

The Canberra Times

Coat of arms taken from Old House

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A stand-off developed between police and indigenous leaders at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy yesterday after protesters seized the coat of arms from Old Parliament House.

Embassy elder Kevin Buzzacott said the kangaroo and emu were sacred images for indigenous people and demanded the animals' removal from national emblems.

A contingent of police were called in but appeared reluctant to make any arrests or retrieve the crest which was taken from the pillar opposite the King George monument and placed near the embassy's fire.

More than 100 people had gathered at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy to mark its 30th anniversary when the coat of arms was taken.

National Capital Authority promotion director Jeremy Lasek said it was disappointing but the NCA, parliamentary precinct landlord, would be guided by the police.

An ACT police spokesman said investigations would continue but police had not laid any charges at this stage.

Several police were on stand-by at the site but did not expect any trouble.

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Mr Buzzacott said it was a peaceful protest to urge all Australians to respect Aboriginal laws and customs.

He called on Prime Minister John Howard, Governor-General Peter Hollingworth and the Australian Federal Police hierarchy to sit down with indigenous leaders and discuss the 'violation of natural law'.

'We have never consented to the theft and use of our sacred emu and kangaroo,' he said.

'Just as you have stolen our lands and violated our sacred laws, you have also stolen our sacred images to support your colonising enterprise.'

A spokesman for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock said it was stunt and 'not worth commenting on'.

Mr Buzzacott said police officers, court officials, parliamentarians and other government agencies which had worked towards indigenous people's genocide and dispossession of land had used the images in emblems.

He made a direct plea to Queen Elizabeth II to order the animals' removal from emblems.

'Our sacred animals have been displayed publicly in a number of your colonial institutions and are used in a manner that is both offensive and oppressive. . . We demand that you order the removal of our sacred images from further use by your representative colonial agents in Australia - respect our laws and customs.'