



STRONG MESSAGE SENT AT THE END OF BUNURONG ADMINISTRATION

The Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, Mr Anthony Beven, has announced that the special administration at Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation) will end today.

The corporation, which is based in Frankston Heights, Victoria, was established in 2002 to represent and manage the native title interests of the Bunurong people. Mr Alan Eldridge from Australian Indigenous Business Services (AIBS) was appointed by the Registrar as the special administrator on 28 January 2014.

‘This special administration has proven to be more difficult than was first expected,’ said Mr Beven. ‘The decision to place the corporation under special administration has been met with resistance from some people from day one.’

Even with such obvious indicators as no annual general meeting (AGM) for 10 years, one directors’ meeting in five years, woeful record keeping, financial irregularities, non-payment of tax and possible insolvency—a number of former members were in fierce denial of any governance problems at the corporation. Mr Eldridge and the Registrar’s office faced a barrage of complaints, requests for internal reviews and constant phone calls from those seeking to maintain the status quo.

A special administrator is only appointed by the Registrar as a last resort. In most cases an appointment is made after agreement is reached with the corporation’s directors. The role of the special administrator is to rectify problems at a corporation and return it to its members as soon as possible, usually within six months, at no cost to the corporation.

‘If ever a corporation required external assistance to get back on track it was the Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation),’ Mr Beven said. ‘It is disappointing that some people sought to undermine the special administrator, rather than working constructively with him for the betterment of the corporation.’

Throughout the special administration Mr Eldridge remained focussed on reforming the corporation. He held the corporation’s first AGM in ten years, appointed a new general manager and this week held a meeting of the new directors. He reconstructed the corporation’s financial and other records and negotiated a repayment plan to acquit a long-standing debt to the Australian Tax Office (ATO).

The special administrator also facilitated complaints to the Registrar, the ATO and police about the conduct of some former directors and staff of the corporation.

The corporation has paid its bills, is solvent and up to date with all its legal requirements but, most importantly, it is protecting the culture and heritage of the Bunurong people.

From the outset Mr Eldridge and the Registrar took the position that poor governance, accountability and transparency would no longer be tolerated at the Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation). The corporation is now strong again and well run. Bunurong



people who have long been excluded from having a say in the running of their corporation have been warmly welcomed back to the corporation.

Some former members recently resigned from the Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation) and established a new entity with the aim of taking over the cultural and heritage role of the corporation. Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation) is not in any way associated with the new entity and Mr Eldridge has advised third parties that they should continue to deal with the Bunurong Land Council (Aboriginal Corporation) on all cultural and heritage matters.

‘This has been one of our most challenging special administrations,’ said Mr Beven. ‘I commend Mr Eldridge for completing his job in very difficult circumstances and standing up for good governance and the Bunurong people.’

The Registrar assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build strong corporations, including through the appointment of special administrators. Examples of action taken by the Registrar in recent years are available on the Registrar’s website, www.oric.gov.au.

Background:

For previous information on this matter see the Registrar’s media release ORIC MR1314-24 available at www.oric.gov.au.

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