

Netball mum Kelly Howard charged over \$299k theft from Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation

By Alicia Thomas and Sarah Danckert
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A decorated Bungaree netballer accused of defrauding the Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation of hundreds of thousands of dollars has been charged.

As reported in The Ballarat Courier, accountant Kelly Howard, 43, appeared briefly before the Ballarat Magistrates' Court on Monday to face a single charge of theft of almost \$300,000 from the Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation. The matter was set down for a filing hearing before magistrate Frank Jones.



Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation manages Aboriginal heritage values and culture within Wadawurrung country. Photo: Ballarat Courier

The court heard Howard was charged by Ballarat CIU detectives on January 10.

Howard's lawyer, Simon Gillespie-Jones, told Mr Jones his client had moved from the Ballarat region and wanted the matters transferred to Echuca.

But Mr Jones said the application would need to be made at the next court appearance before an Office of Public Prosecutions Victoria prosecutor.

Howard will return to court on April 13 for committal mention where it is likely an application to have the matter transferred to another region will be heard.

Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation accused its former bookkeeper Kelly Howard in a civil suit filed in the Supreme Court of Victoria last year of defrauding the organisation of more than \$475,000 over six years.

Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation manages Aboriginal heritage values and culture within Wadawurrung country - a stretch of land that takes in Ballarat, Melton, Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula.



B Grade Netball Best and Fairest Winner Kelly Howard. Photo: Ballarat Courier

Ms Howard, a once relied-upon accountant, is accused of funnelling the hundreds of thousands of dollars from Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation to fund personal purchases.

Her alleged spending spree on the indigenous corporation's dime included but was not limited to landscaping works for her husband, Brad Howard, interactive comedy dinners by Bare Elements - the troupe behind A Dinner to Die For - and 20 netball dresses.

The accusations came after an audit found scores of payments to Ms Howard's company. The audit was part of a wider investigation by the federal government regulator of indigenous corporations, the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations.

The accusations against Howard came after a prolonged period of poor financial management and lax governance that sparked an intervention by ORIC and an examination of members of the corporation by ORIC and external auditors at Grant Thornton.

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