

Pearson in 'breach of protocol'

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NOEL Pearson has breached indigenous cultural norms by criticising his fellow Aborigines and telling those from other parts of the country what to do, according to an expert in indigenous affairs.

Law professor at the University of Technology Larissa Behrendt said Mr Pearson's favoured status among policy-makers had caused "understandable" frustration to others in the Aboriginal community, whose level of knowledge on indigenous dysfunction at least equalled his.

Speaking at Parliament House yesterday, Professor Behrendt, herself Aboriginal, said Mr Pearson had been the beneficiary of a protocol among Aborigines not to publicly criticise one another lest the appearance of division be used as a wedge by opponents.

"It's a protocol in the indigenous community that you should not tell other Aboriginal groups what they should be doing," Professor Behrendt said. "(Noel has been) very unapologetic about breaching that protocol."

Professor Behrendt was giving a lecture on the legacy of the 1967 referendum, which gave the commonwealth power to legislate on behalf of Aborigines.

She was critical of the Government's takeover of communities in the Northern Territory, saying it was paternalistic and would be ineffective if not accompanied by increased frontline spending on health and education.