



CRIME AND CORRUPTION COMMISSION

TRANSCRIPT OF INVESTIGATIVE HEARING

10 CONDUCTED AT LEVEL 2, NORTH TOWER, 515 ST PAULS TERRACE,
FORTITUDE VALLEY WITH RESPECT TO

File No: CO-16-1664

HEARING NO: 17/0001

DAY 6 – THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2017
(DURATION: 29MINS)

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LEGEND

PO Presiding Officer – ALAN MACSPORRAN QC
CA Counsel Assisting – GLEN RICE QC
30 HRO Hearing Room Orderly – MELISSA LETONDEUR
W Witness – ROBERT SHARPLESS
LR Legal Representative – TERRY MCBRIDE, McBride Legal

CA I call Mr Robert SHARPLESS.

PO Mr SHARPLESS, do you have any objection to taking an oath on the Bible?

W No.

PO Thank you.

10 HRO The evidence which I shall give in these proceedings.

W The evidence that I shall give in these proceedings.

HRO Shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

W Shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

20 CA Mr SHARPLESS is represented, I understand, Commissioner.

PO Could you announce your appearance for the record, please?

LR Good morning. My name is Terry MCBRIDE from McBride Legal.

PO Thank you.

CA Sir, is your name Robert SHARPLESS?

30 W Yes, it is.

CA Mr SHARPLESS, you're a businessman and company director?

W I am.

CA You're appearing today in response to an attendance notice?

W Correct.

40 CA Can I show you this, first of all. Is that a copy of the notice you were given to attend today?

W Yes, it is.

CA I tender that, Commissioner.

PO Exhibit 84.

50 CA Mr SHARPLESS, you're a 50 per cent shareholder in a number of companies; am I right?

W No, I'm a 25 per cent shareholder in a number of companies.

CA Okay. Well, perhaps you might explain as we go. There is a company, Springfield Land Corporation?

- W Correct.
- CA You have an interest in that?
- W 25 per cent, yes.
- CA What's the business of Springfield Land Corporation?
- 10 W Property development.
- CA In what area? At Springfield?
- W At Springfield, yes.
- CA And more widely or not?
- W No.
- 20 CA And Springfield falls within the area of responsibility of the Ipswich City Council?
- W It does these days, yes.
- CA The second company, I think, is Brookwater Golf Club Pty Ltd?
- W Brookwater Golf Operations Pty Ltd, I think, is the name of the company.
- 30 CA Golf Operations?
- W Yes.
- CA You have an interest in that company?
- W Yes, I do.
- CA Is that 25 per cent also?
- 40 W Correct.
- CA What's its business?
- W It basically manages the Brookwater Golf Club.
- CA Is that within the Ipswich City Council area also?
- W Yes, it is.
- 50 CA And the third company is Murland No. 1 Pty Ltd - M-U-R-L-A-N-D?
- W Yes.
- CA You have an interest in that also?
- W Yes, I do.

- CA 25 per cent?
- W Yes, I do.
- CA And what's its business, Mr SHARPLESS?
- W It's also a property development company. It has done a number of projects in the past, and currently it owns some land in Ripley Valley, which is in Ipswich.
- 10 CA So all those businesses, the area of operation is within the Ipswich City Council?
- W Correct.
- CA Your partner, or at least one of them, is Mr SINNATHAMBY?
- W He's my only partner.
- 20 CA Only partner, okay.
- W Business partner.
- CA I didn't mean to confuse you, I wasn't sure. You have one partner?
- W Yes. We've been business partners since 1984.
- 30 CA Okay. Now, each of those companies that I mentioned, I think, made donations towards the Ipswich City Council election campaigns in 2016?
- W That's correct.
- CA Are you aware of those donations?
- W Yes, I am.
- 40 CA Were you involved in decisions to make the donations?
- W Yes, I was.
- CA I think the details are set out in a number of returns that were filed. Are you aware of the disclosure returns that were submitted subsequent to the election?
- W Yes, I am.
- 50 CA I'll show you those and we might just go through them.
- W Sure.
- CA I'll just show you two, to begin with. They're both in the name of Springfield Land Corporation. There is one that's dated 17 May 2016 on page 5. I think it's the other one, actually, Mr SHARPLESS.

W Yes.

CA That, I think, bears your signature?

W Yes, it does.

CA On 17 May 2016?

10 W Yes.

CA I tender that one - I'll tender them one by one, Commissioner.

PO Thank you. Exhibit 85.

CA In that instance it records, in the details section on page 4, a donation to Mr PISASALE, being the Mayor of Ipswich, on the 2nd of October 2015. Can you explain how that came about, Mr SHARPLESS?

20 W The actual donation itself?

CA Yes. What were the circumstances of it?

W Well, the Mayor organised a golf day fundraiser at the Brookwater Golf Course. It was managed by an external golf management event company, and we agreed to host that event at Brookwater and we agreed to enter a team in the actual golf day. So this disclosure records the payment that was made to the golf event organisation to enter a team in the golf day.

30 CA The cost of entering a team?

W Of entering a team, yes. So it was a financial payment we made to the golf event company.

CA Whose team does that represent? Is it a Springfield Land Corporation golf team?

40 W Well, we entered four players in the event, but the actual invoice we received from the golf management company was addressed to Springfield Land Corporation, and Springfield Land Corporation paid the payment and, therefore, we disclosed that payment on behalf of Springfield Land Corporation.

CA It was a fundraising golf day for Mayor PISASALE, as you understood it?

W For his campaign, correct.

50 CA Why did you enter a team and pay the money? Why do that?

W Why did we do that?

CA Mmm.

W To support the Mayor.

- CA Why support the Mayor?
- W Because we believe that he's worth supporting. He's the Mayor of the city.
- CA I'm just interested to know the criteria by which you make a donation, Mr SHARPLESS.
- 10 W Sure. Well, I guess - I guess to give you some context, we make lots of donations to lots of organisations who do great work within the community that we've been a part of there for the last 25 years.
- CA Going beyond political donations?
- W Going well beyond political donations.
- CA Perhaps you might expand on that context since you've raised it.
- 20 W Sure. So I think - I actually pulled out a list of the organisations that we've supported over the last two years, and the donations total in excess of \$600,000. They include universities, schools, research organisations, charities, community groups, and generally they're organisations who ask for our help and support and we believe are doing a good job within the community.
- CA And so far as Mayor PISASALE is concerned, you are obviously prepared to support him. Do you have a view about his credentials?
- 30 W Well, I have a view that he's probably the hardest-working Mayor that I've seen in 30 years of watching the behaviours of Mayors in different cities.
- CA Okay. And prepared to support him on that basis?
- W I'm certainly prepared to vouch for how hard he works.
- CA And in this instance offer at least that extent of financial support to his campaign?
- 40 W Yes, we were very happy to support his campaign.
- CA The other return in the name of Springfield Land Corporation is dated - it looks like the 14th of June 2016.
- W Yes.
- CA That records donations of \$19,568. Is that also referable to the 2016 council elections?
- 50 W It is, although it covers more than the Ipswich City Council.
- CA Yes, we'll come to that. For the time being, I'll tender that disclosure return of 14 June 2016.
- PO Exhibit 86.

- CA In this instance, I think the details are set out in a list on the last page?
- W Correct.
- CA Were you involved in decisions to make the donations listed there?
- W I wasn't involved in the - and there is actually a duplication there. The Strategem one is actually a double, a double-entry. There was only the one donation. I wasn't involved in that one, but I was across the others.
- 10 CA How did those donations come to be made by Springfield Land Corporation?
- W We were approached in each case by either the candidate directly or someone on behalf of the candidate.
- CA When you say "we were approached", did you field any such approach?
- W Yes, I did, or Maha, my business partner, would have received the other approach.
- 20 CA So it would have been to one or other of you?
- W Correct.
- CA Asking you for money, asking you for a donation?
- W To support the campaign, yes.
- 30 CA And you and he were prepared to do so, by the looks?
- W Yes.
- CA Did you make a donation to each such person who approached you or your partner, or were you selective about it?
- W I don't recall us refusing to support someone who asked for our assistance.
- 40 CA Well, the first on the list is actually in the name of ALP Queensland.
- W Yes.
- CA Was there some individual who approached you or your partner?
- W Yes, yes, it was, an ex-Lord Mayor approached whether we'd send someone along to a lunch that was being put on for the Brisbane Lord Mayoral candidate, Rod HARDING, and we sent one of our representatives along to that lunch.
- 50 CA The next one, being a donation to LNP Team Quirk appears also to have been for a meal, a fundraising dinner?
- W Yes, that's one that I went to. I was actually contacted by the person who was organising the dinner, asking whether we would send someone along, and I said I would go along to that one.

- CA So you're prepared to support both sides, by the looks, in the Brisbane City Council?
- W Correct.
- CA There is duplication, you say, on the next two entries. There should in fact be one donation?
- 10 W There should be one, yes.
- CA What were the circumstances of it?
- W Again, an ex Labor politician approached us as to whether we would send someone along to a function for Brett RAGUSE, who was a Lord Mayoral candidate for the Logan City Council election.
- CA What kind of function was that? Was it a function?
- 20 W I think it was a sponsorship of a lunch, or something like that.
- CA Do you recall, then, whether that was the cost associated with attendance or was there some additional donation component?
- W That was the invoice that we were sent.
- CA You're not sure?
- W Which we paid. I didn't attend that function myself, no.
- 30 CA Do you think you got an invoice for \$4,400?
- W Yes, I think Terry would have a copy of that invoice.
- CA Would invoices be the source of information to complete this return?
- W Normally, yes.
- 40 CA The next three - Mr PAHLKE, Mr PISASALE and Mr ANTONIOLLI, were all candidates for the Ipswich City Council?
- W Correct.
- CA Were you approached in each instance?
- W Yes, we were.
- CA Likewise, what was the final one? There's a \$5,000 donation in this case to LNP Team Quirk. Can you recall how that came about?
- 50 W Yes, there was a luncheon that was put on. From memory, it might have been a federal member of parliament as well as with Graham QUIRK, and we sent someone along to that function.
- CA In describing these, you've mentioned that you were approached on each occasion for donation or participation in a dinner, as the case may

be. Have you or your partner made a donation to the 2016 council elections that was not solicited by some candidate or on behalf of a candidate?

W No, we haven't.

10 CA Just as a matter of interest, we noticed from the return that we just looked at that there were donations pertaining to the Brisbane City Council, Team Quirk, and also the ALP, et cetera. Is that outside your area of business operations?

W If you mean do we have projects in those two local councils, the answer is, no, we don't.

CA I'm just curious as to why you chose to make a donation to the Brisbane City Council as opposed to the Ipswich City Council, where your business is based?

20 W Well, I think that's - again, to give it context, I mean, we are involved in working with state governments, federal governments, and different local councils, as propagating our project. So, you know, it's not unusual for us to be asked to be involved in all sorts of different initiatives that different local authorities, state governments and federal governments want to pursue. So, as I said, it's a very narrow view if you think that the only area of interest we have is in Ipswich.

CA I was just inviting you to explain it, Mr SHARPLESS.

30 W Sure.

CA The next return is in the name of Brookwater Golf Operations. Looking at page 5, it appears you signed that on the 17th of May 2016?

W That's correct.

CA I tender that disclosure return.

PO Exhibit 87.

40 CA That lists on page 4 a donation in kind of \$8,347. Can you explain what that pertains to?

W Yes. That's the golf day that we talked about earlier.

CA Yes.

W Basically we didn't charge for the use of the golf course, nor for-

50 CA Is that the cost of use of the golf course?

W And the food and beverage that was consumed on the day. So this was why that was disclosed as a donation in kind rather than as a payment.

CA In this case, use of the golf course and food and beverage, is that something that you were asked to do?

W That's correct.

CA Consistent with the pattern that you identified a little earlier?

W Well, we were asked to provide that to that event for free, which we did.

CA Were you approached by someone on behalf of the Mayor for that purpose?

10 W Yes, we were.

CA And you obviously agreed to that?

W Yes, we did.

CA We'll go to the next return. It's in the name of Murland No. 1. This one is not signed by you, but you can see, I think, on page 5 it's signed on behalf of Murland on the 1st of April 2016?

20 W Yes.

CA I tender that disclosure return.

PO Exhibit 88.

CA The details that it provides on page 4 show two donations to two candidates, Mr ANTONIOLLI and Mr PAHLKE. Do you recall anything of the circumstances of making those donations?

30 W Oh, only that we were asked to make those donations. I think that request actually went through to my partner, Maha, rather than myself.

CA Is there any significance to the fact that Murland was chosen as the vehicle to make these particular donations?

W Oh, it's just one of our entities.

CA So there's no significance?

40 W No.

CA Do these donations come to be made with any expectation of anything in return, Mr SHARPLESS?

W No, they don't.

CA Is it your experience that making of donations gives you any form of improved access to councillors?

50 W No, it doesn't.

CA Why do you say that?

W Oh, I think, again, you probably need to understand perhaps a little bit about the Springfield project as distinct from other projects.

- CA Feel free to explain.
- W So, I mean, we have all the approvals for our project. They're supported by an Act of parliament and there has been significant negotiations with the different council, state government and even federal government to set up the platform for the project. So in respect of our project, the politicians actually play a very, very small role.
- 10 The approvals are actually normally issued on delegated authority by the city planner, and the CEO of the council and the city planner are far more powering in relation to, you know, the dealings that we have with our project. So it's a bit of a misconception if people think that somehow these politicians have direct influence or ability to influence our project. In the case of Springfield, it's not the case.
- CA It's a special case?
- 20 W Well, it's the only case we know of in terms of this, I guess, underlying structure that exists. I mean, I can only speak on behalf of our dealings with Springfield.
- CA Could you confirm this, then, from what you've said, would you expect that Springfield Land Corporation will have any development applications before council in the current term?
- W We always have development applications before council, but they are dealt with by basically delegated authority by the city planner in most instances.
- 30 CA Okay, so you don't expect that any development applications will come before council for decision?
- W Well-
- CA Before-
- W There's still another three years to go in this current term of the government, and given the pace of development in Springfield, I couldn't say to you there won't be any that might not come.
- 40 CA But they're not normally dealt with by the councillors?
- W Correct.
- CA Is that something you would expect to continue?
- W Yes.
- 50 CA Do you have a personal relationship, whether it be professional or of a more personal kind, with any of the Ipswich City councillors?
- W No, I don't.
- CA Do you have occasion to contact them personally for professional reasons?

- W Rarely. Rarely.
- CA When you were speaking with Commission officers, I think you expressed a view about the banning of donations?
- W I would love to see it happen.
- 10 CA What is your view, Mr SHARPLESS, about donations, such as the kind that you've made and we've been through?
- W I guess it comes back to what is the problem that you're trying to deal with. You know, there seems to be this perception that the making of a donation is creating a behaviour, you know, that that is-
- CA It's a prevalent perception, isn't it?
- W Well, it's a perception. So I guess - to me, if you really want to do something about it, why don't you ban political donations?
- 20 CA You'd be happy for that to occur?
- W It would make my life so much easier.
- CA And you wouldn't have to come here.
- W It's not the first time and, you know, my view is that there should be some funded model at all levels of government where money is budgeted for, it's dealt with, it's used for the purposes for which it's raised, and then people such as property developers and others wouldn't be accused of doing things that supposedly are not in the public interest, just because we try and help people who ask for our help.
- 30 CA That's the evidence, Commissioner.
- PO Thank you.
- 40 Mr SHARPLESS, just a couple of things. You said that the CEO and city planner are far more influential because of delegated authority. Who is that - is that Mr LINDSAY and Mr ADAMS in Ipswich?
- W Correct.
- PO Do you deal personally with them on occasions?
- W Yes, I do.
- PO And that's in respect of the applications you have spoken of that you might have before council from time to time?
- 50 W Well, it's in respect of those sorts of things. It's also in respect of lots of issues that they want us to help them with. I mean, the City of Ipswich has had a fairly chequered reputation over, you know, the recent past. We've been there for 25 years trying to change the image of that city and bring development into an area that otherwise had no infrastructure, nothing. And, you know, rebranding the city, lifting its

image, being involved in marketing activities and other promotional activities to lift the standard of development in that city is something that we've worked very closely with the Ipswich City Council for basically about the last 25 years.

PO I understand. Finally, we have seen from the disclosure returns and what you have told us that your entities donate effectively to both sides of politics?

10 W Correct.

PO In the same election period?

W Correct.

PO Why is that? Why do you donate to both sides of politics?

20 W Because both sides of politics ask us to support their campaign initiatives and, you know, it's quite normal for political parties and others to ask for help from people who in the past have provided help.

PO Mr MCBRIDE, do you have any questions of your witness?

LR No, thank you.

PO Thank you. Mr RICE, anything arising out of anything I have asked?

CA No, thank you, Commissioner.

30 PO Thank you, Mr SHARPLESS. You are excused.

W Thank you.

CA That's as far as we can take it until 2 pm, Commissioner.

PO Thanks, Mr RICE. We will adjourn now until 2 o'clock.

HRO This hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

40