

THE STANDARD [\(1\)](#)

Valuable cattle missing during liquidation of Aboriginal company

By ANDREW THOMSON

March 15, 2014, 4 a.m.



Aboriginal community members Geoff Clark (left), Phillip Chatfield and Billy McGuinness staged a protest at the entrance of the Boona Pastoral Company dairy farm east of Yambuk yesterday.

LIQUIDATORS involved in the winding up of a pastoral company on Aboriginal land have raised questions about the mysterious disappearance of about 100 valuable dairy cattle.

Worrells forensic account partner Ivan Glavas said his firm was appointed liquidator in October last year for the Boona Pastoral Company (BPC) which runs a farm on Kirrae Whurrong Community Inc. land near Yambuk.

The company is being liquidated with debts running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust.

Mr Glavas confirmed that Federal Police and Victorian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, as well as other government entities, were conducting investigations into the affairs of parties involved.

He said his main issue was that cattle were apparently disappearing from the Yambuk property.

The cattle were not well and their health needed to be maintained in the hope of selling them.

It is understood that 210 dairy cattle would be valued about \$500,000, but up to half of those cattle are believed to have gone missing.

Company searches indicate Boona Pastoral Company Pty Ltd is a private company located in Purnim. It was established in 1999 and the director previously listed was Geoffrey Wayne Clark.

Mr Glavas said there were a large number of competing interests in relation to assets and his firm was being provided with a lot of information which was changing almost hourly.

He described the liquidation process as being at stage two of six stages with Kirrae Whurrong claiming to have contributed up to 100 head of cattle to the Boona operations between 15 and 20 years ago.

“There are a number of competing interests and it would be fair to describe the record keeping practices of many of the bodies involved as atrocious,” he said.

Mr Glavas said his firm was in the process of shoring up assets, which included employing security guards to ensure the cattle remained on the farm.

Worrells was appointed liquidator on October 9 last year and has worked since then to attempt to strike a commercial deal in the best interests of all concerned.

A meeting of creditors was held in Warrnambool on January 30 to receive reports from the liquidator on the company.

Mr Glavas said the large number of competing interests, some known and others not, made the case different to many he had handled.

He said some of those interests appeared to be operating within parameters which were not lawful.

“There is a system that needs to be followed. Parties cannot take ownership and entitlement. They need to be able to prove that,” he said.

“Our main concern is that people associated with the community are disrupting the process and will likely cause more cost to what could be a reasonable commercial result.”

Mr Glavas said all interests had been asked to provide proof of ownership in relation to the cattle. "Interests need to register an interest, they can't just take stuff," he said.

An Auditor-General audit report in 2002-03 showed the Indigenous Land Council (ILC) purchased the Boona property, on the eastern side of Yambuk on October 24, 1996 and divested title to the Kirrae Whurrong Community Inc. on November 20, 1997.

The ILC then provided loan funding of \$540,000 to the Boona Pastoral Company to support the establishment of a dairy farm enterprise.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, of which Mr Clark was previously chairman, provided a \$500,000 grant to the BPC to help establish the business.

Mr Clark, who was once paid \$240,000 a year as head of ATSIC, declared himself bankrupt in July 2009, two years after a civil jury found that he led two pack rapes against a woman in 1971.

Kirrae Whurrong Community Inc. (KWC) was established to promote the interests of Framlingham Aboriginal community with emphasis on the development of economic self-sufficiency.

In June 2010, KWC had net assets of \$4.4 million, including a lease arrangement with Boona.

Boona generated income of up to \$1 million a year and had shares in dairy company Murray Goulburn.

Framlingham Aboriginal Trust officials yesterday declined to comment, saying the action to liquidate Boona was taken with the support of the Framlingham community.