

**ROBBIE KATTER**

Member for Traeger



## MEDIA RELEASE

15<sup>th</sup> August 2022

### LOCAL MPS A NO-SHOW AS INDIGENOUS STRUGGLES LAID BARE

Three days of troubling testimony into the issues of chronic unemployment, criminal recidivism and unbearable socio-economic disadvantage being experienced within Indigenous communities were not enough to rouse the interest of Labor's Cairns and Townsville MPs last week.

Speaking in following the staging of public hearings, held in Mount Isa, Palm Island and Yarrabah into his *Working With Children Amendment Bill 2021*, Katter's Australian Party (KAP) Leader Robbie Katter said he was extremely disappointed no elected Labor State MP had shown up or even dialed into the sessions.

He said the MPs, namely Cook MP Cynthia Lui who represents vast tranche of the region Mr Katter's proposed legislation would apply, had missed a golden opportunity to genuinely listen to their communities.

"I have just returned from these hearings, which were extremely insightful and well-represented by mayors, councilors and other local leaders and community members who were crying out for help on that issue," he said.

"There was widespread support for the Bill and its intent, and the unworkability of the current system was laid bare in relation to not only job prospects, but also volunteering roles and kinship and family care arrangements in these regions.

"It is unfathomable that the North's Labor MPs apparently prefer to attend First Nations Treaty ceremonies in Brisbane, where there is a press pack and plenty of photo opportunities, than to actually sit and listen to the Indigenous representatives in their communities."

Mr Katter's Bill is designed to deal directly with issues of unemployment, socio-economic disadvantage and intergenerational welfare dependency and criminality across Queensland's 18 Indigenous communities.

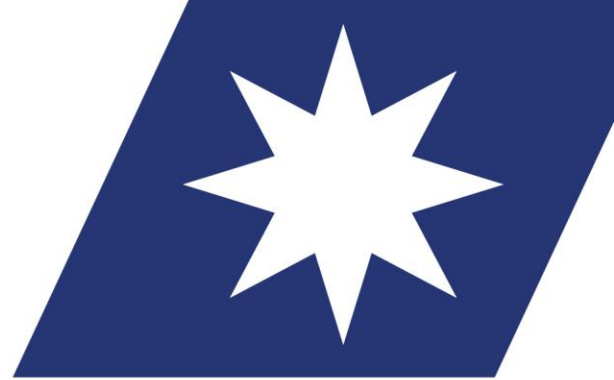
It proposes a variation to the "one size fits all" Blue Card system for these communities only where, if passed, decision-making around Blue Card applications would be handed to local leaders, elders and other community representatives under a strict set of criteria.

Mr Katter said the current situation, where Blue Cards were proving to be an insurmountable barrier to getting a significant number of people into the workforce, could not continue.

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“Despite only around 1.5 per cent of Blue Card applicants across Queensland being knocked back, around 20 per cent of all applications are denied in Queensland’s most remote Indigenous communities,” Mr Katter said.

“Each knock-back represents a lost opportunity for an individual – who may have only petty, or dated, criminal history – to turn their lives around and become productive members of society.”

Palm Island Mayor Mislam Sam said the Bill had his support, and that he estimated there were between 50-100 people on the island currently jobless directly due to being unable to secure a Blue Card.

“There is 80 per cent unemployment (here), but there are a lot of jobs,” he told the Committee.

“No-one can fill these roles; the Police Service has been looking for PLOs for the last two years – \$65,000 a year, four positions, cannot fill them.

“The education department is crying out for local staff as teacher aides; they cannot fill them.

“Selectability is crying out for local staff; they cannot fill those positions because they cannot find people with a blue card or a yellow card – simple little things.”

Yarrabah Mayor Ross Andrews said Blue Cards posed a significant barrier to employment in his community.

“Blue cards play a part in that as well in terms of getting our people off welfare and participating in the real economy,” he said to the visiting committee.

“There are challenges within the rules of government and how they play out, but there are also opportunities for our people to move forward on many of our challenges.”

Mr Katter said he would appeal to Ms Lui, and her Labor colleagues, to garner support for his Bill in their party room.

**ENDS**

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