

## Warren Mundine rift puts indigenous advisory council in limbo



*Warren Mundine says that the board members' terms had not been extended and their future involvement with the council hung in the balance.*

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- Emily Ritchie

A rift between Malcolm Turnbull and Warren Mundine has led to a shake-up of the Prime Minister's peak indigenous advisory body, which is now in limbo.

The high-profile Aboriginal leader, who in December said Mr Turnbull had temporarily stopped speaking to him, said he had been told his role, and that of the nine other members of the Indigenous Advisory Council, had been dissolved after their terms expired.

Two other members of the board, whose positions are now unclear, last night also criticised Mr Turnbull for being out of touch with indigenous affairs.

Council member Josephine Cashman blasted the Turnbull government for "not having its finger on the pulse" of indigenous affairs policy, saying that while she had been expecting the body to be wound up, she had been told nothing.

"As far as I know it was only extended until the end of January but I've heard nothing ... I can only assume it's finished," said Ms Cashman, a Worimi woman who chairs the council's safe communities committee dealing with the critical issue of indigenous domestic violence.

Cape York leader Richie Ah Mat, a member of the advisory council since its inception under former prime minister Tony Abbott in 2013, told *The Australian*: “I don’t think the chief, the PM, was getting the message”.

Mr Ah Mat said there had been silence from the Prime Minister’s office since the council delivered him its final report for 2016 in December.

“We had not heard back about anything, about the report or what was happening with the council,” he said. “I knew Mundine had been extended to February; we didn’t know about the rest of the council. I haven’t been informed.”

Mr Mundine told Sky News last night that the board members’ terms had not been extended and their future involvement with the council hung in the balance. “As our term was put until the 31st of January, that’s now gone and so we’re out of a job,” he said.

“The move forward now is for the Prime Minister to work through the cabinet process to decide what he’s going to do.”

The news comes on the eve of tomorrow’s release of an Australian National Audit Office review of the government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding policy, which is expected to be critical of how Mr Abbott’s signature policy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs was implemented. It is also only days from the delivery of the Prime Minister’s annual Closing the Gap report into indigenous disadvantage.

A spokeswoman from Mr Turnbull’s office said the Prime Minister was “committed to the continuation of the Indigenous Advisory Council”.