

**ROBBIE KATTER**

Member for Traeger



## MEDIA RELEASE

10 July, 2020

### LAST OUTBACK MARKET GARDENER'S LEGACY AT RISK

The small fortune of western Queensland's last market-gardener is at risk of being absorbed by the Queensland Government, in what would be a heart-breaking travesty according to Katter's Australian Party (KAP) Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter.

Mr Katter said the isolated community of Winton, which late outback market-gardener Willie Mar called home for 60 years, would be the only loser if the state was allowed to absorb the man's life savings of \$87,000.

As reported by *In Queensland*, the Public Trustee been unable to find any next of kin or family of the late Winton local and as such has recommended to the Supreme Court that his money be handed over to the government.<sup>1</sup>

This is despite the Winton community, for the last decade, banding together to maintain Willie's former market-garden and shed in his honour.

Mr Katter said the recommendation was especially unfair given the great impact Willie and his father, Willie Mar Snr, had on outback Queensland for near-on a century.

He said the last place the money should go was to the State Government's coffers, where it would have no overall meaning or impact.

Instead he has proposed the money be handed to the Winton Shire Council, or the local Friends of Willie Mar group, for the purpose of maintaining Willie's garden and shed as a historical relic for years to come.

"Willie was the last of our western Queensland market-gardeners, his and his father's contribution to the town of Winton and the broader region is untold and even today their legacy lives on," Mr Katter said.

"The Mars were loved by the Winton community – the younger Willie actually chose to move to Winton from mainland China back in the 1940s.

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<sup>1</sup> "The forgotten fortune of Willie Mar, the last Chinese-born market gardener in western Queensland", In Queensland, 25 June, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://inql.com.au/insights/2020/06/25/the-forgotten-fortune-of-willie-mar-the-last-chinese-born-market-gardener-in-western-queensland/>

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"You can only imagine the culture shock he experienced, but he became a local and the Winton community was better for having him and his father a part of it for so long."

Mr Katter said Willie was well-known for being generous and very austere. He said the market gardener would have worked hard for every single dollar sitting in his bank account.

Willie, also known by his Chinese name Mar Yen Shoo, moved to Winton to follow in his father's footsteps in 1947.

When Chinese-Australian Willie died in 2007, he left behind the legacy of he, and his father, in Winton. He also left behind a depleted garden, a dilapidated shed and an old ute.

Willie's ute itself is a unique historical relic as many Winton locals still recall the ruckus that was his car, and his use of it.

The late Butch Lenton, former Winton Mayor and revered local, told the ABC in 2007 that one of his fondest memories of Willie was witnessing his driving. <sup>2</sup>

"When you had a look at the old car the door hinges wouldn't work - the catches wouldn't work, but he had rope tying them together," Mr Lenton told the ABC at the time.

"The seat-belt was a pushbike tube. It was an old car but it was his pride and joy for sure."

Mr Lenton said that every Saturday morning people in town needed to keep an eye out for Willie on the road.

"He'd leave his shop and come up Werner Street and come through the main street, no looking right or left - it was like Russian Roulette," he said.

Since Willie's death his ute, shed and old garden have been kept by the Winton Shire Council as a tribute to the Mar family legacy.

He and his father are buried at the Winton cemetery.

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<sup>2</sup> "Willy Mar: the last of the Chinese market gardeners", ABC Western Queensland, 23 October 2007, Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/10/23/2067922.htm>