

Greens' focus is not on Aborigines, says Sue Gordon



There are renewed calls to change the date of Australia Day.

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- Ean Higgins

The former Aboriginal magistrate who led the 2007 intervention to tackle indigenous child abuse in the Northern Territory has said the Greens are out of touch with remote communities in their campaign to change the date of Australia Day.

Sue Gordon said indigenous Australians also knew that while Greens leader Richard Di Natale claimed to be championing the movement, he had no practical power to make it happen. "Aboriginal people are not silly, they know who are going to get things up," Dr Gordon said.

"The Greens are not a party of any note, and they are not in a position to change anything in the parliament."

Dr Gordon said she had had "just lots of good feedback" since earlier this week when she said there were far more important issues for indigenous Australians than changing the date of Australia Day.

She said Senator Di Natale, as a medical doctor, should be talking about child protection, and adequate health and housing for Aboriginal people.

Dr Gordon was joined by West Australian Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Wyatt when asked about the Greens' campaign.

“I think people want to see their politicians focused on jobs, health and education,” he said.

Senator Di Natale’s office said the Greens leader “has seen many of these issues first-hand through his years working as a doctor with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory”.

But questions have arisen about how much recent experience the 10 Greens MPs, who say they will campaign to change Australia Day on behalf of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, have of indigenous communities, particularly remote ones.

NSW senator Lee Rhiannon’s spokesman listed a visit she had made to Whitegate in the Northern Territory in 2015 to discuss infrastructure issues including water and electricity, and Mount Nancy Town Camp in the Territory in 2016 to discuss matters including “discrimination by police”.

Representatives for South Australian senator Sarah Hanson-Young and Tasmanian senator Peter Whish-Wilson refused to say when the senators last visited a remote Aboriginal community.

Tasmanian senator Nick McKim’s spokesman said he was unable to answer the questions because the senator was in transit from Manus Island.

The office of West Australia senator Rachel Siewert, who is the Green’s spokeswoman on indigenous affairs, said that last year she had made trips to remote communities in Warburton, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek in her state, and to Pupunya, Alice Springs and the Garma festival in the Northern Territory.

Former Kimberley Land Council head Wayne Bergmann, who has had run-ins with the Greens, believes Australia Day should be changed to be more inclusive of - indigenous Australians and is grateful for the Greens’ campaign.

Mr Bergmann, who is now the executive director of an Aboriginal not-for-profit business, said “politics has strange bedfellows ... you take support wherever you can.”