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## Australia Party disappoints in Queensland but watch out for Katter in Canberra

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### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Paul Williams does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.



The big man in the big hat is ready to take on the Commonwealth. AAP/Dave Hunt

If the hype didn't quite match that of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party back in 1997, it was certainly close enough.

Much was expected of the big man in the even bigger hat at this year's Queensland election. From Federal MP Bob Katter's announcement in May last year that a new conservative party was needed in Australia, through to the fraught and fractured campaign to elect Queensland's 54th parliament, the anticipation was that a powerful new third force would again keep the major parties accountable.

But it wasn't to be. After some analysts, including myself, initially predicted between four and six seats for the fledgling populist movement, the 24 March state election resulted in



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just two seats for Katter's Australia Party (KAP) – exactly the same number with which they entered the campaign.

Dalrymple MP **Shane Knuth** – elected to the northern rural seat in 2009 on an LNP ticket, and defecting in disillusionment to KAP in October 2011 – easily won with 67% of the two-party-preferred vote. Similarly, **Robbie Katter**, son of Bob, won the north-western mining seat of Mt Isa with 61%. It appeared these two capitalised on the Katter brand name, as well as the usual regional angst that great distances produce.

Yet despite varied predictions of its own – ranging from equalling Pauline Hanson's 11 seats, to holding the balance of power, to governing in its own right – the party that shuns globalisation, free market economics and political correctness will not be disappointed with its 11.5% of the state-wide vote. For the moment, however, the party's inner circle will study the entrails of defeated seats to determine what went wrong.

State KAP leader **Aidan McLindon**, for example, was easily defeated in his rural southeast Queensland seat of Beaudesert, attracting just 40% of the two-party-preferred vote. First elected in 2009 on an LNP ticket, McLindon soon resigned to sit as an independent, then formed his own Queensland Party. Perhaps failing to understand that Beaudesert hardly resembles the deep north and is, instead, a more traditional conservative region unimpressed by the vocal populists (Pauline Hanson scored just 21 per cent there in 2009), McLindon's re-election prospects were compromised from the moment he joined the Katter party.

Similarly, star candidate and former cricketer **Carl Rackemann** failed to meet expectations in the rural seat of Nanango, once home to National Party leviathan and long-time Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, winning just 42%. After endorsing One Nation-turned-Independent MP Dolly Pratt since 1998, Nanango turned its back on populism and returned to the LNP fold.

Not unexpectedly, in Brisbane metropolitan seats the Katter vote was negligible. In the key seat of Ashgrove, for example,



For the short-term, the KAP will slip below the radar. But expect an even more energetic Katter, and possibly Aidan McLindon, next year.