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LIBERATE AND EMPOWER ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES THROUGH  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

# media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

23/2/2010

## **No winners in the Russian ice dancing routine**

### **Statement by Chairperson – Bev Manton**

It's disappointing that Ms Domnina and Mr Shabalin went ahead with the routine given the well-publicized concerns about their appropriation of Indigenous culture, and given their promises to change their outfits.

I don't know what sort of a world they live in, but I think it might be a fairy tale world.

The United Nations in its recent report State of the World's Indigenous Peoples makes the point that it is a problem not confined to Australia. All over the globe, Indigenous culture is routinely appropriated by non-Indigenous people, mostly in the interests of profit.

Mr Shabalin was last night quoted as saying, "We heard some opinions about it being offensive, and we tried to do it lighter."

I'd respectfully suggest Mr Shabalin may have missed the point. You can't make a blackface performance less offensive by "doing it lighter" anymore than you can make an 'Aboriginal performance' less offensive by using a lighter shade of brown.

The fact is the bodysuits and make-up were offensive to people of colour all over the world, not just Aboriginal Australians.

It's also disappointing that the skating duo ignored the spirit of the Olympics.

Ultimately, I think their actions were reflected in their scores - they were leading in the competition before they performed the dance, and were favourites for the gold medal. They are now in the bronze medal position.

That's a high price to pay for disrespecting Aboriginal culture, particularly given how much work the pair must have done to get to this point in their careers.

The fact is, they looked ridiculous. It's as simple as that. Their performance was canned by commentators all over the world as ridiculous.

Sadly, there are no winners in this silly saga, least of all Ms Domnina and Mr Shabalin.

On a happier note, it was very heartening to see so many non-Indigenous Australians speak out against the performance.

I know Aboriginal Australians greatly appreciate the support of the world's oldest surviving culture, a culture that the NSW Aboriginal Land Council would urge all Australians to make an effort to get to know better.

*Ends*

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