

Bank Inquiry whistleblower pay suspended

Committee furious at being kept in the dark Members express fear for integrity of Inquiry



Fianna Fail Senator Marc MacSharry
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The Banking Inquiry whistle-blower, whose allegations it is feared will raise serious concerns over the integrity of the investigation into the €64bn bank bailout, had their pay suspended this week, the Sunday Independent has learned.

The whistleblower's claims of misconduct among the Inquiry's investigation team have also resulted in a furious row among committee members who are outraged at not being informed of the allegations when they first emerged in April.

Sources claim the investigator ceased coming to work as they believed the investigation process is deeply flawed and they no longer had faith in its integrity.

But the whistleblower did not have their salary suspended until last week when the allegations became more widely known.

The whistleblower has claimed in a 75-page document that some witnesses received preferential treatment, and there were inappropriate meetings between Inquiry staff and officials from the Central Bank and the Department of Finance.

There are also allegations surrounding the redaction of crucial information in documents compiled by the investigation team and supplied to the inquiry.

The Sunday Independent understands the whistleblower has also claimed another Inquiry staff member raised similar concerns before leaving the investigation team in May.

Two committee members said they were aware of these allegations.

However, a spokesman for the Oireachtas denied there was any resignation related to the current allegations.

Meanwhile, the Sunday Independent understands Fianna Fail Senator Marc MacSharry wrote to his committee colleagues on Friday raising concern at the whistle-blower's pay being suspended.

Mr MacSharry said that he had "grave concerns" that this might be a potential breach of the Protected Disclosures Act.

An Oireachtas source confirmed the whistleblower had been paid since ceasing to work with the Inquiry, but this changed recently.

"They ceased coming in from April, and the Oireachtas was paying the person up until a week ago," the source said.

However, they said they were sure all human resource issues were handled appropriately.

The whistleblower's claims were made public this week after they wrote to all the Inquiry members to inform them that their allegations were being investigated by Acting Clerk of the Dail Peter Finnegan.

After receiving the letter, Mr MacSharry demanded an emergency meeting of the Inquiry where all the committee members were briefed on the investigation for the first time.

At what was described as a "heated" meeting last Wednesday, the committee was told a member of the inquiry's investigation team made a "protected disclosure" using the recently enacted whistleblower legislation.

Speaking to the Sunday Independent, Mr MacSharry said he was "very disappointed" that the committee was not told about the allegations when they first emerged.

"I am entirely unhappy with the process heretofore. I still have no explanation why some people had this information and didn't share," he said.

"It doesn't auger well for what ought to be an inquiry led by and under the direction of the members themselves."

A number of other committee members, who did not wish to be named, said they were also furious that the allegations were kept secret for three months.

"We should have been told in April - the allegations are very serious and go to the heart of the integrity of the inquiry," a member said.

"If any of these allegations are true, we are in the deepest of deepest of trouble."

The whistleblower first raised concerns surrounding the inquiry in April in correspondence with committee chairman Ciaran Lynch.

Sinn Fein TD Pearse Doherty was also copied on these email exchanges as he previously highlighted issues about redactions in documentation being supplied by witnesses.

Independent Senator Susan O'Keeffe was also aware of the complaints at this time.

Separately, it can be revealed that Mr Doherty and other committee members blocked the appointment of applicants seeking to work for the investigation team as they believed there was a conflict of interest.

They also raised concerns about an official leaving the inquiry to take up a position with an organisation that was the subject of a committee hearing. However, these concerns are separate to those raised by the whistleblower.

On June 8, the whistleblower forwarded a report outlining allegations to Mr Lynch, Mr Doherty, Ms O'Keeffe and Socialist Party leader Joe Higgins.

The document was marked "strictly confidential" and those who received it were instructed not to share the information.

The Clerk of the Dail also received the report and initiated an internal investigation.

At the private committee meeting this week, it was decided that an independent investigator will be appointed to review the claims.

An Oireachtas spokesperson insisted this weekend that the allegations would not affect the work of the Inquiry.

"The Houses of the Oir-eachtas will next week set out the process it has initiated in accordance with the Protected Disclosures Act. This will include the appointment of an independent investigator and the terms of reference for the investigation itself," she said.

"As this process is ongoing and the intention is to operate in accordance with the legislation, we are not in a position to comment publicly on certain aspects of this process and on the issues to be addressed.

"It is important to state that the Banking Inquiry continues as this process is undertaken."