



MEDIA RELEASE

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'Invisible' Indigenous voices travel to Parliament to test Government's commitment

TWO formerly "invisible" Indigenous women from Far North Queensland have put the Federal Government's promise to listen to First Nations Australians to the ultimate test by travelling to Parliament from their remote communities to share their voice.

Aurukun women, Sharina Wolmby and Tonia Pootchemunka, have experienced trauma, violence and riots in their community and were once invisible in their own world before gaining employment with charity Orange Sky's mobile laundry.

Now, they are inspiring role models and leaders in their community and this week travelled to Parliament to demonstrate to the Government they are willing to speak up and deserve to be heard if Labor is genuine about an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

During their visit, they met with Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, Emma McBride, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, Malarndirri McCarthy and Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher.

"We wanted to meet with them to discuss our ideas to improve our community, to improve employment, health and how we can empower women in our communities," Ms Wolmby said.

"We've shown two ordinary women who came from nothing are willing to speak, we thank the Government for wanting to listen, but now we will see if they act."

Managing director of Aurukun-based Indigenous employment and training service ReSet, Tim Whyte, helped train Ms Wolmby and Ms Pootchemunkan before securing employment with the laundry, and is a long-term Cape resident.

Mr Whyte said while the women and community welcomed the Government's ambition of a voice, there had been frustration in the past and Labor had "one chance to get it right."

"If you want to know what's going on in Aboriginal communities, we've got some amazing and powerful women who have not previously had a voice," Mr Whyte said.

BOB KATTER

Katter's Australian Party

Federal Member for Kennedy



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“So if you really want to kick this ‘Voice’ off, these ladies are saying 'we're here, we're the invisible people in remote Aboriginal communities'.

“We're spending \$15m a year in just this community incarcerating our local people, there was a productivity report in 2019 that said we must have alternatives like rehab and training camps here in Aurukun. We're now going into 2023 and there's still been not one action on those recommendations on that productivity report.

“So here we have a Government saying we want to give Indigenous people a voice, well this is the first time these two women have been out of their community, they've never seen a high-rise, a set of traffic lights, but they've had the courage to come down because they believe in what the government is saying.”

Kennedy MP Bob Katter congratulated Mr Whyte and his partner Veera Judin, on their efforts in training and employing Indigenous locals in Aurukun, while savaging the negative effects of the “we'll look after you brigade” of Government interfering with Aboriginal affairs.

“If you want to know what's being achieved for First Australians don't listen to the rubbish you hear in this place (Parliament), they have achieved absolutely nothing.

“We have the highest death rate in the world, that I know of, in the First Australian communities up there. They took out the market gardens, they have no right to private property, and then they wonder why these situations exist.

“Aboriginal affairs have been in the hands of the ‘we'll look after you brigade’. Well that's the problem – ‘we'll look after you’. All the blackfellas should be asking for is for the government to go away and ‘let us run our own affairs’.”

Mr Katter singled out the low life expectancy of First Australians which he labelled “a disgraceful shame” for the nation.

“I got the money four-and-half years ago for the market gardens to return. In that time the government has put in not one single market garden.

“They go on and on about closing the gap, they know the gap was created because the nutritional requirements were taken away.

“But rest assured the whitefellas are looking after us,” he said.