

Outrage at mock-black comedian

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A furore has erupted over Crown Casino's decision to present controversial comic King Billy Cokebottle in concert.

King Billy Cokebottle is the creation of white comic Louis Beers, who wears black make-up and lampoons an elderly Aboriginal in his R-rated show.

The comic created his character for a Perth breakfast radio program, but caused outrage among local indigenous groups in his home state. He later relocated to Townsville.

King Billy Cokebottle is booked for Crown's prestigious Showroom on August 23.

Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Minister Keith Hamilton condemned the booking of Beers.

"In 2002 I would have thought we were well past using racism as a comedy form," he said.

"The Aboriginal people of Victoria are a strong people and will treat the show with the respect it does not deserve."

Award winning Aboriginal actor Ningali Lawford who starred in the movie Rabbit Proof Fence, and who is in Melbourne performing with world-acclaimed Bangarra dance troupe, said she was "very, very disappointed in Crown Casino's decision to hire King Billy Cokebottle".

"We are suppose to be encouraging reconciliation not going backwards," she said. "I think King Billy is just stupid; not funny at all."

A spokeswoman for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Victoria said: "Beer's brand of racist humour has no place in today's society."

"We are amazed that Crown Casino has booked him to do a show. We at ATSIC would ask that Crown seriously consider cancelling his show or risk offending Melbourne's Koori community, as well as many non-Koori."

"Members of ATSIC Victoria's elected arm will meet the Premier next week and the Cokebottle show at Crown will be raised."

A spokesman for the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission said her organisation would be sending representatives to monitor the comic's show.

Ethnic Community Council spokesman Laurence Aboukhater also condemned the show.

"We would hope the Casino management would not endorse such a performer whose actions seek to stereotype and marginalise our Koori brothers and sisters," she said.

"The appropriation of indigenous and ethnic cultures only demeans and disempowers them."

Spokeswoman for Victoria's Wurundjerri people Joy Murphy said she was "flattened" by Crown's decision to hire the comic.

"This kind of act just takes away your pride. It's offensive," she said.

"They will hire someone like him, but never some of our talented local indigenous performers."

Grant Hansen, head of the Songlines Music Aboriginal Corporation, said: "In this day and age it is totally inappropriate to have a white comic send up blackfellas by pretending to be one.

"All this does is reinforce negative stereotypes and I am really disappointed that Crown would provide a venue for him."

Comic Beers was unrepentant.

"I can not see why people would object," he said. "I have done my show everywhere - places like Darwin and Tamworth

"I have grown up with Aboriginal people; my grandson is part-Koori.

"King Billy Cokebottle is a cult character. A lot of Aborigines come to my shows."

Crown Casino spokesman Gary O'Neil said the complex hired many and varied performers.

"King Billy Cokebottle is not an act I would want to go and see," he said. "However, we are not in the business of censorship and if people do not like this act they do not have to go and see it.

"I would be happy to discuss the issue with anybody who objects to his appearance."