

WINE VVS

Blogger Petros Khaledirad cleared of charges over alleged stalking of Queensland MP

By Paul Robinson and Kristian Silva

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A court has thrown out unlawful stalking charges against a self-described citizen journalist accused of harassing Labor MP Brittany Lauga.

Petros Khaledirad, a local businessman and political blogger, was accused of making derogatory posts on social media and publishing Ms Lauga's phone number and a photo of her house online.

On one occasion he referred to her as the "minister for trailer trash", and asked her neighbours when she walked her dog.

In court, the Keppel MP said the posts made her anxious, and she felt as if she was under constant surveillance by Mr Khaledirad.

However, Rockhampton Magistrate Cameron Press said the weight of evidence was not strong enough to prove a stalking charge and said Mr Khaledirad had no case to answer.

"I cannot conclude that a reasonable jury even taking the evidence at its highest could find that the charge was proved beyond reasonable doubt," he said.

In court, Mr Khaledirad's lawyers argued the charges were concocted to pressure him into dropping an investigation of fraud allegations against Ms Lauga's husband.

"Democracy's an important thing in Australia under a representative government," Mr Khaledirad said outside court.

"I think we have a right to ask questions about government decisions, indeed policy decisions, about members of parliament. I think it's everyone's obligation to do that."

In a statement, Ms Lauga said she was "incredibly disappointed" by the court's verdict.

"Politics can be a nasty business, but I remain determined not to stoop to the level of those who seek to destroy my reputation," she said.

Laugas agreed to pay back \$250k

Much of the court hearings over the past two days have centred around an incident involving Ms Lauga's husband which Mr Khaledirad was investigating.

Wayne Lauga worked as the central Queensland manager of Hutchinson Builders, and he used the company to build the family home.

The court heard the company's managing director, Greg Quinn, confronted Mr Lauga when costs for the home went hundreds of thousands of dollars over budget, telling Mr Lauga "something terribly untoward has happened".

The cost over-run included thousands of dollars in payments to a number of Rockhampton businesses.

"I've heard your explanation and the facts don't align with what you've said," Mr Quinn wrote to Mr Lauga.

"Never before in my career have I had to face anything so concerning."



PHOTO: Brittany Lauga is the Labor MP for Keppel. (Facebook: Brittany Lauga)



PHOTO: Rockhampton businessman and political blogger Petros Khaledirad. (Supplied: Petros Khaledirad)

Hutchinson Builders agreed to allow the couple to pay back \$250,000 of the cost over-run on an interest-free basis after meeting with Ms Lauga.

The company's lawyers have previously testified that the agreement was not politically motivated, and Ms Lauga denied any wrongdoing.

In a police interview played to the court, an officer said the Crime and Corruption Commission had cleared Ms Lauga of any wrongdoing in relation to her dealings with Hutchinson Builders.

The court heard Mr Lauga resigned from the company.

Topics: law-crime-and-justice, courts-and-trials, government-and-politics, parliament, state-parliament, rockhampton-4700, qld

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