

More trouble for Sugar Ray

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IN a fresh blow to embattled Aboriginal leader "Sugar" Ray Robinson, the Howard Government has referred to police the results of an audit of five publicly funded companies he formerly headed.

Government sources also revealed that the records of two Queensland casinos were central to a police recommendation that Mr Robinson face multiple charges of misusing travel allowances.

Mr Robinson had been asked by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to justify \$48,000 worth of travel payments he received between 2000 and 2002.

Mr Robinson resigned as ATSIC's deputy chairman in June, claiming a campaign of vilification against him was hurting his family.

Mr Robinson would not comment yesterday, but he has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, and remains an ATSIC commissioner.

Shortly before Mr Robinson resigned, Indigenous Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock wrote to him asking questions arising from an audit of the Bidjara group of companies, based in Mr Robinson's home town of Charleville in western Queensland.

Government sources said that because of probity concerns raised by the audit, its results have been referred to police attached to ATSIC's fraud awareness unit.

The ATSIC board last month rejected an appeal from Mr Robinson to overturn the appointment of receivers for one of the companies, the Bidjara Aboriginal Housing and Land Company, after it failed to repay a \$706,320 debt to the now liquidated Bidjara Motor Corporation.

The federal police have recommended to the Director of Public Prosecutions that Mr Robinson face 15 charges of dishonesty under the commonwealth criminal code over his use of travel payments.

Police executed warrants for the records of Jupiters Casino on the Gold Coast and the Treasury Casino in Brisbane, as well as for bank accounts held by Mr Robinson and the records of several hotels and motels he stayed at.

In addition to the Bidjara audit and travel allowance investigation, Mr Robinson faces fraud charges relating to two cheques passed at a Brisbane hotel last year.

The DPP is also considering a police recommendation that Mr Robinson be charged with disclosing confidential ATSIIC information.