customers are still without a service. An estimated four trains have run for all of 2022 – a sharp decline from a typical seven trains per week.

Two months after Mr Katter sent letters and queries sent to Queensland’s Transport Minister calling for a resolution, the Minister replied to say transitional arrangements were in place as Watco worked on delivering track and loading yard access, driver recruitment, cattle wagon refurbishment, and customer engagement.

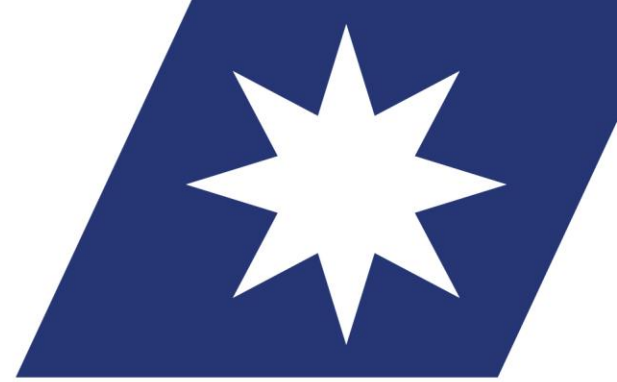
The Minister also claimed that Watco was working collaboratively with producers, processors and councils about service arrangements and availability.

However, Mr Katter’s office has received public reports that the issue has only worsened, with cattle holding yards and corridors still blocked by Aurizon, preventing use by Watco and all but confirming alarming predictions that the service could be largely offline for two years.

“This problem has been created by the State Government, which took the contract from Aurizon, and the problem needs to be urgently fixed by the State Government,” Mr Katter said.

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“This impasse is forcing cattle from the rail to the road, spiking transport costs for all players in the supply chain and compromising road safety, exacerbated even further by impacts of recent high rainfall.”

Truck drivers, cattle producers and meat processors have complained to Mr Katter’s office since the cattle freight ground to a halt after the Palaszczuk Labor Government awarded the livestock haulage contract on the GNL to Watco East West early this year.

Previous operator Aurizon absorbed the operational legacy of the former Queensland Rail, including their cattle yards, at key locations along the lines, the retention of local staff and drivers where possible and the running of driving training facilities in places like Cloncurry.

But Aurizon was reportedly padlocking cattle holding yards and blocking corridors, preventing use by Watco and bringing cattle trains to a standstill.

Mr Katter said the major disruptions were unfortunate but not surprising as it was Aurizon’s prerogative to control their own property, and overall was a poor reflection of the Government’s failure to manage the challenges of changing the operator.

“Did the Government think that Aurizon would kindly offer up their assets after losing the cattle contract to assist their competitors? This is a case of a very poorly thought-out decision-making process,” Mr Katter said.

He said the farce was an example of the slap in the face that Bligh Labor Government’s privatisation of the rail line in 2010 had delivered to regional communities.

“That move cost hundreds of jobs and precipitated a slow and substantial decline in service delivery,” he said.

“Now, the Palaszczuk Labor Government has thrown the rail freight contract to the control of the ‘free market’ which is all well and good, however they have failed to consider the fact that there is only one rail company that owns cattle yards along the GNL and that company is not the one that won the tender.”

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