

Bookkeeper jailed for \$780k theft from Aboriginal organisations in Central Australia

By Tom Maddocks



PHOTO: Johannes Joubert was jailed for stealing about \$780,000.

An Alice Springs accountant who stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from Aboriginal organisations in Central Australia has been sentenced to nearly eight years in prison.

Johannes Joubert stole about \$780,000 over four years when he worked as a bookkeeper for local accounting firm Centre Accounting Services (CAS).

The 46-year-old attributed his offending to a pathological gambling addiction, the Supreme Court was told.

The court heard he transferred funds from his clients' bank accounts directly into his personal bank account.

He used almost 170 separate transactions to pilfer about \$550,000 from more than a dozen mostly not-for-profit Aboriginal organisations in remote Central Australia.

He also stole \$230,000 from a link-up service for family members of the Stolen Generation, which closed last year due to a misuse of Commonwealth funds and was audited over "compliance issues".

The Central Australian Stolen Generations and Families Aboriginal Corporation had provided two programs — a social and emotional wellbeing link-up service and a primary healthcare program.

"Aboriginal people were deprived of benefit," Justice Peter Barr said in sentencing.

Business partner left to rebuild reputation

In referring to the Northern Territory indictment, Justice Barr said technically the Aboriginal organisations were the victims but ultimately the real victim was CAS, which had closed as a result.

Justice Barr said there had been "...a level of spite and vindictiveness from Joubert" towards his business partner at the time, Gwen Gouveia.

Ms Gouveia said his deception had taken a toll on her professionally and personally and she was trying to rebuild her business reputation.

"Words cannot describe what it has done to me, my family, my partner," Ms Gouveia said, who was the managing director of CAS.

Ms Gouveia said in her victim impact statement that she had suffered severe stress and anxiety, and a decline in health.

"It's been a horrific experience, one I didn't want to have, one I never anticipated and it certainly will continue to have an impact on me for a few years to come but I'm just glad it's come this far," she said.

"I'm glad that it's over, and I guess that gives me some closure. But the sentencing wasn't in my hands, it was in the hands of the courts and I have to put my faith and trust in that."

Joubert was ordered repay \$182,000 to Ms Gouveia and about \$230,000 to the Commonwealth.

Joubert was convicted of several charges of stealing and received a total effective sentence of seven years and six months, with a non-parole period of three years and nine months.

He had already served about nine months.