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Columnist For The Australian Tells Cabinet Minister To 'F*ck Off'

By Chris Graham



Mike Carlton came under fire for telling a reader to 'f*ck off' after a week of strident abuse. Noel Pearson managed that feat in minutes. And to a cabinet minister no less.

Chris Graham reports.

Noel Pearson, a long-standing columnist with The Australian newspaper and the publication's reigning 'Australian of the Year' award winner has told an Abbott Government cabinet minister to 'f*ck off' and 'get the f*ck out of our campsite' during a heated exchange at an iconic Aboriginal festival in the Northern Territory.

The altercation occurred shortly after Pearson and a group of Aboriginal leaders delivered a presentation on a trial Aboriginal governance model to hundreds of people at the Garma Festival, a cultural event staged over the weekend in Arnhem Land.

Nigel Scullion, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, had attended the presentation and was walking past the campsite where Pearson and his group were staying. Witnesses say Scullion was urged to join the group.

The Minister was asked by Pearson for his views on the Empowered Communities model – Scullion, as minister, has responsibility for whether or not the pilot project eventually gets funded (it was provided \$5 million by the previous Labor government to write a report on the model).

Witnesses, all of whom requested anonymity, report that Scullion expressed some reservations about the strategy, and noted that he was still waiting on the group's report.

One witness, who asked not to be named, told New Matilda that "Pearson's face completely changed", before he delivered a tirade of abuse.

“Scullion goes to the campsite and declares ‘I want to be up front about this’ and said he was unconvinced around the merits of the Empowered Communities concept,” a witness told New Matilda.

“Pearson expressed disappointment and said he believed they’d spent time briefing him and bureaucrats on the worth of the program, and noted that the [previous] government had already committed \$5 million to the project.

“Scullion maintained that he still wasn’t convinced, and that’s when Pearson lost it.

“His face changed. I mean, it just completely changed.

“He said words to the affect of ‘He was sick and f**king tired, despite their best efforts, to brief f**king public servants and politicians, and yet they are still ill-informed regarding [Empowered Communities]’.

“He used the words ‘f**k off’ and ‘f**k’ quite a few times – there were a lot of f-bombs - and then he told Scullion words to the affect of ‘Get the f**k out of our campsite.’”

New Matilda understands the altercation occurred in front of around 50 people. Witnesses say Scullion stood up to Pearson, told him to calm down, and then left.

A spokesperson for Mr Pearson told New Matilda he was unavailable for comment.

New Matilda was also unsuccessful in gaining comment from Minister Scullion’s office, and from Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships, which hosted the group at Garma and which is guiding the Empowered Communities project.

Editor of The Australian, Clive Mathieson also declined to weigh into the issue, telling New Matilda it was “... entirely a matter for Mr Pearson.”

Ironically, it’s The Australian that has played a major part in lifting Pearson’s profile. Pearson has been a long-standing columnist with the publication, and is still listed on the site as an opinion writer. The Australian has awarded Pearson its ‘Australian of The Year’ honour on several occasions, including in 2014.

That honour was bestowed despite The Australian earlier publishing an explosive story revealing lengthy details about Pearson’s occasionally abusive exchanges, which included calling bureaucrats “white c*nts”, throwing water in the face of a journalist who asked him a question he didn’t like, and regularly abusing politicians and journalists.