

**ROBBIE KATTER**

Member for Traeger



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### HOPE DYING A STATE-SANCTIONED DEATH IN MID-WEST

A 2,000-strong jobs boom that would see the population of a mid-west town double and an extra \$170 million of annual gross agricultural production injected into the Queensland economy hangs in the balance, Katter's Australian Party (KAP) Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter has warned.

Mr Katter said the community-driven Hughenden Irrigation Project Corporation (HIPCo), which was set up in 2017 to develop a viable irrigation scheme at Hughenden, had sounded the alarm bells that its project was being strangled due to a lack of support from the Palaszczuk Labor Government.

The \$746 million project, which would build an instream dam on Saego Station around 45km from Hughenden, has already been funded by the Federal Government to the tune of \$180 million.

Investors are also willing to contribute \$127 million of the upfront capital cost of the infrastructure.

A total of \$12 million has been spend on progressing and finalising the project's comprehensive business case, which has proven HIPCo stacks up economically, environmentally, socially and culturally.

But Mr Katter said HIPCO could not progress due to the Palaszczuk Labor Government's lack of support around water rights.

He said despite months of negotiations the State Government has indicated it would refuse, on a technicality, water access to the scheme under its Flinders River catchment strategic unallocated water release.

This is because HIPCo is a "supplemented scheme", meaning it would draw its requested annual water allocation (74,000ML) from the Flinders River over a number of years or rely on natural rainfall to reach capacity.

"HIPCo, which is the most advanced proposed dam project in the country, has likely bid the highest price for water out of its competitors during this competitive tender process but it will still be knocked back on the most ludicrous and irregular of conditions," Mr Katter said.

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“The only assumption I can draw at this stage is the State intends to provide this water to corporate-held entities, which already hold water licences, in the hope the water is never used.”

Mr Katter said only the Premier had the power to address the manifest injustice within the State’s water department, presided over by Minister Glenn Butcher, that has shot HIPCo’s bid for water down on a technicality and threatens to hand the last of the Flinders River water release to corporate interests.

“The Premier could find a pathway forward for HIPCO’s water licence woes through a supplemented scheme; much like amendments adopted to the Fitzroy Water plan for Rookwood Weir, HIPCo could be provided with a supplemented water licence under the Gulf water plan,” he said.

“She must ask herself, who do you want to benefit from water access in this State? The local farmers and communities populating the outback and feeding our State, or the corporates?”

“This will truly test the fabric of who the Labor party represents in 2022.

“We are only talking about three per cent of the average annual flow of the Flinders River being needed to supply this project.”

HIPCO Board chairman Jeff Reid said by refusing water access, the State could kill off HIPCO.

“The Federal Government has always been supportive of our project and financing the project has never been our hurdle; rather, it’s the bureaucracy in Brisbane,” he said.

“The detailed business case has been accepted by both levels of government and has excelled in all areas of compliance.

“Now, at the eleventh hour, we are battling with technicalities with the State water department.

“To save the scheme, we are seeking changes to the Gulf Water Plan that would be very similar to what is proposed and occurring with the Fitzroy Water Plan and Rookwood Weir.

“We need a licence for the water and without it the State will strangle us.”

**ENDS**

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