

FINANCE

Woodside seeks 'moles' in Voelte email lawsuit

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Petroleum giant **Woodside** is trying to unmask three workers who alerted a former executive to a blistering internal email from chief executive Don Voelte that now sits at the centre of a bitter defamation battle.

The former executive, Steve Major, is fighting in the WA Supreme Court to protect the workers identities amid claims that **Woodside** is behaving in a mischievous, illegitimate and oppressive manner.

Mr Majors barrister, Barrie Goldsmith, told Justice David Newnes yesterday that the workers were concerned about being identified, with one describing **Woodside** as being "quite spiteful".

Woodside claims it needs the identities to comply with court orders that it hand over electronic records about the publication through the groups email system in late 2006 of Mr Voeltes scathing attack on Mr Major, who last year sued the petroleum group for defamation.

Mr Voelte wrote the email after Mr Major, a 20-year oil industry veteran, quit Woodsides Libyan operations and questioned the energy giants ability to properly support its expansion into overseas markets.

Mr Major emailed Mr Voelte to outline his frustrations working for **Woodside** in Libya, including difficulties in securing accommodation. He said he had reached a point in his life where he did not require a job for financial security, the "level of intolerance rises dramatically" and "consequently minor irritations are no longer acceptable".

Mr Voeltes response was initially circulated among top **Woodside** management but eventually found its way to other staff and to The West Australian.

Mr Voelte boasted of having worked until 2am while on an overseas trip through 17 cities, enduring lost luggage and cancelled flights. He welcomed Mr Majors resignation: "Steve, you have made the right choice for **Woodside**, that is."

Woodside, which is defending the legal action, has been struggling to comply with orders to hand over electronic records related to the email.

Woodsides lawyer, Carmel Galati, said discovering the identities of those who sent emails to Mr Major could help **Woodside** find documents during the complex task of scouring electronic records. The names should not be kept secret just because the workers were concerned about being identified, she said.

But Mr Goldsmith said one worker had told Mr Major he feared his job would be jeopardised if **Woodside** learnt his identity and another described **Woodside** as a powerful company that would not take kindly to an employee passing on information, allegedly claiming: "**Woodside** is a spiteful company, I would not like to get on the wrong side of it."

Ms Galati said **Woodside** did not accept the workers fears were real.

Mr Major has told the court that he had destroyed the emails and his laptop computer had been stolen.

Justice Newnes reserved his decision.

Mr Major has told The West Australian the email saga raised concerns about the way **Woodside**

operated and what it did to retain overseas staff.

He had suggested **Woodside** make a public apology but none was forthcoming.

I pulled one all-nighter getting the board papers out. In all, I travelled to 17 cities and flew 22 airline legs in heightened security conditions. Only two lost luggage conditions in 22 opportunities.

Now what was this about your minor irritations are no longer acceptable...even if a position is interesting and challenging.

Steve, you made the right choice...for **Woodside**, that is.

Take it from one that has probably 50-100 times the financial security you seek or think you have...that does not even rate on fulfilling one's life experiences.

Here's hoping that you experience no further minor irritations in life.

Don

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