


NSW Greyhound chief has phone and laptop seized after leaks

EXCLUSIVEBy **HEDLEY THOMAS**, NATIONAL CHIEF CORRESPONDENT12:00AM AUGUST 4, 2016 •  COMMENTS

The laptop computer and mobile phone of the chief steward of Greyhound Racing NSW, Clint Bentley, have been confiscated for an examination of email and call records after sensitive excerpts from legal documents were published in The Weekend Australian.

The legal documents included submissions by his solicitor John Laxon, who highlighted alleged unfairness and flawed reasoning in the Baird government's special commission of inquiry.

The disclosure of the material has been embarrassing for Premier Mike Baird and his advisers as they have repeatedly insisted that the inquiry by former High Court judge Michael McHugh QC and his counsel assisting, Stephen Rushton SC, was forensic, in-depth, fair and balanced.

Industry participants as well as former and current staff of GRNSW insist the inquiry was biased and that Mr Rushton was of the view before the first public hearing that shutdown was the best option.

GRNSW staff and inquiry witnesses who want to defend the industry say they have been gagged and threatened with disciplinary action as Mr Baird moves towards abolition, the loss of hundreds of jobs and the demise of thousands of dogs.

Sources close to GRNSW said yesterday the peak body's legal counsel, Madeleine Love, and a staffer from KordaMentha went to see Mr Bentley on Tuesday and told him to hand over his phone and laptop.

KordaMentha was appointed by GRNSW's interim chief executive, Baird government appointee Paul Newson.

Mr Newson has lost the confidence of staff who say he adopted a legal strategy to “run dead” in the inquiry, contributing to Mr Baird’s decision to end racing.

Because Mr Bentley’s laptop computer was at his home in Mittagong, a two-hour drive from the GRNSW offices in Sydney, the chief steward was told to drive home.

He was followed by the KordaMentha staffer who took the laptop.

It was returned yesterday after forensic examination, according to sources, who said Mr Bentley was “concerned and distressed” at his treatment.

Mr Newson has issued Mr Bentley a notice saying he was being investigated over leaks from confidential documents related to the inquiry and reported in **The Weekend Australian**. The documents belonged to Mr Bentley and his solicitor, not GRNSW, according to sources.

Mr Laxon, of Laxon Lex Lawyers, said yesterday: “I am unable to make any comment.”

The investigation of Mr Bentley, a devotee of greyhound racing, has heightened tensions in the industry.

Mr Rushton declined to comment on criticisms including that he appeared to have made up his mind before the first public hearing last September that the industry should be shut down.

Mr Newson responded to questions from *The Australian* yesterday with a statement in which he said:

“It appeared from the article that confidential information from Mr Bentley’s lawyer’s submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry may have been leaked to *The Australian*.

“GRNSW did not instruct KordaMentha to confiscate the laptop and mobile phone of Mr Bentley.

“All GRNSW personnel are required to co-operate fully with KordaMentha in the Inquiry.

“GRNSW cannot maintain the public trust and credibility the greyhound industry most desperately needs if information is continually leaked to the media.”

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