

Mabunji Aboriginal corporation audit reveals 'financial irregularities', ORIC says

By Felicity James

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PHOTO: Alison Doyle, acting chief executive of the Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation in the Northern Territory's gulf country. (Supplied: Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation)

An audit of an Aboriginal corporation in the Northern Territory's gulf country has revealed its chief executive and human resources manager received almost \$200,000 in excessive time-off-in-lieu payments.

Key points:

- In August, Borroloola residents and sacked Mabunji CEO demand investigation into corporation
- ORIC audit reveals more than \$186,000 in excessive time-off-in-lieu payments
- TOIL payments received by the CEO and HR manager account for 93 per cent of all TOIL paid last financial year
- Mabunji has until end of January to report on its TOIL policy, employment contracts and other irregularities

The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) sent a notice to the Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation last week outlining the findings of the audit.

"I suspect on reasonable grounds that there are financial irregularities and other irregularities in the affairs of the corporation," ORIC Registrar delegate Peter Armstrong said in the notice.

ORIC's notice shows the corporation's chief executive and human resources manager have received more than \$186,000 in time-off-in-lieu (TOIL) payments since the start of last financial year, on top of their salaries.

The TOIL payments were not approved and, in the case of the chief executive, were equivalent to 187 days last financial year, according to the notice.

"The TOIL payments made to the chief executive officer/corporate services manager and the HR manager would appear to be excessive when compared to TOIL payments made to other management staff, and when compared to their annual salary," the notice said.

The notice states that Mabunji's policies and procedures do not provide for staff TOIL payments and that overtime must have approval.

The TOIL payments received by the chief executive and the HR manager account for 93 per cent of all TOIL paid by the corporation last financial year, according to the notice.

Mabunji's former chief executive Michael Gravener was sacked by the corporation in August after about two months in the job.

Alison Doyle — named in ORIC's notice — was Mabunji's chief executive prior to Mr Gravener's appointment and is now the acting chief executive.

Mabunji has been under the spotlight for months, with residents and Mr Gravener demanding transparency and an investigation into the corporation.

Net loss due to \$760k employee expenses

In August, community members protested outside Mabunji's office in Borroloola, prompted by the corporation's decision to sack Mr Gravener.



PHOTO: "He got a lot of things cleaned up," says Jack Green (right) about the sacked CEO. (Supplied: Tahnee Mawson)

Senior community member Jack Green said Mr Gravener had shown genuine concern about community housing issues and the organisation's governance.

"He's been out there, he's been out in this community and he got a lot of things cleaned up," he said.

ORIC's notice also said Mabunji has failed to monitor its financial position and that it had set up a "management committee", which can make decisions on behalf of directors without their approval.

The corporation recorded a net loss of more than \$840,000 last financial year, despite a surplus of almost \$700,000 the previous year.

"The decline between 2014 and 2015 is largely contributed to an increase in employee expenses of \$760,000, an increase in operating expenses of \$230,000 and a decline in grant income of approximately \$880,000," the notice said.

Mabunji has until mid-February to report on its TOIL policy, employment contracts, non-compliance with the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act and other irregularities.

After a request from Mabunji, ORIC granted an extension of time from the initial end-of-January deadline.