

# SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

EXCLUSIVE

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## Revealed: MP Stuart Robert speech partly written by property developer lobbyist

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A speech Turnbull government MP Stuart Robert gave to Parliament defending the Gold Coast property developer Sunland was substantially written by the lead lobbyist for the company.

Fairfax Media can reveal that former Tony Abbott staffer-turned-developer-lobbyist Simone Holzapfel was the true author of whole sections of the speech that Mr Robert delivered in November 2012.

### Is this polly a parrot?

MP Stuart Robert strongly defends a property developer in parliament - but who wrote the script?

Ms Holzapfel wrote a four-page defence of Sunland after a November 17 newspaper article scrutinised the company's dispute with an Australian man who spent five years trapped in a legal nightmare in Dubai.

Seven sections of that response - provided to various government officials and obtained by Fairfax Media - subsequently found their way into Mr Robert's adjournment debate speech on November 26.



Coalition MP Stuart Robert's links to the company have come under scrutiny. Photo: Andrew Meares

Ms Holzapfel's words make up more than half of the speech.

Mr Robert has refused to comment on the revelation, which once again puts the spotlight on his connections with Sunland. Mr Robert's links to the company have come under scrutiny as part of a Queensland corruption inquiry into political donations to Gold Coast City Council candidates, which involves his fundraising body, the Fadden Forum.

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Mr Robert's November speech is one of two contentious speeches Mr Robert made about the dispute between Sunland and Marcus Lee.

Mr Lee is an accountant and property executive who was arrested on fraud charges in Dubai in 2009 after a land deal between Sunland and his company Nakheel went bad. He spent nine months in jail and then a further four years under house arrest. He was fully acquitted in 2013 and returned home to Australia in 2014.

He is now suing Sunland and its directors for more than \$10 million for loss of income, distress and legal costs.

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The case to which Cameron Stewart refers is currently being appealed by Sunland on the basis that Justice Croft failed to consider a substantial amount of documentary evidence, including evidence of Joyce and Reed planning to deceive Sunland, evidence of the falsification of documents by Joyce or Reed, and evidence of the distribution of half of the payment made by Sunland to Reed's company, approximately \$7 million, from Reed to Joyce, who at the time was a senior public servant in Dubai.

The receipt of that \$7 million by Joyce is the basis for the bribery charge Joyce faces in Dubai. However, that bribery charge was not tested in the Victorian Supreme Court. Although the evidence of the bribe, and documents from the Dubai investigation and the Dubai Court file, were put before the Victorian Supreme Court, Justice Croft refused to consider them and said they were irrelevant. In his 300-page judgement, Justice Croft made not one mention of the fact that Reed paid Joyce \$7 million and that Joyce has been charged with bribery in Dubai for receiving that \$7 million. Further, Cameron Stewart wrote:

*Joyce is not alone. His former work colleague Marcus Lee, 43, was also arrested in 2009 on*

*similar charges. despite Sunland having belatedly admitted this year that some of its*  
*Extract of Mr Robert's 26 November speech to Parliament. The highlighted section is just part of his speech that appears to originate from developer lobbyist Simone Holzapfel's four-page defence of Sunland.*

Mr Robert's speeches sent shockwaves through Mr Lee's camp, who felt they were ill-informed and could have a devastating impact on his bid for freedom. In the earlier speech - delivered in October 2012 - Mr Robert called Sunland a "solid Australian corporate citizen" and its directors as "fine, upstanding men".

Mr Lee subsequently wrote to former prime minister Tony Abbott to complain about Mr Robert's speeches and call for a correction to the Hansard record, saying they added to his post-traumatic stress-related disorders. Mr Lee was subsequently given the rare opportunity to make a statement to the House of Representatives detailing his acquittal and responding to Mr Robert's speeches.

### **Response to material in 'Let us go home' article**

*The bribery charges for which he was arrested in Dubai in 2009 were tested in the Victorian Supreme Court this year and found to be without foundation. The large Gold Coast-based property developer Sunland, which provided the key evidence against Joyce to the Dubai authorities, was found by the Australian judge to have "commenced and continued the present proceedings in wilful disregard of known facts and law" and with "a willingness to implicate Joyce unjustifiably". Sunland denies this and is appealing the judgment.*

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*Extract of Ms Holzapfel's four-page defence of Sunland - the highlighted section shows just part of the statement that later appeared in Mr Robert's speech to Parliament.*

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's office has also declined to comment on the revelations.

Mr Robert also gave a speech to Parliament in 2010 in which he thanks Ms Holzapfel and said her support was "completely and utterly invaluable".

Comment has also been sought from Ms Holzapfel. She and her company SHAC Communications donated \$114,000 to the Queensland Liberal National Party ahead of the 2013 election campaign.

Fairfax Media at the weekend examined Mr Robert's support for a controversial \$600 million Sunland development proposal on the Gold Coast.

Mr Robert attended the launch of the Mariner's Cove proposal and has lobbied the Gold Coast City Council to approve it - even though it is outside his electorate and contravenes development guidelines for the area.

Sunland temporarily withdrew its development application on Tuesday, two days after Fairfax Media's report.

Mr Robert has also admitted his Fadden Forum – a fundraising arm of the Queensland LNP – was used to secretly bankroll two candidates with \$60,000 to run in the March Gold Coast City Council election.

Kristyn Boulton and Felicity Stevenson, who were given \$30,000 each, were both members of Mr Robert's staff but ran as independents and did not disclose their Liberal links until after the poll. Ms Boulton was successfully elected while Ms Stevenson failed and returned to Mr Robert's employ.

Political rivals have accused Mr Robert and the LNP of seeking to stack the council by stealth with pro-development councillors.

The Queensland Crime and Corruption Commission this month launched an investigation into the election and has assigned a "specialist team" with political expertise to spearhead the investigation.

It's understood the investigation will seek to examine the provenance of money donated to the Fadden Forum, including Ms Holzapfel's contribution. Ms Holzapfel insists the money came from her own pocket, angrily rejecting suggestions she merely channelled money that really came from developer clients like Sunland.

Mr Robert was sacked from Mr Turnbull's frontbench in February over a scandal involving a major Liberal donor.