

White hands raid the honey pot

by Debra Jopson and Joel Gibson
Wednesday, 22 August, 2007
Sydney Morning Herald

❑ THE federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, has overridden an Aboriginal advisory committee entrusted with the care of royalties paid by mining companies to operate on black land, pledging \$4 million to Alice Springs Town Council towards an indoor aquatic centre for the general public.

The Mayor of Alice Springs, Fran Kilgariff, confirmed that Brough told her during a visit last month that he had approved the funds to be paid out of the Aboriginals Benefit Account, which by law must be used in the interests of Northern Territory indigenous people.

This is a pot of money that for years the Federal Government has counted as part of its indigenous spending even though it does not have to contribute one cent, a Herald investigation has found.

The all-Aboriginal committee set up to advise Brough on how the money should be distributed voted in May not to approve funding for the aquatic centre "based on the lack of measurable benefit to indigenous people", minutes obtained by the Herald show.

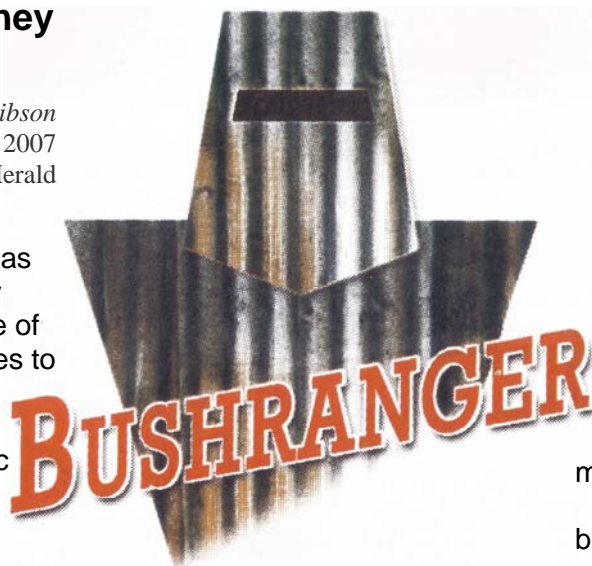
But Brough says there was a split decision on the committee.

"I've assured myself that that is going to benefit in a very substantial way the indigenous people of Alice Springs as well," he says.

The Northern Territory indigenous leader Olga Havnen, who co-wrote a report on Alice Springs town camps last year, accuses Brough of "raiding the piggy bank" meant to fund Aboriginal development for his own purposes, substituting it for mainstream funding.

Budget papers show the Aboriginals Benefit Account as the source of \$54.8 million in federal spending last year, but the money comes from royalties that companies pay for mining uranium on Aboriginal land.

The royalties are paid to the federal Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, then an



equal amount is paid from consolidated revenue into the Aboriginals Benefit Account, the ABA's annual report says.

Brough is allowed to make discretionary payments of 30 per cent of the money the account receives annually, but the Aboriginal advisory committee usually gets a say first. They must be beneficial payments for indigenous bodies "who are resident in the Northern Territory", the report says.

About \$8.8 million was spent in 2005-06, and \$10.5 million the year before. The committee agreed to provide money for ceremonial activities, crab farming and cattle enterprises, anti-petrol-sniffing programs and building a port for the Tiwi Islands.

"It is equivalent to a future fund [but] since this Government has come in, it's been used as a slush fund to prop up its initiatives," says William Tilmouth, the executive director of the Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs.

Tom Calma, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, has described the Government's plan to pay for its takeover of indigenous-controlled town leases with account money as a misuse of funds. The Law Council of Australia has described the plan as alarming and unprecedented, saying the money was never intended to fund government promises.

The Minerals Council of Australia told a Senate inquiry last year it was concerned the Government would use ABA money for "government services that should be funded by

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mainstream programs".

Brough was accused of pork-barrelling last month when it was revealed he had approved a \$100,000 ABA grant for an indigenous arts festival, without the agreement of the advisory committee. The festival was to be held in his electorate of Longman in Queensland, although the boundaries were later moved.

It was the first time in 30 years that account money had been spent outside the Northern Territory. Brough says it benefited Territory artists performing at the event.

Kilgariff says she has letters of support for her pool plan from the executives of the Central Land Council and the health organisation the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.

The town council received \$8.1 million for the aquatic centre from the Northern Territory Government two years ago and applied to the ABA for the remaining \$4 million a year ago. A new heated pool would replace an existing pool, which closes in winter. Construction will begin soon and take two years.

Brough denies that he uses the account as a slush fund and says it is not royalties money, as it comes out of consolidated revenue.

"What could be more for indigenous people's benefit than the economic benefits that will come with the 99-year leases, including the houses and the businesses established with it?" he says. "The test is whether it benefits indigenous people. If a company is going to establish jobs, for argument's sake, which will benefit them, then that's obviously a clear connection. It's wide and flexible for that reason."



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Bush rejects Howard plan



**ABC Message Stick
Friday, 24 August**

A GROUP of Aboriginal people in Central Australia is calling on the United Nations to oversee the Commonwealth's intervention in the Northern Territory.

Members of the Arrernte Nations Campaign met in Alice Springs today to talk about the issue.

One of the representatives, Mitch, says the Federal Government is bulldozing

Indigenous communities with its plans for a nuclear waste dump in the Territory and with the intervention into communities.

"Our human rights have been trampled in this issue, our rights as Indigenous people in Australia have been trampled, and in that regard the United Nations can come in" she said.

"Number one, they can have a look at the anti-racism laws that have been changed so that this stuff can go through."

Howard welcomes Bush's plan

**The Herald Sun
Wednesday, 29 August**

AUSTRALIA is eager to join a US-led global nuclear bloc to help shape the future "architecture" of nuclear power generation.

Despite concerns Australia will be forced to take back nuclear waste from overseas, Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer says it "makes very good sense" to be involved in the fledgling Global Nuclear Energy Partnership.

With nuclear power shaping as a key election battleground, Mr Downer's enthusiasm to take part in the global process will further expose the Government to Labor's scare campaign.

Labor claims the Government

is committed to building up to 25 nuclear reactors and is running a marginal seats campaign in the lead-up to the poll.

In an interview ahead of the APEC summit next week, Mr Downer spoke positively of Australia joining the nuclear group but said the Government would not be "verballed" into accepting other countries' nuclear waste.

The US President, who plans to raise the nuclear issue during his visit to Sydney next week, first raised the prospect of a global partnership in 2004.

"It makes a lot of sense for Australia to be involved," Mr Downer said.

Australia has been invited to attend a GNEP meeting in Vienna on September 16, along with Russia, Japan, China and Britain.

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