

Former Indigenous Land Council chair speaks out over pressure on board

Reporter: Natasha Robinson
ABC
26 April 2016

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: The former chair of the Indigenous Land Corporation* is accusing Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion of attempting to pressure the land fund's independent board. The ILC is a \$3 billion Indigenous land fund and is supposed to generate profits on behalf of ordinary Aboriginal people.

But bitter conflicts have wracked the organisation in recent years. Now, former chair Dawn Casey has responded to reports Senator Scullion asked for changes to the ILC's annual report, which she drafted.

Natasha Robinson reports.

NATASHA ROBINSON: As ILC chair, Dawn Casey was in constant battle with Senator Nigel Scullion. In retirement, she's still fighting.

DAWN CASEY: He didn't want that statement in the annual report, he wanted it gotten rid of.

NATASHA ROBINSON: That statement is a summary of the events surrounding the purchase of the Voyages Ayers Rock resort by the ILC for \$300 million in 2010.

DAWN CASEY: Clearly the Minister seems very concerned about the previous ILC board raising these issues around the acquisition of Ayers Rock.

NATASHA ROBINSON: Dr Casey's campaign to find out why the ILC paid so much for the Voyages Ayers Rock resort has seen her clash repeatedly with Senator Scullion, first as chairwoman of Indigenous Business Australia and then as chair of the ILC.

NATASHA ROBINSON: Indigenous leaders have expressed anger in the past at her treatment.

PATRICK DODSON: It's extraordinary. You have one of the most confident, capable and genuinely passionate person about Aboriginal affairs but with a very level head being dealt with in a very unsavoury manner.

NATASHA ROBINSON: Patrick Dodson, now a Labor Senate candidate, spoke out when Senator Scullion failed to renew Dr Casey's tenure as head of the IBA.

Now, the battle has taken another dramatic turn.

Since Dr Casey's term at the helm of the ILC ended in October last year, she's been lodging FOI requests.

NATASHA ROBINSON: What do these documents that have been released under Freedom of Information show?

DAWN CASEY: It shows that the Minister requested and demanded that there be a repudiation of my overview statement in the annual report.

I've never known before to have a demand that you change it or else I won't table it.

NATASHA ROBINSON: In a statement, Senator Scullion flatly denies he requested the board change its report.

SENATOR SCULLION'S STATEMENT: I did not direct the ILC to make changes to the report. Nor do I have the authority to do so.

What I did was ask the ILC board to consider responding to factual inaccuracies in the statement from the former chair contained in the annual report.

NATASHA ROBINSON: The foreword to the annual report drafted by Dr Casey stated that the ILC board had requested an inquiry into the acquisition of the Voyages resort.

It was an inquiry Senator Scullion has long refused to undertake.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert has tried to get to the bottom of the matter in Senate Estimates hearings.

RACHEL SIEWERT: It begs question, why - why is the Government so desperate to take out any reference to an inquiry into the Ayers rock purchase and to not continue looking into that?

MICHAEL BRISENDEN: Senator Rachel Siewert ending that report by Natasha Robinson.