Councils gifted work by minister

Zach Hope

HOUSING Minister Bess Price excluded two indigenous-owned businesses and ignored Commonwealth and Territory procurement principles to gift nearly $16 million of work to two regional councils.

Contracts to upgrade more than 180 remote homes across Central Australia were given to MacDonnell Regional Council and Central Desert Regional Council last month without tender, despite Aboriginal-owned, non-government operators in the region claiming even better capabilities.

Ms Price’s decision came at the expense of indigenous business enterprises (IBEs) Ingererreke Commercial and Tantentyre Construction, which had expected to get the opportunity to bid for the lucrative contracts.

In emailed responses, Ms Price said she used a Certificate of Exemption to gift the work because of previous “excellent work done at Docker River by MacDonnell Regional Council and the opportunity for local employment”.

She based the validity of the Certificate of Exemption on a Territory Government procurement directive stating governments should ensure regional councils had an “adequate opportunity” to get work if they could guarantee a minimum of 30 per cent Indigenous employment.

But Ms Price’s call runs counter to stated procurement principles of “open and effective competition”. Procurement directions also state “Government-owned businesses; Local, Territory, State and Federal Government Agencies and Authorities are not to operate in competition with the private sector on Government-funded projects without the prior approval of the Procurement Review Board”.

Ms Price said changes to procurement rules implemented on July 1, 2014, meant the department was no longer required to obtain PRB approval.

The regional councils will now subcontract most of the work – in the communities of Kintore, Docker River, Areyonga, Nyirripi and Mt Liebig – to businesses based in Alice Springs. Central Desert has said it plans to include work for the-dole participants at Nyirripi, which Ms Price said would provide “CDP participants a great opportunity to enter the workforce”.

The NT’s new Remote Contracting Policy directs work at IBE through select tender or, if the contract is greater than $5 million, through open tender with a requirement to include an IBE in a joint venture.

Ms Price gifted the work to the councils only days before this policy came into effect on July 1 this year.

This revelation comes in the same week as Chief Minister Adam Giles spoke of new procurement policies he said would create at least 3800 Aboriginal jobs by 2020.

On Saturday, Mr Giles announced a series of new policies to “encourage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses to work together in a spirit of partnership”.

“My Government is determined to build the capacity of Aboriginal communities so they can take full advantage of business and job opportunities,” Mr Giles said.

**With only a month to go and more than 300 entrants already registered – and more signing up every day – the inaugural Red CentreNATS promises to make this year’s Father’s Day weekend one of the biggest ever.**

Chief Minister Adam Giles said he was excited about the early rush.

“We’re very excited about the large number of people already entered in Red CentreNATS,” Mr Giles said.

“People are coming to Alice Springs from all over Australia to compete, but it’s also great to see how many locals and Territorians are throwing the covers off their vehicles and bringing them along for a great time. If you haven’t yet entered, I highly encourage you to get involved.”

The event is offering something for all the family.

To kick off the festival, a free movie night will be held on Wednesday, September 2, from 6.30pm at Lasseters Hotel Casino with Disney Pixar’s Cars showing – a sure-fire favourite for all the family. If you’re up for more of an exclusive experience, tickets are available at the box office and the Uluru IP area at Friday night’s Rock N’ Rumble concert featuring Dr Elephant and the legendary Chocolate Starfish.

With the best show cars, drag cars and burnout machines coming to Alice Springs, it’s sure to be an ac- tion-packed event.

Go to redcentrenats.com.au

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**Fete seeks volunteers to help out**

Val White preparing her cakes for the Old Timers Fete.

FOR more than 50 years the Old Timers Fete has enjoyed the support of the community at Alice Springs and around Australia, with entries now exceeding 300.

All is ready for the annual fete on Saturday – except for volunteers to help on the day.

Old Timers director of nursing Mary Miles said there was only a small organising committee this year and that volunteers were urgently needed.

“We need people to help set up the fete from 9.30am and some for the stalls when the fete is on from 11am,” Ms Miles said.

A big feature of the fete would be the auction at noon, she said.

“It will be bigger than usual with a lot of second-hand furniture, with a lot of tables and chairs,” she said. “There will also be a $50 prize for the lucky program this year.”

Proceeds for the fete will be used to upgrade and refurbish the independent units (cottages) and possibly for a new shaded area near Flynn Lodge.

There will be free passage for people taking the south route to the fete on Saturday.

Travelers on the south route are warned to allow extra time for their journey due to the increased traffic on the road before and during the fete.

To volunteer for this year’s fete, contact Old Timers on 8952 2844.

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**Kidman shoot has Uluru in Vogue**

Kidman did a photo shoot for Vogue Australia at Uluru.

Nicole Kidman did a photo shoot for Vogue Australia at Uluru.

The first images of Nicole Kidman’s photo shoot at Uluru, shot under a cloak of secrecy last month, have finally been unveiled by Vogue Australia.

The 48-year-old Hollywood superstar, who took a rare break from her filming schedule posed for the shoot at sacred Mutitjulu, at the eastern end of Uluru, with her two daughters close by. Permission to shoot at the world-famous site had to be sought from Parks Australia as well as the Mutitjulu elders. The stunning results, revealed in Vogue’s September issue, vindicate the choice of setting.

The shoot was also an excuse for Kidman to return to the Outback, a place she says she developed an affinity for in 1983 while filming the family drama Bush Christmas.

The Australian actor also believes her swim in a sacred Outback waterhole seven years ago, a spot known for its fertility powers, helped her conceive Sunday Rose when she was 41.

“I’m enraptured by it. I’ve always been drawn to the landscape, and I do think there’s something… the energy and the light… it’s just a very magical, special place,” Kidman tells the magazine.

Tourism Australia managing director John O’Sullivan said he hoped the shoot would play an international role in promoting the Red Centre.