

NEW-LOOK TRAVEL+LUXURY 32-PAGE MAG OUT THIS SATURDAY

INDIGENOUS LAW GROUP ACCUSED

Workers 'sacked if graft exposed'

EXCLUSIVE

ELLIE DUDLEY
LEGAL AFFAIRS
CORRESPONDENT

Senior staff at Australia's largest Indigenous legal service have been accused of sacking employees who become aware of alleged corruption plaguing the organisation, as other disgruntled workers quit.

The allegations follow claims of corruption, fraud, bullying and drug use within the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, including claims that former chief executive Priscilla Atkins, chief financial officer Madhur Evans and chair Colleen Rosas misused thousands of dollars in taxpayer funds.

Ms Atkins is suing NAAJA for unfair dismissal, claiming she was sacked after making numerous corruption allegations against Ms

dent Commission Against Corruption. When the accountant returned to work, his office had been placed "directly outside the CFO office which (sic) his computer screen facing the CFO office so she can watch what he is doing on the computer," Ms Atkins wrote in the email, which was tendered to the Federal Court.

Ms Atkins alleged two other accountants were suspended because they were aware of the alleged misconduct. Both accountants have since provided documents to the NT ICAC for review, she said.

A cleaner was sacked after catching Ms Evans on Ms Atkins' computer after hours and without permission, Ms Atkins claimed, and her executive assistant was fired due to an alleged criminal history, of which no details were provided.

Ms Atkins also claimed NAAJA's executive services coordinator, who handled some salary matters, was suspended in December 2022. The suspension came after the board launched an investigation into Ms Atkins' salary following the forgery allegations.

Many staff members, including solicitors and administrative workers, had resigned over the past year, Ms Atkins claimed, and others have called her in tears.

"Staff are calling me daily crying and are stressed they are being threatened if they speak to anyone about NAAJA they will be sacked," Ms Atkins wrote in the email.

"The CFO is monitoring their computers and work phones. They are now leaving the office and calling on their mobile phones."

Ms Atkins alleged the board hired family members and friends, and refused to publicly advertise positions.

"Staff have been advised that all recruitment and interviews will be conducted by the NAAJA board," her email reads, adding that she had reported the matter to the NT ICAC, NT Attorney-General's office, the federal Attorney-General's office, ASIC and NIAA. "I am appalled that the NAAJA Board and CFO are treating taxpayers' money like it is their own and to date they are getting away with it. The public would be disgusted that an Aboriginal organisation is being run by an Aboriginal board who are corrupt," she wrote.

'Staff are calling me daily crying and are stressed they are being threatened'

PRISCILLA ATKINS
FORMER NAAJA CHIEF
EXECUTIVE

Evans, including that she made a discreet payment to Ms Rosas of \$20,000.

NAAJA denies allegations that Ms Evans and Ms Rosas engaged in deceptive conduct, and claims Ms Atkins was fired for forging Ms Rosas' signature on her contract extension, securing her position as CEO - and its \$350,000 salary - for a further five years.

NAAJA has also alleged Ms Atkins used company funds to buy cars, flights, clothes and art.

Ms Atkins denies all allegations of misconduct.

More than 30 of 200 NAAJA staff members have been sacked or resigned since November last year, according to an email from Ms Atkins to Namatjira MP William Yan.

Ms Atkins alleged one accountant, who was aware of alleged misconduct by Ms Evans and Ms Rosas, was suspended for sending NAAJA documents to his personal email, and then forwarding them to the NT Indepen-

Breastmilk study finds formula for health



Doctor Hannah Pennicott, with her three-month-old son Hubert on Wednesday, knows the benefits of breastfeeding

EXCLUSIVE

JOANNA PANAGOPOULOS

A new study on the composition of breastmilk could be the key to explaining its remarkable benefits for infants compared to other animal milks or formula, paving the way for the development of supplements to improve the long-term health of both breastfed and bottle-fed babies.

A huge team of Australian researchers analysed hundreds of human milk samples and discovered a much higher number of other lipids in breastmilk than in animal milks like goat milk and instant formulas.

Ether lipids, which are a unique class of fats, are known to have strong cardio-protective properties, which could be the reason breastfed infants have increased protection from disease risks when compared to formula-fed babies. It was previously not known why this was the case.

The study, published in *Frontiers in Nutrition*, also found that ether lipid intake by exclusively breastfed infants was 200-fold higher than that of exclusively formula-fed infants.

"They concluded that increasing lipids in a mother's diet could increase the number of ether lipids in breastmilk and therefore in the baby's circulatory system."

Early-life lipid metabolism has been linked to the development of chronic diseases such as obesity and type 2 diabetes later in life.

"It suggests that maybe the lack of exposure to specific human milk lipids could contribute to increased disease risk in babies," lead researcher Alexandra George from Melbourne's Baker Institute said.

The scientists have already started working on the development of dietary supplements that could be given to breastfeeding mothers to boost their lipids levels and added to formulas.

"We want to know how can all babies have the best start at a healthy life," Dr George said.

"We know these specific lipids exist in human milk (but) not really in animal milk or infant formula, so how can we make sure every baby can get them? By supplementing mums to make sure they have higher lipids in milk, and by supplementing infants earlier in life."

Doctor and young mother Hannah Pennicott understood the benefits of breastfeeding and was keen to breastfeed her baby but didn't realise how difficult it would be for her.

"I knew about the scientific benefits of breastfeeding ... but I don't think it helped me at all in terms of being a mum who could breastfeed," the 32-year-old said.

Feeding was extremely painful for the first six weeks after she gave birth to her first child Hubert.

She felt a lot of guilt around why it wouldn't take and it wasn't the bonding experience she imagined it to be.

She persevered because Hubert was gaining weight. "He was

Cancer team follows the path of fluoro drugs

EXCLUSIVE

JAMES DOWLING

Fluorescent drugs could be used to locate brain cancers, and help surgeons remove them, an Australian study has found.

A team led by researcher Sarah Best, of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, has studied low-grade glioma (LGG) cancers and found a drug could travel down certain pathways in the brain, showing the full mass and shape of the tumour.

"Glioblastoma patients, when they undergo neurosurgery, receive a drink colloquially known as the 'pink drink', which is a drug called 5-ALA," Dr Best said.

"That actually interacts with the metabolism of the glioblastoma tumour cells and it makes them fluoresce pink during the surgery."

Dr Best and her team are working to identify the pathways necessary for the drug by mapping where various cells are in a tissue sample.

Dr Best's lab is the first at WEHI to feature three head researchers, as she's accompanied by data scientist Saskia Freytag, and oncologist Jim Whittle of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

The study was funded in part by the Cancer Council, which marks cancer awareness

Daffodil Day on Thursday. Last year Daffodil Day raised about \$2.5m for research.

Diane Dunn knows the trauma of brain cancer only too well, having been diagnosed in 2016.

"While my diagnosis alone hasn't stopped me working, it's the circumstances of the diagnosis," said Ms Dunn, who lives on the outskirts of Geelong.

"It's a lot of uncertainty in the long term, wondering when this progression will happen. There's never been much doubt about that, everyone has been clear with me that this is a terminal illness."

She is frustrated at being unable to plan long-term.

"The inability to plan your future is as debilitating as the disease itself is," she said. "In the longer term support drops off, there's a certain amount of carer and caring fatigue ... it's just an inevitability."

getting lots of benefit, I definitely wasn't," she said. After seeing a specialist it became easier and she now enjoys feeding.

"I have a lot of friends who had babies at a similar time, and breastfeeding didn't work out for them. They tried lots of things as well. You can't always do it and sometimes you need to have formula, and that's OK," she said.

"The aim with formula is to get as close to breastmilk as possible, so anything that helps the science behind formula is beneficial."



Diane Dunn was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2016

"We welcome the court's decision," a spokesman for Mercedes-Benz Australia said. "Our focus continues to be on delivering luxury, high-performance cars for our valued customers around Australia."

The court battle was triggered when the carmaker moved to an agency model whereby dealers no longer purchased cars from Mercedes-Benz to resell to consumers. Instead, Mercedes-Benz retained ownership of the vehicles, which dealers were to sell for a fixed price in exchange for a commission. The dealers claimed their businesses would be greatly damaged by the new model and that they weren't properly consulted over it or adequately compensated.

Their lawyers told the court Mercedes-Benz had engaged in an "unconscionable taking of property" when it switched to an agency model as the dealers had invested in their businesses and built up goodwill, but that customer equity was snatched away by the carmaker when its business model was changed.

Justice Beach found some of the car dealers' claims to be exaggerated, although he also had some criticism for Mercedes-Benz and the way it treated its dealers as it prepared to present to them a completely new model by which they would sell Mercedes-Benz cars in their showrooms and dealerships.

However, Justice Beach ruled that the applicants in the trial, the car dealers, did not prove that Mercedes-Benz acted in an unconscionable manner.

"But none of this conduct together with the other conduct and circumstances makes out the applicants' statutory unconscionable conduct case," he said in his ruling.

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Corruption report on Berejiklian 'didn't take too long'

STEPHEN RICE
NSW EDITOR

The NSW corruption watchdog commissioner who presided over the three-year investigation into former premier Gladys Berejiklian has been cleared of claims she took too long to finalise her report.

ICAC Inspector Gail Furness found that the time taken by Commissioner Ruth McColl - who was paid more than \$1.1m to complete the investigation - did not amount to maladministration.

In a report to parliament released on Wednesday, Ms Furness acknowledged the devastating consequences of the delay in producing the report, which found

that Ms Berejiklian had engaged in serious corrupt conduct by breaching the public trust and failing to report her then-lover, Liberal MP Daryl Maguire, to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

"The impact was enormous," Ms Furness wrote. "On 1 October, 2021, the premier resigned because she could not predict how long it would take the commission to complete the investigation."

It would be another year and eight months before that occurred, she noted. "The reputation of many people continued to be affected over the months taken to complete the report and furnish it to parliament."

The inspector of the ICAC has

the power to handle complaints into whether the watchdog has abused its power or committed misconduct.

In June, Premier Chris Minns told 2GB radio that ICAC had taken "too long" to deliver its report.

Margaret Cunneen SC, who was wrongly accused by ICAC of perverting the course of justice in a case later overturned by the High Court, attacked the "terrible" delay. "It can't take this long to work out if Ms Berejiklian did something wrong," she said.

"Why has she had to wait so long? As someone who's been touched by ICAC ... it's really quite inhumane."

Ms Furness said the evidence

showed that all those involved at ICAC "were, within available resources, attentive to the work, diligent and acted in good faith."

"Balancing the impact with the complexity, importance and resources available, I am satisfied that the time taken to report to parliament on Operation Keppel does not amount to maladministration because while the issue is serious, it was not unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory," Ms Furness found.

"This was necessary delay and was not undue delay."

"Nevertheless, the commission cannot expect to meet its key performance indicators if it continues to work in the same way."

Invitation to submit Tender: 2023 - 12ST

Alice Springs Town Council invites tenders for

RESURFACING OUTDOOR NETBALL COURTS AND OTHER ANCILLARY WORKS

Tender documents available from www.tenderlink.com/astc or the Civic Centre, 93 Todd Street, from Thursday 31 August 2023.

Responses must be lodged with Tenderlink, or deposited in the Civic Centre Tender Box, by 3pm (ACST), Thursday 21 September 2023.

For further information, contact the Project Coordinator on asts@astc.nt.gov.au or (08) 08 8950 0520 or 0490 015 998.

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