



INDEPENDENT  
COMMISSION  
AGAINST  
CORRUPTION

# FACT SHEET

## Investigation Into The Theft Of Zoological Specimens From The Australian Museum

### ICAC FINDINGS

- That Hendrikus (Hank) van Leeuwen, a former employee of the Australian Museum, engaged in corrupt conduct having stolen more than two thousand zoological specimens between 1997 and 2002.
- That the Director of Public Prosecutions consider the prosecution of van Leeuwen for offences under section 156 (larceny as a servant) of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW). Van Leeuwen is no longer employed by the Museum, and accordingly the ICAC did not need to consider any disciplinary action or his dismissal as a public official.
- A total of 33 recommendations have been made to assist the Museum to strengthen its systems and policies. These recommendations cover the following areas of the Museum's operations: collection management; internal investigations; staff training; reporting of missing specimens; staff recruitment; security; mailroom procedures; staff supervision and management; asset disposal; the Museum's procedures for receiving specimens from Taronga Zoo; the implementation of and amendments to specific Museum policies.
- The ICAC also emphasises in the report the need for the Museum to ensure that:
  - staff understand their roles and responsibilities as public officials;
  - managers reinforce and support this understanding through strong and consistent leadership; and
  - the values, culture, management, decision making and systems of the Museum are all strong, integrated and reflective of the principles of public duty.

### BACKGROUND

- In early 1997 significant 'disappearances' of specimens from the Museum began to be reported by staff. However, it was not until late 1998 that Museum management first took the steps of informing police of the thefts and upgrading security. The Museum balked at a more proactive investigation to uncover the culprit, apparently concerned such action may amount to 'harassment' of staff. In the event, the 'disappearances' continued, which were by then recognised by the Museum as regular and determined thefts of its specimens.
- Following an initial telephone notification of the matter to the ICAC in late September 2002, Commission staff met with senior officers of the Museum on 3 October 2002 when the matter was formally reported.
- The Commission made the decision to investigate the matter, rather than simply refer it to police, because the suspected involvement of an employee in the thefts over a long period of time indicated that other issues which fall within the ICAC's jurisdiction may have been a factor in facilitating the thefts.
- As part of its investigation Commission officers interviewed Museum staff and commenced covert surveillance of the Museum's specimen collections. On 12, 13 and 17 March 2003, ICAC officers conducted a series of searches in Londonderry and Newcastle with assistance from NSW Police. More than two thousand zoological specimens identifiable as Museum property were seized, as well as other Museum property such as scientific tools, books and office equipment.
- Evidence was taken in private hearings from Hank van Leeuwen and Professor Michael Archer, the Museum's Director from January 1999.

The ICAC's primary functions under the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, are to investigate and prevent corruption in the NSW public sector, which includes government departments, statutory authorities, local councils and public officials; including politicians and the judiciary.

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