

East Timor accuses Australian tax assessor Roger Maguire of being a "mole" for oil companies

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Australian man Roger Maguire has been accused by East Timor of being a "mole" for oil major ConocoPhillips amid revelations it paid him \$US120,000 to provide evidence on its behalf.

Mr Maguire worked for the Timorese government as a revenue legal adviser but was paid to testify against his former employer by ConocoPhillips during a bitter conflict over tax involving hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mr Maguire angrily denied he had been a mole. However, he told Fairfax Media he received payment of "about 120,000 dollars US" for travel expenses and his time reviewing his files. He said he was paid an hourly rate of \$US500.

"We were talking about quite a number of man hours here," he said. "Having to take time off, jeopardising other projects I had going on."

Even after deducting \$20,000 for travel expenses, the amount equates to 200 hours of work, or five weeks entirely devoted to the project.

Mr Maguire was not called by either side to appear but did compile two short witness statements, each less than 10 pages long.

Those familiar with arbitration hearings described the amount as "extraordinary".

One oil industry insider, who asked not to be named, said the amount was "contrary to Conoco's policy".

Fact witnesses – those who recount what their direct knowledge of the matters before arbitration – are generally not paid, except for expenses. In contrast, expert witnesses – those with specialist knowledge but no direct involvement in the case – are typically paid, sometimes lucratively.

Industry sources and emails obtained by Fairfax Media reveal Mr Maguire, who was charged with assessing appeals by oil companies, liaised regularly with them and was seen as sympathetic to their claims.

Mr Maguire said such meetings were part of his job. But East Timor's legal counsel, former US ambassador for war crimes Pierre-Richard Prosper, said Mr Maguire was an "asset" of the oil industry, an intelligence term for an informer.

"This information clearly indicates that Roger Maguire was a mole for ConocoPhillips during the time he was a Timor-Leste government employee," Mr Prosper said. "This raises the question as to how he became one."

"We wonder how deep this goes."

Mr Maguire said the notion he was a paid "asset" for ConocoPhillips was nonsense.

"One might say that about everyone's who is on East Timor's payroll or was a witness," he said.

Fairfax Media revealed on Tuesday the extraordinary case of Bobby Boye, the Nigerian national and convicted felon who worked alongside Mr Maguire. Boye was arrested in June for allegedly defrauding Timor of \$3.5 million.

The investigation also revealed that ConocoPhillips executives were aware of Boye's criminal past and fraudulent conduct in East Timor for more than 12 months before telling its government.

Mr Maguire said he was appalled by Boye's conduct when he worked with him, although he was unaware of his criminal past and deceit until his arrest in June.

He said Boye's tax assessments against the oil companies were almost invariably wrong "but I was not permitted to correct them".

Mr Maguire said he was "under instructions" when he supported one of Mr Boye's tax decisions in an email.

"As far as they were being subject to illegal decisions, I was sympathetic [to the oil companies]," he said.

"There is an intriguing logic that while Prosper attacks my motives, credibility and character, his entire case is built around a proven fraudster, who is presently reported to be facing up to 20 years imprisonment on each of number of charges."

He also accused East Timor of using the media to influence the arbitration proceedings.

A decision on the arbitration is pending.

ConocoPhillips declined to respond to questions from Fairfax Media on Wednesday.



'Mole': Roger Maguire, an Australian who worked in East Timor's Directorate-General of Revenue and Customs has been accused of being a ConocoPhillips 'mole'.