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'I didn't plant slug': official

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The council official accused of editing an image of a slug to frame a food company has denied doctoring the photograph, as her council attacked the credibility of the Dandenong food supplier's owner.

Greater Dandenong Council chief executive John Bennie and two council health inspectors implicated in "slug gate" yesterday denied impropriety at a parliamentary inquiry investigating the closure of I Cook Foods.

Then-acting chief health officer Brett Sutton signed off on an order to close the business in early 2019 because officials determined it had provided food to an 86-year-old Knox private hospital patient who died from listeria infection.

All charges against the company were later dropped and a former Dandenong Council official claimed she saw health inspector Elizabeth Garlick editing a picture to remove traces of a tissue that carried the slug that was allegedly planted inside I Cook Food's premises.

"I did not plant the slug," Ms Garlick told the inquiry. "And the photo was not altered in any way."

Owner Ian Cook, who is suing the council and Health Department for \$50 million in damages, has consistently claimed his business was targeted because the council and Mr Bennie were stakeholders in a rival catering company, Community Chef.

At yesterday's hearing, Mr Bennie said he had no involvement in the closure and admonished Mr Cook, accusing him of running a "diversion" from the serious food safety breaches found by council officials.

"The allegations... are completely and utterly untrue," he said.

Ms Garlick, the council's environmental health officer, is alleged to have carried tissues in her pocket – supposedly to conceal a slug – when inspecting the premises, but she said she did not recall carrying tissues in her pocket, which she said she would not normally do.

Ms Garlick told the inquiry the slug was "very low on my priorities list" when she saw it; she suspected it may have slithered into its position from a nearby set of wet crates.