

The Sun-Herald

Australia Post failed to stop campaign of racist abuse, says employee

By Rory Callinan
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Australia Post boasts it has a tolerant and diverse workplace and is "committed to continuing our legacy of providing real employment and careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders".

But the federal government-owned business has allegedly taken months to deal with claims of racism in a northern NSW depot involving a senior employee reportedly telling an Indigenous worker that "black people" should be "strung up and shot".

The dispute comes despite the corporation being heavily criticised in a Federal Court judgment last year for failing to act on racial complaints where a Sri Lankan worker was called "a black bastard".

In the latest incident, an Indigenous staffer in NSW has alleged he was subjected to a long-running campaign of racial harassment which was ignored by management.

He said he became so frustrated he used his mobile phone to record a senior staffer who was responsible for the racist taunts. It is also alleged that a manager was present but did not intervene.

The phone recording allegedly captured the senior staffer saying that: "All black people should be hung up by the throat and shot, make sure they're swinging so it's harder to shoot them."

The employee said the harassment had been going on for months at the post office, but management had taken no action, according to documents sighted by Fairfax Media.

An Australia Post spokeswoman this week confirmed the matter had "taken longer than expected to fully investigate". She said this was because they had only been able to speak to the complainant this week.

The spokeswoman said an employee had now been stood down given the serious nature of the claims and the evidence presented.

In December last year a customer heard some of the racist comments and sent an official letter of complaint to the regional manager, the complainant has alleged. The Indigenous worker was then called in while he was on leave in January or February and was approached by the alleged perpetrator and accused of making the complaint.

In late February the situation exploded when the alleged perpetrator and the victim ended up in a wrestling match outside the post office after the Indigenous employee complained about the other employee's smoking.

Top level human resources managers flew to northern NSW to deal with the allegations last week. But when they played the audio tape they allegedly told the shocked Indigenous employee that he could not use the recording in court. It is also understood they also said they did not know the complainant was Indigenous.

Australia Post did not respond to questions put to it by Fairfax Media about this matter and whether it was an appropriate way to respond to a complainant.

The Australia Post spokeswoman did say that while the complainant had not formally identified himself as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander "this is completely irrelevant to our investigations".

The spokeswoman said all employees and contractors must adhere to the corporation's harassment, discrimination and bullying policy.

She said: "We will take all necessary disciplinary action, including termination if this policy is breached."