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Police move on giant tent embassy sculpture

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A stand-off between police and a member of the Aboriginal tent embassy, who was perched on top of a giant kangaroo sculpture for more than an hour and a half yesterday, ended in a heated clash and the arrest of two men.

The stand-off started at 3.30pm when about 15 police officers and a National Capital Authority contractor moved in to remove the 12m-high sculpture which had been erected by Aboriginal tent embassy resident Darren Bloomfield on Thursday morning.

As police began removing the rope fence around the structure, Mr Bloomfield jumped on to the sculpture, climbing to the top and clinging to the chain holding the kangaroo to a tripod.

A police van was backed up, resting against the kangaroo while various police officers tried to negotiate with Mr Bloomfield to come down. At one stage he was handed a mobile telephone and Aboriginal liaison officers were called in to help.

While clinging to the kangaroo Mr Bloomfield shouted at onlookers and police.

'You are dismantling the tent embassy,' he yelled. 'One week is all I wanted.'

More than an hour and a half later Mr Bloomfield slid off the kangaroo on to the top of the police van and jumped on to the ground.

The contractors then moved in dismantling the kangaroo in minutes.

AFP Acting Commander Gary Gent said the NCA had requested that police remove the structure.

'Any structure on unleased Commonwealth land without the necessary authorisation is illegal,' he said.

The structure was removed under the trespassing on Commonwealth lands ordinance.

'We have negotiated on this issue for the last couple of days and we sought to have them voluntarily remove the tripod but unfortunately this has not been achieved and that's why we are here today,' he said.

He was pleased that the stand-off ended with no-one hurt.

Earlier in the day Mr Bloomfield had refused a NCA request made through the police to take down the sculpture by the afternoon.

He said that he had put the statue up as part of a sculpture week and would remove it after the week was over.

The embassy had legally bought the sculpture *Moondance* off Mac McDonald, an artist from the Kangaroo Valley.

McDonald said he had not expected the statue to create such a furore and it was never meant to be used as a political statement.

Co-chairperson of the National Sorry Day Committee Audrey Kinnear said she was disappointed that the structure had been removed.

'It is just a small spot in Canberra that Aboriginal people can call their own,' she said.

'They don't give an inch. It is an important site and surely the authorities could be a little bit generous and overlook some of the so-called breaches considering what our people have been through.'

Jeremy Lasek, from the NCA, said the organisation wanted the structure pulled down because it was illegal.

'The occupant of the embassy knows the rules and chose to ignore them when he originally had the structure brought in,' he said.

Mr Lasek said the sculpture was potentially dangerous to the public.

'The last thing we want is to put people at risk,' he said. 'We're happy with the outcome.'

A 34-year-old man and a man in his late 30s were arrested by police just after 5pm for obstructing police in the execution of their duties.

Both men were expected to be charged late last night.