

Botany Bay Council ICAC spotlights corporate governance

Manager oversees \$7m while 'unqualified' for it

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For the two years that Mark Goodman was "given the key" to Botany Bay Council's business unit, the acting manager didn't access its account management system, didn't set a budget and never saw a financial statement - in fact, a corruption inquiry was told this week that he wasn't even qualified to read one.

During his evidence to the Independent Commission Against Corruption on Thursday, Mr Goodman agreed that he was "totally unqualified" to head a unit that paid out on invoices worth about \$7 million a year.

"Is it fair to describe your leadership during this time, from what you're saying, as significantly incompetent?" counsel assisting the inquiry, Murugan Thangaraj, SC, said.

"In hindsight that would be a fair call," Mr Goodman replied.

In a week that's already thrown up an absent witness with a missing toe, phone taps of jealous lovers and alleged fraud on a multimillion-dollar scale, the ICAC inquiry into Botany Bay Council is beginning to turn its attention to what it called the "extremely poor corporate governance" that allowed much

of the misconduct to flourish. "Do you know what corporate governance is?" Mr Thangaraj said.

"No," Mr Goodman replied.

Next week's witness list includes the council's former general manager Peter Fitzgerald and his successor, Lara Kirchner.

The inquiry was told Ms Kirchner appointed Mark Goodman as acting business unit manager without so much as an interview, on the recommendation of Mr Goodman's boss - and Mr Fitzgerald's son - Peter Fitzgerald jnr.



Marny Baccam.

"Lara told me I was doing a good job," said Mr Goodman, who had joined council as a labourer.

Botany Bay Council has been a family affair for the Goodmans too. The inquiry's principal person of interest is Gary Goodman, the council's former long-serving chief financial officer and Mark Goodman's brother. He is yet to give evidence due to hospital treatment for an amputated big toe, described as "gangrenous".

Mark Goodman also admitted to the inquiry that he had given a council car to his son, who works at Botany as a labourer. On other occasions he had arranged for council vehicles to work at his father's house. He also admitted accepting \$10,000 he was told came from a contractor, Gardens2envy.

Even so, Mark Goodman told the ICAC he was "shocked" to this week hear allegations his brother was engaged in large-scale fraud at the council, primarily by stealing millions through false or inflated invoices from contractors.

Similar allegations of fraud or misusing council property, including fuel cards, phones and cars, have been levelled at other council employees, including two of Gary Goodman's onetime lovers, Marny Baccam and Suman Mishra.

Although Ms Baccam worked at the business unit under Mark Goodman's leadership, the ICAC has previously stated that "at this stage no allegation of benefiting from false invoices" was made against him.

However, six external auditors came through during his time in the role, said Mr Goodman, who told the inquiry on Thursday he had not read any of reports produced as a result.

The inquiry continues before ICAC Commissioner Megan Latham.