

Port Stephens General Manager



UnderFire

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CALLS for Port Stephens Council's top bureaucrat to fall on his sword have been dubbed a "low, mongrel act" by the region's mayor.

Cr Bob Westbury has blasted calls by some councillors for general manager Peter Gesling to go after plans to back out of a controversial land deal.

The council compulsorily acquired land for the controversial Stockton Bight Track late last year, potentially providing access to a sand mine operated by a company part-owned by Cr Bruce MacKenzie, but it will consider reversing the sale.

It comes as the land's original owner, the Towers family, seeks \$8.551 million in compensation from the council over the acquisition.

Several councillors have expressed frustration with Mr Gesling over the matter, believing he should have sought more legal advice before the council forged ahead with the deal.

Cr Geoff Dingle blasted the general manager for allegedly putting ratepayers in the firing line for legal costs.

"I'm blown if I'm prepared to sit back see [a] multimillion-dollar loss based on what appears to me to be a failure to get good legal and procedural advice," Cr Dingle said.

"In my opinion he should resign his position immediately."

Mayor Bob Westbury hit back on behalf of Mr Gesling, labelling Cr Dingle's broadside "completely unjustified".

"This attempt to undermine the general manager's integrity in a forum where he is unable to publicly defend himself due to the confidential nature of the legal case is a low, mongrel act," Cr Westbury said.

Mr Gesling declined to comment on details of the case yesterday but said the council sought legal advice where appropriate and with due consideration of the costs.

He also questioned whether the public arena was the correct place to vent frustrations over his work.

A spokesman for Local Government Minister Don Page said any rescission of the Stockton Bight Track land deals would be assessed on its merits. 