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# **The Great Debate: Neighbourhoods are Dead and the Individual Now Reigns Supreme**

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\*If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was  
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Services**

## **Joan Kirner:**

I have great pleasure in introducing speaker number one of the case for “Neighbourhoods are Dead and the Individual Now Reigns Supreme”.

When I read Jacqui’s CV here I thought there were two Jacqui Katonas. Because I can remember meeting Jacqui for I think the first time, though I’d seen her on television, at a quite social luncheon in Toorak.

And Jacqui and a wide range of women were there to talk about the whole issue of Kakadu and uranium mining. And Jacqui held us enthralled in terms of her community’s stand, the organisation of that community’s stand and all the almost octopus-like tentacles she was putting out to involve the broader community in making her cause and her community cause our cause.

And then I read this really modest CV and I thought, “Maybe there are two Jacqui Katonas”. Well I’d love there to be two, in fact I’d love there to be 202. And there will be one day. Have you been breeding again? Well they did try to stamp you lot out, but you’re the highest birth rate. Now Jacqui I’m not putting the birth rate entirely on you. But I’m going to read you the proper introduction, I’ve given it a real build up, but here’s some facts on the matter.

Jacqui is currently a development worker, campaigner, researcher, editor and writer. She’s got one of the best senses of humour, that’s not written in here. She’s a member of the Djok Clan, located within Kakadu National Park. She’s currently the CEO of the Lumbu Indigenous Community Foundation which is based in Brisbane.

She’s worked for several Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander organisations, media and campaigns and has a broad range of experience in issues affecting indigenous communities, such as family removal and deaths in custody.

She’s worked as the Co-ordinator of the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisation Secretariat to ensure an organisational structure for information movement within a nation wide network of

Jacqui Katona - The Great Debate, Communities in Control conference, June 2006. Visit [www.ourcommunity.com.au](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au) for more details.

Aboriginal organisations, so she's been at the grass-roots and she's been at the organisational structure level.

She's represented this organisation at the United Nation's Working Party on Indigenous Populations in the area of information. In 1995 Jacqui was Stolen Generation's Project Officer for the Northern Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, providing assistance for the co-ordination of litigation on behalf of the stolen generation of the Northern Territory.

In 1996 she took up the position of Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Corporation in Kakadu, Gundjehmi, to work with family members assisting them establish organisational frameworks and strategies for land management and mitigation of negative social impacts experienced by the committee.

That means she organised to stop in past the deleterious impacts of uranium mining, in particular the third proposal. And she attracted women and men from across Australia to join her cause, including one some of you will know the 80 year old - nearly 90 year old - Molly Hatfield from Northcote, who rang me when she was over on a demonstration with Jacqui and said, "Can you go bail for me?" I said, "What?!! Where are you, what have you done in Northcote?" She said, "No no. I'm up in Kakadu."

So I don't know, getting old ladies into trouble. That's a bit much.

She's the recipient of a range of awards including the Australian Conservation Foundation's the late Peter Rawlinson Environment Award and the Island Nations' Gold Winning Environment Prize. And she's one great woman. Please welcome Jacqui Katona.

### **Jacqui Katona:**

Thank you very much. Thank you all for your warm welcome here. And I argue for today that "Neighbourhoods are Dead and the Individual Reigns Supreme". But not in the way you think it might be argued.

I'm sure the other team, my esteemed colleagues and peers across the other side of the stage will celebrate neighbourhoods. They will tell you that they're part of the glue of our society.

I want you to think about neighbourhoods and what they mean to a whole range of people. Because I argue that neighbourhoods are not communities. Neighbourhoods are used, the word neighbourhood is used in a very different way. It doesn't represent the gel that keeps us together. It doesn't represent a future. Neighbourhood in fact is an economic term.

Neighbourhood allows governments to capture and contain human interaction. Our statistics are organised on the basis of neighbourhoods. I want to talk about the human beings; I want to talk about the individuals; I want to talk about the diversity that makes up the constructs that government uses to try and make us bland.

Neighbourhoods herd us into uniform lives. They make us targets of consumerism. Advertising agencies love neighbourhoods because they can calculate the amount of money that they can extract. Neighbourhoods have reduced our diversity to a polyglot. Neighbourhoods are not communities. Neighbourhoods are vessels into which governments can pump policy. Neighbourhoods allow the observation of the rat race.

Communities on the other hand are dynamic, energetic and they support individuals, individuals like you, individuals like me. Individuals with strengths, weaknesses. Individuals who work together. Individuals who respect and support one another. Individuals who build and maintain communities. Individuals who indeed are communities.

I invite you and our colleagues across the table to get out of your neighbourhoods and get into your communities. You have individual talents. You have individual contributions. You are building a future which recognises the value of individuals and the needs of individuals, that individuals are the building blocks of communities, the cornerstones, the foundations.

Your individual courage working with your communities. Your individual inspiration. Your individual strength gathers others to communities. Celebrate the individual voices. Our collaboration as individuals is a gift for future generations. You have to listen when you hear other individuals. This is what we are reminded of when we have individual gatherings of individuals.

You have to think when you talk with other individuals. You have to give and take to build a community and grow a community.

Don't simply observe and generalise about neighbourhoods. Break out and claim your community as individuals. In this political climate we need the creativity of all individuals. We need every individual's talent. We need the inspiration of all individuals. Because it's too easy for this Federal Government to undermine the strength of our communities by using the Trojan Horse that neighbourhoods and the term similar gives to them as strengths.

Indigenous people need you as individuals to clearly understand us as individuals within our communities. Not fall prey to the generalisation which have neutralised the debate in Australia, and in fact that has painted me or other Aboriginal women and men as eternal victims.

I don't live in a neighbourhood of victims. I live with resilient individuals, vibrant individuals, individuals who want to take hold of opportunities for the future.

Individuals who inspire, connect with each other, enliven each other, lead each other to action. And build prosperity in our community, not achieve the economic outcomes that a government wants to see for a neighbourhood.

All those resources are vital and all those resources are contained in all of us as individuals who can collectively bring about change, change that's so necessary in the broader Australian community.

Following the debate that's been happening recently about Aboriginal issues, I think one thing that seemed to escape the glaze or the gaze of the media is the changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act that are

taking place in the Northern Territory. Communities are becoming neighbourhoods, our Federal Minister is telling us.

Neighbourhoods which should be open for sale. And in fact the community of Galiwinku has been told that the services which other communities enjoy as part of standard of living, the average standard of living, services such as reasonably good sewerage systems, housing, clean water coming to you through a tap inside your house, those things aren't affordable in the neighbourhood of Galiwinku.

Galiwinku has to be open for business to access those services. They have to trade rights to land to enjoy the same standard of living as a majority of other Australians ...

The responsibility that you as individuals can take to bring about change, to join as a community, to act in solidarity with our community, that kind of change needs to happen in Australia. And that kind of change needs to happen with all of us understanding the path forward, not as a polyglot, not as people who operate under generalisations, but people who know and respect one another as individuals.

Our community includes all of us; we are all responsible to ourselves and each other as a community. Hiding behind economic terms like neighbourhood isn't going to Advance Australia Fair.

Thank you.