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Wood ‘shocked’ by allegations against agent

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Federal La Trobe MP Jason Wood. 218599_01
By Cam Lucadou-Wells

La Trobe MP Jason Wood says he was “shocked” by allegations against a migration agent who had donated to his election campaign fund.

The agent was linked to “dozens of unmeritorious” asylum seeker visa claims including for convicted drug traffickers, according to reports on 60 Minutes and The Age.

"I was shocked to hear the allegations against [the agent]... the first I heard of these allegations was when contacted by 60 Minutes," Mr Wood said.

Mr Wood was a former chair of the parliamentary joint migration committee and Assistant Minister for Home Affairs.

In that time, the agent reportedly donated \$26,700 to Mr Wood's campaign fund, described Mr Wood as a "friend" on a Facebook post and was introduced to senior Liberals.

In its report, 60 Minutes emphasised that there was no suggestion that Mr Wood knew of the agent's "wrong-doings".

In a statement, Mr Wood said he met with stakeholders, the department and law enforcement agencies to "identify gaps in the visa system particularly by rogue migration agents".

He also introduced "robust measures" to "eliminate the rogue agents and increase the industry's standards".

"I implemented a number of changes to strengthen oversight of the industry, including a new Code of Conduct for registered migration agents which commenced on 1 March 2022."

Other changes included "improving" the agent registration process, "strengthening" the powers of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) and increasing penalties for illegal operators.

Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said the allegations by 60 Minutes "highlight the failure of our visa system".

"I have asked my Department to investigate and provide me with advice on next steps.

"In addition, I announced on Monday the appointment of Dr Martin Parkinson AC PSM, Dr Joanna Howe and Mr John Azarias to guide a comprehensive review of Australia's migration system."

Ms O'Neil also recently responded to reports of "sexual exploitation, human trafficking and other organised crime" as a result of "grotesque abuse" of the visa and migration system.

She labelled the system overseen by Mr Wood and other Liberal Ministers as "broken".

In response, Mr Wood said that "Minister O'Neil should get her party's broken migration policies fixed first".

"Labor was the one who opposed the strengthening of the character test.

"(The) Liberal Coalition Government also proposed criminals to be deported based on their crimes committed, not by the time served – again Labor opposed these changes.

"With protection visa applications we proposed applications to be sent and assessed by (the) Migration Assessment Authority instead of the current requirement to be assessed by the (Administrative Appeals Tribunal) which is causing delays.

"Once again Labor opposed these changes."

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