

## Indigenous row over Games mascot



Wesley Aird. Picture: Jack Tran

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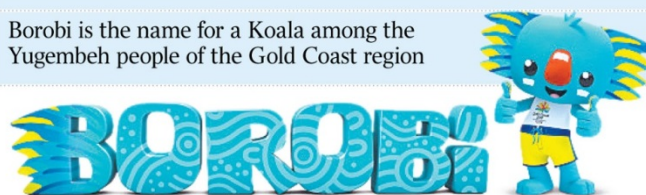
The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games' has been hit with legal action over the use of a local indigenous name and designs for its blue koala mascot, Borobi, in a move that has split the Aboriginal community.

Wesley Aird, a former indigenous adviser to John Howard, alleges the "Borobi caricature" is disrespectful to the Yugembeh people and is demanding a "commercial settlement" to withdraw opposition to the use and trademark of the mascot.

Mr Aird, sole director of a Yugembeh cultural heritage body, has accused Games' organisers of failing to properly consult about hosting sporting events next year on traditional Aboriginal country.

Koala is an Aboriginal name that means "no water" and has many derivations among different language groups including Kooelwong, Colo, Coloo, Coola, Colah, koobor, Koolah and Kaola

Borobi is the name for a Koala among the Yugembeh people of the Gold Coast region



The legal action by Mr Aird, who was on the panel of the 2014 McClure review of Australia's welfare payment system, has been attacked by some Yugembeh members and elders as unrepresentative of broader indigenous support for the Commonwealth Games.

Mr Aird has declined to publicly comment about the legal action or his claims to Games organisers that he has statements from senior members of the Yugembeh opposing the use of the Borobi mascot.

It is understood Mr Aird, through cultural heritage company Jabree, is seeking licensing fees and a percentage of profits from merchandising the blue koala for the benefit of the indigenous community.

Yugembeh elder Mary Graham, a lecturer at the University of Queensland, yesterday told *The Weekend Australian* Mr Aird was not representative of the majority of Yugembeh people.

A member of an elders' advisory group to the 2018 Commonwealth Games, Ms Graham said Mr Aird had not fully consulted with other Yugembeh representatives to discuss his action or produce the statements of opposition to the mascot.



*The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games mascot Borobi the Koala. Picture: David Clark*

She said she believed the majority of the Yugembeh language group — comprising about six clans — supported the Borobi name and design. “We are very proud of it,” she said. “This is an international event being held on our land and we saw it as a great opportunity to show the world our culture and language.

“The Games people have consulted us from the beginning; there were lots of meetings open to everyone, and we all liked it.”

Ms Graham said decision-making in traditional culture was about consensus and if there was widespread dissent over the mascot, that would have been raised.

“Cultural heritage and language is not owned by one person but by all the people.”

Commonwealth Games chairman Peter Beattie yesterday said he was aware of Mr Aird’s action, but the former Queensland premier dismissed the claims that Gold Coast indigenous people had not been properly consulted. Mr Beattie said organisers had established two advisory groups — the Yugembeh Elders Advisory Group and the Indigenous Working Group — to consult on the Games preparations.

“We have bent over backwards and worked very closely with the Yugembeh people all the way along,” he said. “The Commonwealth Games is an opportunity to promote indigenous culture to the world, particularly that of the Yugembeh people.”

Mr Beattie said it was inevitable that “some won’t agree with the majority,” but the organisers had followed correct procedures in getting approval for naming the mascot and using traditional land.

“We will go through the appropriate process and any claims will be dealt with in the appropriate legal way.”

Mr Aird established Jabree as a cultural heritage body in 2010 while he was one of several applicants for a native title claim on the Gold Coast.

Documents show that in 2013, a meeting of the Gold Coast Native Title Group voted against Jabree as its cultural heritage company. However, Mr Aird disputed the legality of the action, and Jabree remains a registered cultural heritage body in - Queensland.