

‘Political Pull’

An ethics Vodcast

produced by the Australian Public Service Commission

Brenda Jones—Local Member, Government party

Being elected to serve my community at the last election was a real honour. With this electorate being so marginal it could have gone either way. My office is in Downheart, a little town in the centre of the electorate. We’ve had some hard times recently with the closure of the canneries and the meat works. There are a lot of young people without jobs.

Les Brown—Branch Manager, ECO Skills project

My team was responsible for managing the tender process for the Eco Skills training centres. It was an election promise to establish the centres in areas of high unemployment.

It was a huge process—the stakes were extremely high—and the pressure was very intense. With contracts of more than \$70 million being awarded, you know, I made sure that all my staff understood, and were clear about, each step in the tender process—I didn’t want there to be any mistakes that could undermine the integrity of the process.

The tender evaluation went really well. There was a small moment at the Christmas drinks when Kylie from the Minister’s office said she wanted me to make sure that the Hugtree consortium was on the short list. I told her to pull her head in basically—I mean, obviously respectfully—and that was the end of it. She’s just a kid—very inexperienced. And, you know, next time she will know better than to ask.

Integrity and ethical behaviour in procurement is really important throughout the process. And that’s why we went to the trouble of having an independent panel undertake the evaluation and make the recommendation to the Minister. It’s easier to prevent a problem than deal with it after the event.

Michelle Fox—Ministerial adviser

When Brenda approached the Minister to make the tender announcement in her electorate, we thought it was a good idea. Her electorate is marginal and it would be a big boost for the local economy. We expect the skills centre to employ about 50 staff, have 500 trainees and inject \$20 million a year into the surrounding community. It’s a big coup.

Brenda Jones—Local Member

My husband heard that a friend of his, who owns a local company called Hugtree Training, was part of a consortium that won the tender for a new Eco Skills training centre in our electorate. I thought that it would be a great opportunity to raise the profile of the project if I made the announcement at the upcoming Downheart community Harvest Festival. All the regional media would be there. I didn’t think it would hurt my profile, either, to be associated with a project that will have such a positive impact on the community.

I rang my niece, Kylie, who works in the Minister’s office, to float the idea, and she was really helpful.

Les Brown—Branch Manager, ECO Skills project (ashen faced and shocked)

Well the big announcement is due to be made later today. I didn’t much like the idea of the local member making an announcement. I would have preferred the Minister to do it with representatives of the winning consortium—and it looks like I was right to be concerned. The Opposition seems to have got wind of the outcome and they’re claiming the selection has been influenced by Brenda’s lobbying, helped along by Kylie who, as it turns out, is Brenda’s niece. I mean, I had no idea.

But that's not all. It just gets worse. I took receipt of an FOI request last week from a reporter at the *Daily Bugle* asking for papers relating to the tender.

Going through the files this morning I found a letter which seems to suggest that Hugtree Training contributed to the local member's electoral campaign.

I don't know what to do. Both my Division Head and Deputy Secretary are travelling and they're out of mobile range. What advice do I give the Minister? Should I let the launch go ahead? Does this mean that I have to re-run the whole process again?