

Noel Pearson rings up a wrong number

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THE indigenous leader Noel Pearson's last-minute intervention with Rob Oakeshott has backfired for the Liberal Party.

Mr Oakeshott has been an opponent of Mr Pearson's approach to indigenous issues and he has repeatedly railed against what he sees as Mr Pearson's hijacking of the indigenous agenda.

During the election campaign Tony Abbott championed Mr Pearson, who on Sunday phoned Mr Oakeshott, whose wife is of Aboriginal descent, to argue the Coalition's case.

When asked yesterday why he had not backed the Coalition or been swayed by Mr Pearson's argument, Mr Oakeshott replied: "There is more than one view in indigenous Australia."

Mr Oakeshott's views on Mr Pearson's welfare reforms have been clear on the public record.

In February he said in Parliament: "We continue to see both sides of the chamber wanting to get close to Noel Pearson in Cape York because of some perception that if you are close to Noel Pearson you have the voice of Aboriginal people in Australia. Noel Pearson does a great job for Cape York, but not for one minute should any of us as policymakers fall into the trap of thinking that Noel Pearson is the voice of all Aboriginal Australians."

Mr Oakeshott has also often highlighted that half of indigenous Australians live on the east coast between Sydney and Rockhampton - not in Cape York or the Northern Territory.

Yesterday Mr Oakeshott said he was prepared to "work with Noel Pearson". He prefaced this by saying "one of my great frustrations about education, employment schemes and regional indigenous issues is there's always this automatic drift to the Northern Territory and Cape York".

A conversation needs to begin about the lives of east coast Aborigines, Mr Oakeshott said.