

Privileges Committee

Citizen's Right of Reply (Hillsong Emerge)

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Terms of Reference

The inquiry was conducted in accordance with standing orders 202 and 203, which were adopted by the Legislative Council on 5 May 2004: *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, No 52, Wednesday 5 May 2004, Entry No. 10

Committee Membership

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Australian Labor Party

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Liberal Party

The Hon Amanda Fazio MLC

Australian Labor Party

The Hon Jennifer Gardiner MLC

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The Hon Kayee Griffin MLC

Australian Labor Party

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Report

- 1.1 On 10 November 2005 the President of the Legislative Council, the Honourable Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC, received a submission on behalf of Hillsong Emerge, requesting the incorporation of a response under standing orders 202 and 203 of the Legislative Council relating to the protection of persons referred to in the Legislative Council.
- 1.2 The submission referred to statements made by the Honourable Ian West MLC, during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 8 November 2005.¹ The President, having considered the submission under standing order 202 (2), referred it to the Privileges Committee on 15 November 2005.
- 1.3 The Committee met in private session on 28 November 2005, and decided, according to standing order 203, to consider the submission. The response, which the Committee now recommends for incorporation in *Hansard*, has been agreed to by Hillsong Emerge and the Committee in accordance with standing order 203 (4)(b).
- 1.4 The Committee draws attention to standing order 203 (3)(b) which requires that, in considering a submission under the resolution, the Committee must not consider or judge the truth of any statements made in the House or in the submission.
- 1.5 The Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That a response by Hillsong Emerge, in the terms specified at Appendix 1, as agreed to by Hillsong Emerge and the Committee, be incorporated in *Hansard*.



The Hon. Peter Primrose MLC

Chair

¹ *Hansard*, 8 November 2005, pp. 19162-3.

Appendix 1

**Response by Hillsong
Emerge, agreed to by
Hillsong Emerge and the
Committee, according to
standing order 203 4 (b)**

Appendix 1

Reply to comments by the Hon Ian West MLC in the Legislative Council on 8 November 2005

The Hon Ian West MLC on 8 November 2005 addressed the Legislative Council about a grant Hillsong Emerge, the charitable arm of Hillsong Church, received earlier this year under the Federal Government's National Community Crime Prevention Program.

The speech Mr West delivered contained gross inaccuracies.

Hillsong Emerge has been providing extensive community services across Sydney and beyond for more than 20 years. Far from being the 'business unit' of Hillsong Church as Mr West claims, Hillsong Emerge is the public benevolent arm of the church, similar to the charities run by many churches.

Allegations that Hillsong Emerge has in some way 'used' the Riverstone Aboriginal Community Association (RACA) to secure Federal funding are untrue and without foundation.

Hillsong Emerge has worked in the Blacktown Local Government Area for close to 20 years, and over this time has developed strong partnerships with local community organisations and the wider community.

The partnership of local community agencies led by Hillsong Emerge invited RACA to be included in an application for funding under the Attorney General's Community Crime Prevention Partnership at the final community consultation meeting in December 2004, an invitation they accepted by providing the partnership with a letter of endorsement.

RACA provided Hillsong Emerge with program suggestions to be included in the final application and these were incorporated into the proposed budget of the application. This original application was then submitted as two applications, one targeting youth and the other being a more generic neighbourhood approach. The content was the same and budget line items identical to those outlined in the original submission. The youth specific application was successful.

In August 2005, the Prime Minister announced that Hillsong Emerge and its partners were successful in their funding application. Up to the announcement, the Attorney General's Department had not advised anyone, including Hillsong Emerge, of the successful application.

Attempts were made to alleviate RACA's concerns and confirm Hillsong Emerge's recognition of RACA as a community partner in this project.

Allegations that funds were offered to RACA to silence them are nonsense. It was at the request of RACA that the Chief Executive Officer of Hillsong Emerge, Mr Coleman, signed a letter demanding that RACA be responsible for the distribution of funds to the Riverstone component of the project. The letter was signed as an act of good faith to demonstrate Hillsong Emerge's willingness to co-operate with RACA as an equal partner. Hillsong Emerge informed RACA that this was subject to the Attorney General Department's approval and the agreement of each of the other partners. A copy of this letter was forwarded to the Attorney General's Department.

Hillsong Emerge attempted to accommodate RACA's requests in an effort to prevent the project stalling, even before contracts had been exchanged with the Attorney General's Department.

Ultimately, the Attorney General's Department will determine how this project proceeds.

Hillsong Emerge remains hopeful that RACA will continue in partnership.