



Ben Roberts-Smith owes Kerry Stokes \$1.9m

Joe Aston *Columnist*

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We could only marvel at the jaunty response of alleged war criminal **Ben Roberts-Smith** to the Prime Minister's appointment of a special investigator to advance findings by the inspector-general of the Australian Defence Force into the conduct of SAS troops in [Afghanistan](#) towards prosecution.

"I would also like to take this opportunity to correct the false claims repeatedly made in the Nine press that the IGADF inquiry referred any matter about me to the AFP for investigation," Roberts-Smith claimed on Thursday. "That is untrue. As the Federal Court heard on 8 October 2020 in my defamation proceedings against Nine, the AFP investigations were commenced in May 2018 following a referral from a member of the Melbourne media."

Retired corporal and Victoria Cross recipient Ben Roberts-Smith is a "potentially affected person" in the upcoming IGADF inquiry into the conduct of SAS troops in Afghanistan. **Sean Gallup**

What this statement is supposed to prove or disprove is unclear – indeed, perhaps clarity wasn't its purpose. As the Federal Court heard on September 1, the Australian Federal Police wrote to Roberts-Smith's lawyer in December last year advising him that a murder investigation was commenced into his client on June 3, 2018, following a referral from the then Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal **Mark Binskin** – which discredits any suggestion that the AFP's investigations are somehow a creation of "a member of the Melbourne media" (being, unmistakably, *The Age's* **Nick McKenzie**).

It is also now a "[known known](#)" – to borrow a phrase from **Donald Rumsfeld** – that the IGADF inquiry issued a potentially affected person (PAP) notice to Roberts-Smith, which

demonstrates both that the decorated soldier is a focus of the inquiry, and that its representation of him is adverse.

Roberts-Smith denies all wrongdoing and is suing our sister mastheads *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* over their revelation of the multiple murder allegations against him.

The Victoria Cross recipient joined Seven West Media in 2014 and it has long been presumed or speculated that Seven chairman **Kerry Stokes** is financially underwriting his executive's legal battle (not to mention his PR offensive led by **Sue Cato** and ably assisted by UFO aficionado **Ross Coulthart**).

This column has now established that as fact. Stokes' private investment company Australian Capital Equity has extended a line of credit to Roberts-Smith, who has drawn \$1.9 million on the repayable facility thus far.

Bear in mind that Roberts-Smith's family home on the Sunshine Coast wouldn't be worth much more than the balance of his loan to Stokes. Not that he lives there any more, having moved to Brisbane and formed a special friendship with his solicitor **Monica Allen** of the (full service) firm Mark O'Brien Legal.



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Stokes is also chairman of the Australian War Memorial. Serving alongside him on the AWM council is Chief of Army **Rick Burr**. Only last month, Lieutenant General Burr emailed all Australian Army personnel to gird them for the “extremely serious and deeply troubling” contents of the IGADF inquiry. He said the SAS’ alleged conduct in Afghanistan “do not reflect who we aspire to be” and promised that “we will act on the findings”.

Another director of the War Memorial is **James McMahon** – chief operating officer of Stokes’ Australian Capital Equity, financier of Roberts-Smith’s civil disputation of those “extremely serious and deeply troubling” allegations.

The dissonance of the AWM council on this matter – which goes to the core of the War Memorial’s mission – is surely untenable? Something else for the PM and Defence Minister **Linda Reynolds** to iron out, eventually ...

Joe Aston has helmed The Australian Financial Review's Rear Window column since 2012. He is based in Los Angeles. *Connect with Joe on [Facebook](#)*

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