FOREST CONTRACTOR BUY-OUTS UNDER A CLOUD

Greens Call for a Probity Audit and the Release of Final Assessment Criteria

Kim Booth MP
Greens Forests spokesperson

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mps.tas.greens.org.au

The Tasmanian Greens today announced that they would be calling on the Federal Auditor General to conduct a probity audit on the way in which the government has provided some contractors with a buy-out package, whilst ignoring the plight of others.

They also called on the government to release the final criteria on which contractors were paid out and why many were deemed ineligible.

Greens Forestry spokesperson Kim Booth MP said today that he had serious concerns about the selection criteria finally used to decide who received payouts.

"Eighty-three contractors put up their hands for an exit package, yet apparently only 25 received one," said Mr Booth.

"I am extremely concerned that some contractors who received exit assistance in fact had no contracts in Tasmania or were already fully employed logging in other states."

"Potentially, another $17 million of scarce public money has been spent on the forestry industry in what appears to be an ad-hoc manner. I spoke with Greens Leader Bob Brown this morning and he will be writing to the Federal Auditor General to investigate the probity of the way those public funds have been spent."

"In addition, I am calling on the Federal Government to publicly release the final selection criteria."

"This was an opportunity to make a quantum shift out of native forest logging, but instead it seems that the timber barons have once again plundered the public purse and condemned the remaining native forest contractors to financial ruin."

"I understand that 42 Gunns contractors and 41 Forestry Tasmania contractors wanted out at less than $750,000 per contractor. Buying these contractors out would have seen the end of the financially unviable native forest woodchipping industry. But once again it seems that the back room boys have done another back room deal and flogged the public purse without probity or good effect," said Mr Booth.