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## **Legal spotlight on Hope Vale land deal: - Bullying tactics alleged**

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DETAILS of a damning report which accused prominent indigenous activist Noel Pearson and his family of using bully tactics to influence remote Cape York communities have been revealed in court.

A judicial review began yesterday into the State Government's decision to grant a Cape York Land Council-affiliated group trusteeship of a 110,000ha parcel of land at Hope Vale, which comes with \$6 million in mining royalties.

The Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council has opposed last year's appointment of the Congress of Clans as trustee, arguing the move was not in the interests of all community members as the group only represented traditional owners.

Cairns Supreme Court heard former indigenous affairs minister Warren Pitt, who was commissioned in 2009 to assess how the money should be distributed, raised concerns the Noel Pearson-founded land council was bullying residents.

In a report, Mr Pitt said congress leader Brian Cobus, an employee of the Pearson-run Balkanu organisation, had not been informing residents they could attend meetings to help decide which group would be granted the trusteeship.

"I have no doubt through the track record of bullying by the Pearson family through the Cape York Land Council, he (Mr Cobus) has chosen to take the survival option, against his better judgment," he wrote.

Mr Pitt said that on the days meetings were held, land council employees would go through the town "applying pressure" on traditional owners not to attend.

The Yuuru people, who would benefit most from the funds either way, were distrustful of the land council, he alleged.

Barrister for Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council, Douglas Campbell SC, said Mr Pitt's report had not been taken into account by the State Government in making the decision and it should be taken to task over the omission.

It was also alleged that the land council wanted a fee of 10 percent to be allocated to it from the royalties, which are associated with the Cape Flattery silica mine, for

assisting with the trustee appointment.

The hearing continues today.