

Major speaks out on sex abuse

By SOLUA MIDDLETON



YOUNG Australian of the Year Tania Major has revealed on a top-rating television program how she suffered sexual abuse as a child. The

22-year-old Kokobera woman from Kowanyama, on Queensland's Cape York, gave a gutsy interview on the ABC's *Enough Rope* with Andrew Denton program at the end of August, declaring she can't understand why people aren't doing anything about the issue.

Ms Major revealed to Denton that one of her cousins was responsible for the abuse.

"It happened twice actually ... and I thought 'this is not right'," she revealed.

"He said 'Oh don't you tell anybody'. And for me, all my life I'm thinking 'well what did I do wrong, what did I do wrong?'"

Ms Major said that many of her white friends would say 'you know Tan, it's happened to everybody'.

"I say, 'But why is it happening

continuously in Aboriginal communities? Why aren't people doing a f***ing thing about it?'" she said.

"I'm speaking because I want other young kids and children to know that there's a way out. And a lot of the young people who commit suicide in our

Cape York Institute, running its Youth Talent Development Program.

She said she agreed with Mr Pearson's stance on welfare dependency.

"When I talk about welfare mentality, it's that passivity, that dependency. (That) 'because I'm black you owe me this, you

After talking about her connection to her country and spending time with her grandfather, a healer, Ms Major concluded the interview by telling Denton what ordinary Australians could do to help Indigenous people.

"I bloody love this country and the only way we're going to heal in this country is to face up to reality," Ms Major said.

"Face up to the fact that there was a Stolen Generation ... people weren't paid right. My mother was denied an education because she was black.

"And I want people to realise that so they understand how to interact with Indigenous people because not very many people out there know how to interact with Indigenous people.

"And I really want that for the future generation, and for my kids to sit in a classroom and to talk about the worries and to talk about the massacres, because we've got to heal, we've got to get over this.

"We've got to say 'Hey, it's happened, why are we denying it?'. That's what I want."



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— Young Australian of the Year Tania Major

communities have been raped or molested as children. I know one of my cousins was."

Ms Major also spoke of her admiration for Noel Pearson, saying that when she was ten years old she wanted to grow up to be like him.

Now she works with Noel Pearson's

owe me that, you gotta do this for me'.

And that's a bit of a problem in our program," she said. "But apart from that there are some really good high achievers, some young people who want to get out there, who want to be accountants and nurses, who are going out there and, and giving it a go."

Women power

Wik lobby group is back in action



THEY are women ... hear them roar. Prominent Australian women, outraged at the Federal

Government's intervention into Aboriginal communities, have resurrected the Women for Wik lobby group.

Group members are promising to independently monitor the implementation of the Government's intervention, and speak out loud and strong against injustices.

Women for Wik was formed in 1997 and was endorsed by 130 women's organisations, representing hundreds of thousands of Australian women.

The group's name refers to the Wik people of Cape York whose native title rights the High Court found in 1996

were able to co-exist on pastoral properties, setting an Australia-wide precedent.

Its original members included the late actor Ruth Cracknell, film-maker Jane Campion and Justice Elizabeth Evatt, and was inspired by a speech by Lady Deane, wife of the then Governor-General Sir William Deane, who



Kayla, Jessalina, Joash, and Jasmine Willika are pictured with Women for Wik mentor Associate-Professor Claire Smith, of Adelaide, who worked in Northern Territory Indigenous communities for more than 20 years.

said women had to take the lead on the issue of reconciliation.

Lady Deane has again added her support, along with Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue and Tammy Fraser, the wife of the former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.

Sydney film-maker Christine Olson (*Rabbit-Proof Fence*) told the Koori Mail the original group had attracted a groundswell of support and things were shaping up the same this time. Their website www.womenforwik.org already is

receiving messages of support from across Australia, and women in other countries are also taking notice.

Ms Olsen said the Government had painted all Aboriginal communities as dysfunctional and had forged ahead with its intervention with no real consultation or planning. She said 130 organisations around Australia supported the Women for Wik group last time, and many more were expected this time.

"The timing is right. There will be a Commonwealth election soon and we are taking the stance that, yes, we want the money being promised for Aboriginal communities but it has to be done correctly and with proper consultation," Ms Olsen said.

"The answer to the problem is the support of Aboriginal culture. Not the destruction of it."

Prof O'Donoghue, a member of the original group and a former chairperson of ATSIC, described

the NT intervention as patronising and unworkable.

"We need policies that will take us forward, not backwards," she said

Claire Smith, of Adelaide, the President of the World Archaeological Congress, said many ordinary women believed the intervention was well-intentioned but flawed.

Associate-Professor Smith said the group would be bipartisan and would educate Australians by recording on its website the voices of Aborigines affected by the intervention.

She said rallies also would be organised. Associate-Professor Smith worked in NT communities for 20 years and said she was appalled at the lack of respect shown for community organisations struggling with paltry monetary resources to find solutions.

"The pretext of the intervention was child sexual abuse," she said.

"Now they've taken away the permit system and advertised these communities as vulnerable. Is that going to increase or decrease the level of paedophilia in these communities?"

Sydney-based author Rosie Scott encouraged all women to lend their support.

"You can endorse our website as an individual, and also get your organisation to endorse it as well – the endorsements are flooding in, the more the merrier. We need lots of organisation endorsements," she said.

"You can do an email out of the website address and attached statement, organise meetings (you only need a few women – Women for Wik first started with only four of us) to work out activities, public meetings and rallies as a build-up before the election."

'The answer to the problem is the support of Aboriginal culture. Not the destruction of it'