

Jessica Buckley fourth person charged over alleged \$71m Defence contracts fraud



By Matt Garrick

Courts

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Jessica Buckley is the fourth person to be charged over an alleged \$71 million Defence contract fraud scheme.
(ABC News: Sam Parry)

In short:

The Australian Federal Police has charged a fourth person over an alleged \$71 million Department of Defence contracts scheme.

The ABC has confirmed that the 45-year-old woman charged is M + J Builders director, Jessica Buckley.

What's next?

Ms Buckley is due to appear before the Darwin Local Court on Friday, as the AFP operation continues.

A fourth person has been charged with fraud over an alleged \$71 million

Department of Defence contracts scandal.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) on Thursday confirmed that Jessica Buckley had been charged with one count of dishonestly gaining a benefit from a Commonwealth entity.

She joins three other people also facing charges over the alleged scheme, who the AFP alleges have been "involved in a conspiracy to influence the awarding of tenders to their company, with the intention of dishonestly gaining a benefit from the Commonwealth, namely the Department of Defence".

The three co-accused — Michael Buckley, Natalie Wynne and Dallas Wynne — faced court in Darwin on Monday, in a case Judge Jonathon Bortoli said was "likely to end up in the Supreme Court".



Dallas Wynne, Natalie Wynne and Michael Buckley were also charged with fraud by the AFP last week. (ABC News: Sam Parry)

The AFP said Ms Buckley was another director of well-known Darwin building company M + J Builders, as is her co-accused Mr Buckley.

Ms Buckley appeared before the Darwin Local Court on Friday morning.

The 47-year-old was granted bail under strict conditions, including surrendering her passport, mandatory police reporting and not to be in possession of more than one phone or SIM card.

She will be back in Darwin Local Court with her co-accused on February 16.

An AFP spokesperson said in a statement that it would be "alleged in court that the woman conspired with the above-mentioned Commonwealth employee, his spouse and the fellow building company director in the above offending".

"Operation Panton Hill remains an active investigation with inquiries continuing," they said.

The AFP has said that the operation was launched following a report from the Department of Defence concerning "irregularities identified through an internal investigation in relation to the awarding of contracts by Defence with a value of almost \$71 million to a Northern Territory business".

Fallout from charges continues

Since the initial charges were laid on November 14, the contracting accreditation of both M + J Builders and Ms Wynne's business, Transportable Solutions NT, have been suspended.

The suspension will stand while the investigations continue.

NT Department of Logistics and Infrastructure acting chief executive Gemma Lake confirmed that contracting accreditation for both companies had been suspended.

"During this suspension, both companies will be ineligible to receive work under the panel contracts," she said.

The two companies' memberships with the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) were also suspended this week.

In a statement, the NTIBN board said it maintained "a zero-tolerance position on corruption, fraud and unethical conduct".

"The suspension will remain in place while the investigation proceeds," they said.

Mr Buckley has also been suspended from the board of Master Builders NT.

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