

Senator Nampijinpa Price civil trial hears land council CEO's reputation took a 'sustained hit' after media coverage

By Olivana Lathouris Courts

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Jacinta Nampijinpa Price has faced a second day in the Federal Court as she defends against defamation allegations. (ABC News: Olivana Lathouris)

In short:

A witness in the defamation trial of senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price says the chief executive of the Central Land Council took a "sustained hit" to his reputation after public commentary and media coverage of an alleged no-confidence motion last year.

Les Turner is suing the senator after claims she made in 2024 that he no longer had the support of the majority of council members.

What's next?

The hearing will continue for another five days.

The chief executive of the Northern Territory's biggest land council took a "sustained hit" to his reputation when news broke about an alleged no-confidence motion last year, the court in the defamation case of senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price has heard.

Central Land Council (CLC) chief executive Lesley Turner is suing Senator Nampijinpa Price in the Federal Court over a media release her office distributed in July last year.

The release was sent to more than 1,000 journalists and uploaded to her website.

It claimed Mr Turner lost the support of his councillors and was no longer fit to serve as CEO.

Earlier that day, CLC chair Matthew Palmer released a statement claiming Mr Turner had faced a no-confidence motion, which was defeated.



Lesley Turner's defamation suit started in the Federal Court this week. (ABC News: Olivana Lathouris)

On the second day of the defamation case, the chief medical officer of the Central Australian Aboriginal Health Congress, John Boffa, gave evidence.

Under cross-examination by Senator Nampijinpa Price's lawyer, Peter Gray SC, Dr Boffa said Mr Turner had taken a "sustained hit" from the widespread publication of the purported no-confidence motion.

"He's definitely taken a hit to his reputation and mud sticks," Dr Boffa said.

Dr Boffa said he remembered seeing several news stories published by the ABC and NT News about the alleged no-confidence motion.

"My initial thought was 'there's more to this', there's always a back story," he said.

"I wasn't convinced it was true."

Dr Boffa said he recalled seeing news stories about Mr Turner prior to Senator Nampijinpa Price publishing her media release, but said once her comments were made public, the story was "everywhere".

"It was the talk of the town, once Senator Nampijinpa Price weighed in ... it elevated it," Dr Boffa said.



John Boffa says Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's comments around a no-confidence vote elevated the story in the community. *(ABC News: Tobias Hunt)*

Court documents outlining Mr Turner's claim state the senator's release implied he had "behaved so unprofessionally that it warranted his dismissal" and was "unfit to continue to occupy the role of CEO".

The court has previously heard that following the CLC's annual conference from July 16 to 18 last year, Mr Palmer called a men's meeting which excluded all female delegates and CLC staffers.

Mr Turner's barrister, Sue Chrysanthou SC, said Mr Palmer provided Senator Nampijinpa Price with a "nonsensical" report of what happened at the meeting, including claims a no-confidence motion was moved against him but was ultimately unsuccessful.

Ms Chrysanthou said Senator Nampijinpa Price then received a draft copy of a "startling" press release written by Mr Palmer about the events of the meeting, which was distributed to four journalists on July 20 last year.



Sue Chrysanthou SC is acting on behalf of Lesley Turner, who launched the defamation suit against Jacinta Nampijinpa Price. (ABC News: Olivana Lathouris)

Senator Nampijinpa Price's office then sent her media release — echoing the claims about the no-confidence motion and calling for Mr Turner's resignation — to more than 1,000 journalists.

She also uploaded it to her website, but has since removed it.

On Monday, CLC general manager Josephine Douglas told the court, that while she was not present at the meeting, she was told by a male delegate that there was an "attempt" at a no-confidence motion against Mr Turner but that it was "never carried out in full".



Josephine Douglas told the court about media coverage that followed the senator's press release. (ABC News: Olivana Lathouris)

Dr Boffa told the court on Tuesday he saw Senator Nampijinpa Price's comments as "verifying" Mr Palmer's claims about the no-confidence motion.

"When a politician repeats claims, I assume they've done their due diligence," he said.

"I saw it as her independently verifying that this vote did take place and the majority of people wanted Mr Turner gone."



Lesley Turner is still the chief executive of the NT's Central Land Council. *(Supplied)*

Court documents outlining Senator Nampijinpa Price's defence state that the issues concerning the land council were in the interests of the community.

They also state the senator had reasonable grounds to believe what she was told was true.

Proceedings halted over 'security risk' as man enters court

Proceedings were halted mid-way through the day when the senator's lawyer raised concerns over a "security risk" after a man entered the courtroom and sat a few seats down from her in the front row of the gallery.

Mr Gray told Justice Michael Wheelahan the man had been instructed by Australian Federal Police (AFP) not to approach or speak to the senator and that him sitting in court "would be intimidating".

"I have been told NT police and AFP have been in communication and would remove the person in question from the court precinct, but would need the

dispensation of the court to do so."



Police were seen outside the NT Supreme Court on the day of Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's defamation trial. (ABC News: Olivana Lathouris)

Following a brief adjournment, Mr Gray told the court the AFP was not willing to provide documents at that time, but that he would pursue an application to have the man removed from the court on Wednesday.

Senator Nampijinpa Price returned to the courtroom for the afternoon despite the man remaining in the gallery.

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