

Key indigenous adviser's organisation under a cloud



Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Susan Murphy.

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- Andrew Burrell

A key member of Malcolm Turnbull's new six-person indigenous advisory council runs an Aboriginal body in Western Australia found to have committed a string of governance breaches, including credit cards irregularities, unreconciled bank accounts and poor record-keeping.

The federal indigenous regulator issued a compliance notice this month against the Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation on 12 grounds after an examination of its books by an independent financial examiner.

The chief executive of the Kimberley-based organisation is Susan Murphy, who was appointed as a member of the Prime Minister's "refreshed" Indigenous Advisory Council two months ago while the examination of WNAC's affairs was under way.

Ms Murphy, who has led WNAC since 2013, did not respond to requests for comment yesterday.

The organisation is the biggest community development provider for remote Aboriginal communities in the West Kimberley and provides support to communities including in governance, business development and employment and training.

According to WNAC's financial accounts, the body received \$4.16 million in government grants in 2016 and has net assets of \$4.73m.

In a compliance notice on April 4, the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations (ORIC) said WNAC had issued a corporation credit card to an external consultant who was not an employee. "The issuing of the card to the - consultant appeared to have been made without the knowledge of WNAC's board of directors, or without knowledge of the possible implications," it said.

"The examiners are of the view that the issuing of the credit card to the external consultant is an unusual practice and undesirable to the corporation."

The examiners also reported to ORIC that WNAC had not reconciled two of its 13 bank accounts as at September 30 last year and one reconciliation had resulted in a discrepancy of more than \$7000.

It was also alleged that WNAC had kept inadequate employment records. A review of staff files found no records of each employee's superannuation details and, in some instances, their tax declaration forms.

In other alleged breaches, WNAC did not keep a register of members or former members, as required under the act.

"The corporation's chief executive officer advised the examiners that a break-in occurred some time ago and since then a number of the corporation's documents had been archived," the notice said. "The CEO suggested that the register of members may have been archived."

There is no suggestion Ms Murphy had any knowledge of any wrongdoing.

The group's notices of annual general meetings in 2014 and 2015 did not include all required information, ORIC said. The corporation also allegedly failed to keep adequate minutes of its AGMs.

The examiners reported that directors were not adequately monitoring WNAC's financial position and performance. (Ms Murphy is not listed as a director of the group.)

ORIC has given WNAC a series of deadlines to improve its performance, including the termination of credit cards issued to external consultants who are not directors or employees.

A spokesman for Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion could not be reached for comment.

Ms Murphy joined WNAC after gaining experience working across three regions and 27 remote Aboriginal communities in WA.