

New claim in I Cook saga

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Greater Dandenong Council has denied “many of the assertions” in an incendiary letter from I Cook Foods accusing the council of misleading a Parliamentary inquiry.

At the recent hearings into the closure of ICF, the council listed a “history” of 13 food-safety complaints against the Dandenong South catering business since 2016.

But in a letter to council CEO John Bennie, Mr Cook has demanded a correction of the “misleading and dishonest” claims.

Mr Cook stated the council had omitted significant exonerating evidence that explained why ICF had never been prosecuted.

The incidents listed include a Kingston Council complaint of a fragment of glass being allegedly found in ICF-made soup.

Upon investigation it was found the glass may have come from a domestic container, and there was no evidence it originated from the soup, Mr Cook said.

Similarly, ICF was cleared of responsibility for complaints such as a stone found in jasmine rice, a bread clip in a pre-packaged food item and a foreign object in a lamington, he wrote.

Mixed sandwiches in 2017, as well as Asian noodles with egg garnish and a sample of baked fish and fennel sauce in 2018 tested positive to listeria.

But the council omitted to add that the listeria growth was within safe legislated limits, Mr Cook said.

In response, Mr Bennie stated that the council “disagrees with many of the assertions” made by Mr Cook.

“Given that Mr Cook has provided ongoing commentary in respect to future litigation against Council, we are unable to comment further.

“We encourage any further correspondence on the matter through Council’s legal representatives.”

ICF was closed for more than a month in early 2019 as part of an investigation into a hospital patient’s death.

The business was effectively destroyed, with 41 employees losing their jobs.

The inquiry found ICF’s forced closure was valid but the business was “not properly dealt with by the City of Greater Dandenong”.

Mr Bennie said the “council maintains that it treated I Cook Foods in a fair and consistent manner throughout”.

Mr Cook says he is not “rolling away” from two Supreme Court actions over what he says was the “illegal” closure and destruction of his 34-year-old family business.

ICF has also submitted a brief of evidence to Victoria Police to investigate alleged corruption.