

The Advertiser

Ugly racism uproar at beachside hotel

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A FATHER of three says he is gobsmacked and shocked after being denied entry into a popular Semaphore hotel because of his skin colour.

Peter Miller Koncz said he and wife Kahlia were refused entry at the Palais Hotel on Saturday night because they are indigenous.

"When we were refused, I asked what was wrong and he (the security guard) said, 'Nah, not tonight brother â€¦' the manager told me not to let Aboriginals in tonight'," Mr Miller Koncz said.

"The security guard said there was a big fight of a group of Aboriginals there last week.

"There was a few non-indigenous people out the front of the pub who heard what was happening and they actually apologised to us." Palais owner Steve Karpluk denied there was any directive from management to deny people entry based on their race.

"We are looking into these allegations and we can assure you we take them very seriously," Mr Karpluk said in a statement yesterday.

"We would like to state that as a business and family-owned hotel, we categorically deny any allegations of racism and there has never been - or will there be - a directive from management to refuse any patron entry due to race." Mr Miller Koncz said he asked to speak to the on-duty manager, who was dismissive of the issue, and added to their poor treatment by staff.

"The manager was so rude. He denied what the security had said then told us to leave, otherwise we'd be removed from the premises," he said.

"My heart dropped and I was in shock after we left. My wife and kids often go there to have lunch and we were even considering having our wedding there a few years ago, that's how much we go to the place. Now we definitely won't be going back.

"A precedent has been set concerning this kind of behaviour with equal opportunities (action) taken against a hotel in Ceduna and I would be recommending the hotel association conduct cultural awareness training for all staff and security so this kind of behaviour doesn't happen in the future.

"We can't be treated as second-class citizens in our own country." Mr Miller Koncz expressed his disappointment over the issue on the Palais Hotel's Facebook page.

His post was commented on dozens of times before being removed by the pub yesterday morning.

Mr Miller Koncz said he had been advised to contact the Equal Opportunity Commission.

Taylor Power-Smith had a similar post hidden from the Facebook page about an incident on Friday night, when she and two family members were refused entry shortly before midnight.

"He (the security guard) denied us entry before we even got close to the doors, saying, 'Sorry, no entry tonight' and his reason was that there were only 60 people inside and closing soon," Ms Power-Smith told The Advertiser.

She said the bouncer then let "two non-indigenous" people through the doors and explained to her: "I'm letting you know there was a big indigenous fight here last weekend." "That made it clear why we were refused ... we weren't involved in it and didn't know anyone involved," she said.

"It was horrible. He made us feel guilty for something we had absolutely nothing to do with. We were all painted with the same brush and labelled and judged because of an event we had nothing to do with." Ms Power-Smith emailed her complaint to the pub yesterday and said she would be contacting the Equal Opportunity Commission.

"I will be exploring every avenue possible to make sure they are held accountable," she said.

It is understood the fight involved up to 40 people and broke out after the hotel closed on Sunday, November 27, at 2.30am.

A police spokeswoman said they had received reports the group was throwing bottles at each other, but they dispersed when patrols arrived and those remaining were asked to leave.

The spokeswoman said no arrests or reports had been made.