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NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

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RUSSIAN ICE SKATERS: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council says the decision by two Russian Ice Skaters to ditch their costumes for the Winter Olympics next week is a step in the right direction.

NSWALC Chairperson Bev Manton says the decision to drop the costumes is a victory for common-sense but the skaters also need to consider reworking the music in their routine.

Ms Manton says the composer of the music, Sheila Chandra, has protested at the use of her work in the controversial routine.

"It's good that the skaters have recognised the offence the costumes caused to many Aboriginal people and the importance of not exploiting our culture," she said.

"However, the public statements from the composer clearly illustrate they have also mangled her music in their routine. I think they also need to respect her intellectual property rights."

Ms Manton says she's been surprised and heartened by the level of support for the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council's position on the controversial routine.

She says those who have criticised NSWALC for protesting the routine need to understand why the commodification of Indigenous culture provokes such a strong reaction from Aboriginal people.

Ms Manton says the issue was highlighted in a recent report to the United Nations on the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The report noted that the appropriation of Indigenous cultures had taken on considerable dimensions with globalisation.

"The report said the exploitation of Indigenous arts, designs, stories, performance and other art forms, as well as the proliferation of products on the market that imitate, misrepresent and profit from the alleged associations with Indigenous cultures continues to be a major concern," Ms Manton said.

"It went on to say the use of Indigenous peoples' names and images on sport mascots, commercial products, ventures or enterprises is an ongoing issue because it is most often designed to profit non-Indigenous people."

"It also noted the images are often derogatory, offensive and disrespectful to Indigenous peoples.

"The report went on to say the owners of products explain their choice of mascot, name or logo by contending that their choice is motivated by a desire to show respect for Indigenous peoples.

"However, it appears the real motive is profit, as there is little, if any, concern for the harm and suffering it has caused Indigenous peoples.

"The report cites the use of Native American names and mascots as symbols for college and school sporting teams in the US. Native Americans have held protests for many years to eliminate their use.

"While it's great the Russian skaters have put their costumes on ice, the UN can now add the Russian ice skating routine to that list."

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