



Pearson family `has record of bullying'

By Sarah Elks
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A FORMER Queensland minister says the family of indigenous leader Noel Pearson has a ``track record of bullying" indigenous people on Cape York through the peninsula's land council, a court has heard.

Warren Pitt, a retired indigenous affairs minister, was commissioned in 2009 by the Bligh government to work out how to distribute \$6 million in mining royalties to Hopevale, the Pearsons' home town.

Against Mr Pitt's advice, the government late last year ordered the money -- and trusteeship over 110,000ha -- be given to the Congress of Clans, which represents 12 Hopevale native title groups and has close links to Mr Pearson, his brother Gerhardt, and the Cape York Land Council.

That decision is now being disputed in a Supreme Court battle brought by the Hopevale Aboriginal Shire Council, which argues the congress is not representative of the whole community and is unduly influenced by the Pearsons and CYLC.

Portions of Mr Pitt's 2010 series of reports were read to the court yesterday, detailing his concerns that ``CYLC operatives" had subverted the consultation process, by pressuring residents not to attend relevant meetings.

Mr Pitt said congress chairman Brian Cobus was an employee of Balkanu, an economic development organisation run by Gerhardt Pearson, and had kept details of meetings secret.

``I have no doubt given the track record of bullying by the Pearsons through the Cape York Land Council, (Mr Cobus) has chosen to take the `survival' option against his own better judgment," his report says.

He said the CYLC was ``struggling for relevance".

Douglas Campbell SC, barrister for the Hopevale Aboriginal Shire Council, told the court Mr Pitt's concerns had not been taken into consideration by then natural resources minister Rachel Nolan when she made her decision, partly because her department did not provide her with all of the information.

Darryl Rangiah, SC, for the congress, said he would consider raising issues of relevance in his final submissions today, when the matter continues.