

Parliamentary 'slug gate' inquiry re-opens

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Hearings are set to resume at a Parliamentary inquiry into the "inappropriate" closure of Dandenong South commercial caterer I Cook Foods in early 2019.

ICF director Ian Cook is scheduled to re-appear in front of the inquiry on 25 August.

Others listed are ex-Greater Dandenong Council food-safety inspector Kim Rogerson – who turned whistle-blower, and ex-Knox Council officer Ray Christy.

The 30-year-old family business had been closed by the Department of Health and Human Services as part of an investigation into the death of a listeria-infected 86-year-old hospital patient.

By the time it re-opened six weeks later, the business was destroyed. Forty-one employees lost their jobs.

In August 2020, the Parliamentary inquiry into the matter found the ICF closure was "valid" but "not fair".

But the inquiry has re-opened after "new evidence that was made public in relation to the inappropriate closure of I Cook Foods", according to its terms-of-reference.

New evidence contradicted testimony by "senior officials in the Victorian Government and City of Greater Dandenong", the terms stated.

Some of the evidence includes a report by Mr Christy, which stated prior to the closure that it was "more than likely" the deceased pa-

tient had not eaten ICF food.

ICF has consistently insisted it was wrongfully closed, including an allegation that a council officer planted a live slug during a factory inspection.

It has launched a \$50-million lawsuit against the health department and Greater Dandenong council.

Victoria Police has recently re-opened its investigation into the circumstances of the closure.

In 2019, Greater Dandenong Council laid 96 food-safety charges against ICF – all of which were dropped just before a hearing at Dandenong Magistrates' Court in late 2019.

The council stated it aimed to avoid a legal bill of up to \$1.2 million.

P3 17 August 2024
Dandenong