

\$80,000 ABORIGINAL LOAN FOR PERKINS'S DAUGHTER

Author: By MIKE SECCOMBE
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CANBERRA: A daughter of the head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Charles Perkins, received an \$80,000 home loan from the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC).

Mr Perkins agreed yesterday that the loan had been granted, but rejected suggestions it was evidence of corruption or nepotism. He said he had not been an ADC commissioner when the loan was granted.

Mr Perkins said the raising of the issue in the Senate Estimates Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, by Northern Territory Country-Liberal Party Senator Grant Tambling, was part of a cowardly witchhunt and smear campaign.

Senator Tambling asked if Mr Perkins' daughter had received more than \$160,000 for a home loan.

Outside the hearing, Mr Perkins said his daughter Hetti had received a loan of about \$80,000, about half the price of her \$160,000 house in Sydney. But she got it before he became an ADC commissioner.

The Northern Territory Government and the National Party had carried out "a deliberate, provocative witchhunt against me personally ... to discredit me and smear me ... under the privilege of Parliament."

He said they also smeared the Aboriginal and islander people by references to a "black mafia, nepotism and corruption."

(Senator Tambling first aired claims of a "black mafia" last week, and then admitted he used the phrase only to get media attention.)

"My daughter is 23 years old," said Mr Perkins. "If she wants to apply to the commission for a loan, she's entitled to."

He said his daughter should not be smeared "because she happens to be my daughter" for getting the \$80,000 loan.

He denied corruption in Aboriginal Affairs, but admitted "some mistakes".

"We've messed it up a little, but we're going to try again, and that's what Aboriginal Affairs is all about. We try and try again. We'll get it right. We'll stumble a few times.

"Blacks are not corrupt. There's no nepotism in black affairs, and there's no black mafia. So what Mr Tambling has said is all bullshit."

A spokeswoman for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Hand, said the ADC was set up under the Fraser Government, and all Aboriginal people were eligible to apply for loans. Each case was considered on its merits.

Senator Tambling also questioned Mr Perkins about the spending of nearly \$900,000, including \$600,000 in loans to buy poker machines, on an Aboriginal club in Canberra.

The Woden Town Club is in the basement of Bonner House, the headquarters of the Aboriginal Affairs Department.

The club was opened only in June, and Mr Perkins said he expected it would be a few years before it began to pay returns.

Yesterday's questions followed claims contained in a leaked letter to Mr Hand of incompetence, misused travel allowances, and unconventional recruitment within the department.

They were contained in a confidential letter from the national president of the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association, Ms Ann Forward.

On ABC radio, Ms Forward said: "I think it is widely acknowledged ... that patronage has had a role to play since the inception of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs."