

Life continues for key figures in corruption probe

Justice far from swift as scandal inquiry drags on

By SHANNON TONKIN

IT'S the photo we can't show you.

A beaming Beth Morgan looks dizzily happy as she pounds the pavement alongside Port Macquarie's Hastings River, seemingly a world away from the nation's largest local government corruption scandal that engulfed her life three years ago.

Sporting sunglasses, her hair in pigtails and wearing a snazzy green, white and navy blue lycra running suit that hides a trim athlete's physique, Ms Morgan is on her way to a commendable 30th place in her first full triathlon at the Port Macquarie Triathlon Club's fourth race of 2010-2011 the season.

Multiple triathlon photos of Ms Morgan, who competes under her maiden name Beth Mooney, can be seen on the website of a professional photographer connected to the club, however the man refused to release them to the *Mercury* this week for publication.

But the images, the most recent in February this year, paint the picture of a new life for Ms Morgan in her childhood town, far away from a past that has yet to deliver its final blow.

Ms Morgan's personal life, involving affairs with developers Frank Vellar and Glen Tabak, was aired to millions across the country during the Independent Commission Against Corruption's sensational inquiry into corruption at Wollongong City Council in February 2008.

She was found to have corruptly accepted gifts and payments from Vellar during their affair in exchange for approving his development applications.

It was recommended Ms Morgan face 27 criminal charges, however, 2½ years on and some 500km away from where it all started, she is still waiting for her day in court.

The road to justice for those caught up in the Wollongong corruption scandal has been long and tedious, and



Hearing: Beth Morgan at an inquiry into the corruption scandal in 2008.

appears far from nearing its end.

It's been a little more than three years since the salacious details of the council's underbelly were divulged at the public inquiry, 2½ years since commissioner Jerrold Cripps flagged a potential 139 criminal charges against 11 individuals and 21 months since the fate of those people - former councillors, developers and council employees - was put in the hands of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

In that time, sacked councillors Kiril Jonovski and Zeki Esen have been cleared of three charges under the ICAC Act, developer Glen Tabak has been found guilty and fined \$2500 for making a false statement to the commission (decision upheld on appeal) and Frank Gigliotti is awaiting an appeal against a nine-month prison sentence for two lying charges.

Former councillor Val Zanotto, Ms Morgan, former senior council manager Joe Scimone and convicted con-man Gerald Carroll are yet to be charged. Police have issued an arrest warrant for Ray Younan, who faces a charge of impersonating an ICAC officer, however, it is believed Younan has fled the country.

Meantime, Vellar, allegedly one of the key players in the scandal, is preparing his defence for a hearing on five charges in July.

While each new police charge or court proceeding brings the saga one step closer to completion, the pace at which justice is being delivered is painstakingly slow.

Jerrold Cripps, the commissioner who presided over the inquiry and ultimately recommended charges against Ms Morgan and 10 other people, agreed last September the process was taking too long.

At the same time, the then-NSW Opposition attacked the Labor government for the delay, with then shadow attorney-general Greg Smith saying the community deserved "to know whether these people will be prosecuted or not". Exactly seven months on, and Mr Smith, as the new attorney general, was harder to reach for comment yesterday.

A staffer took note of the *Mercury's* questions for the new minister, which included whether Mr Smith would order any outstanding prosecutions relating to the scandal be fast-tracked. A response was not received by publication deadline.

Meantime, Ms Morgan is yet to learn when, or even if, she will be charged.

Despite her uncertain future, Ms Morgan appears to be throwing herself into life in Port Macquarie.

She has become an avid triathlete and results from the club's current season show steady improvement.

The *Mercury* attempted to contact Ms Morgan at her parents' home this week, however a woman, believed to be Ms Morgan's mother, said she was at her workplace, but refused to say where it was or what kind of work Ms Morgan was doing.

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New life: Beth Morgan in Port Macquarie last year. She relocated to the city after the scandal broke in 2008.

Prof 'sorry' about tweet

FEDERAL Aboriginal Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin has refused to weigh into the debate on controversial comments indigenous academic Larissa Behrendt made on Twitter.

The lawyer tweeted that sex with a horse was less offensive than Aboriginal leader Bess Price, who backs intervention in the Northern Territory.

Ms Macklin said she had not spoken to Ms Price or Professor Behrendt,

who was recently appointed to lead a Federal Government review of indigenous higher education access.

"The woman concerned has apologised and made clear her position," she said yesterday.

Prof Behrendt had tweeted during ABC's Q&A program: "I watched a show where a guy had sex with a horse and I'm sure it was less offensive than Bess Price."



PROF BEHRENDT

Airline resuming Japan route

QANTAS will resume flights between Australia and Japan on Tuesday next week.

Airline chief Alan Joyce said many issues had been taken into account before the decision was made.

The Flying Kangaroo cancelled the popular route in the wake of the massive earthquake that hit northern Japan and caused a

tsunami that killed thousands.

The initial natural disasters damaged the Fukushima nuclear power plant, which is still causing major problems.

Qantas had carried out lengthy discussions with all relevant nuclear, aviation and medical authorities and would continue to monitor and assess the situation in Japan, Mr Joyce said.