

PO Box 1968
Mount Isa QLD 4825

Mount Isa

74 Camooweal Street
P: 07 4730 1100

Charters Towers

Stock Exchange Arcade
2/76 Mosman Street
P: 07 4787 2139



Robbie Katter MP Member for Traeger

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Dear Editor,

RE: Defeat of the KAP's Working with Children (Indigenous Communities) Amendment Bill 2018

It would seem tokenism prevails with our governments' treatment of First Australians.

Some six years after first going to the State Government for assistance on the Blue Cards issue, in particular in relation to its unindented yet devastating impacts on First Australian communities, we saw our bill on this issue voted down by Labor, LNP and the Greens MP last week in the Queensland Parliament.

This bill was all about reducing barriers (in this case, those caused by the overreach of the Blue Card system) to meaningful work for First Australians. Child safety, which is the cornerstone of the Blue Card system, remained paramount under my plan.

All the changes would have done was enable decision-making around the Blue Cards (in some circumstances and never when an applicant had a history of harming children) to be undertaken by Local Justice Groups that are based in those indigenous communities instead of some faceless bureaucrat in Brisbane who doesn't realise that their tick or flick on an application could literally change someone's life.

So many politicians offer words in parliament about how they want to help the people in these communities but when we finally offer something tangible to help First Australian adults access jobs, they run scared lest they be accused of being soft on crime.

Here's the thing, and the defining feature of my bill (which is readily available online for those who are not familiar with it): any system that empowers the local First Australian community to make decisions on their own must be putting the child's safety first. That is, unless you think these people are not capable of making these judgement calls themselves.

Well the Labor party, Greens and the LNP all certainly appear to hold this condescending and paternalistic attitude.

The major argument in the debate on this bill was that taking Blue Cards decisions away from bureaucrats on in Brisbane (located thousands and thousands of kilometres away) and putting it in the hands of Local Justice Groups in the communities is somehow putting the kids more at risk. This was their lead, and I would argue extremely flawed, argument.

I don't have all the solutions for the social problems in these communities but I do have good ears and I have listened to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when they first brought this initiative to me – it is not something I have created on a whim, it is a grassroots solution to a pervasive problem that I have put in front of the decision-makers.

Many of the growing youth crime problems in places like Cairns and Townsville are worsening because parents are finding the barriers to re-entering the workplace are just too high. If parents don't have meaningful work then they are highly prone to substance abuse. If they are prone to substance abuse then the risks for children's safety in that household increases immensely and the kids often then end up playing up on the street.

My bill aimed to turn things around in this space, by getting to the heart of the problem.

We can't sit back and judge people for not getting engaged in the workforce when we keep upping the ante on barriers to entry; and I will not tolerate this argument that you can't have two sets of rules in Queensland.

Our state is way too large and diverse for one set of rules. Besides, we already apply a second set of rules for these First Australian communities, namely: they can't own their own house in most of these places and many have alcohol bans in place where you can't drink.

Suffice to say, may I suggest that it might scare some people that we actually could offer some good ideas to politicians and bureaucrats in Brisbane for our own benefit.

The two major parties along with their Green mates proved last week in parliament that they are truly scared of our ideas, and the fact that they could be good ones.

We will be re-introducing this bill again as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Robbie Katter, Member for Traeger