

Senator Louise Pratt

Chair, Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs References Committee

Dear Chair,

I write to register my profound concern with public comments made by the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Peter Dutton and his fellow ministers, including the Prime Minister, and a member of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, Mr Eric Abetz MP, with respect to my engagement with the Committee's inquiry into ministerial intervention in certain visa cases.

As you are aware, I have made two written submissions to the Committee's inquiry, on the 5th and the 7th of September respectively, relating to my recollection of a conversation with Minister Dutton's Chief of Staff, Mr Craig Maclachlan.

After my first submission was posted on the Committee's webpage, Minister Dutton issued a media statement in which he identified an anomaly with the date which I had nominated as the date when the subject conversation took place. I have no objection to an examination and a contest of facts surrounding this matter however Minister Dutton's media statement relied on a simple date anomaly to subsequently accuse me of fabricating my evidence, attacking my integrity and motivations, and manifestly implying that I was suffering from stress and mental ill health.

As a result of the date anomaly identified by the Minister, I provided a second submission explaining the context of the date error, providing further details around the conversation and pointing to areas and functions within the Department and the Australian Border Force where discovery processes will unearth corroboration of my recollection.

After my second submission was posted on the Committee's webpage, Minister Dutton responded to a question without notice in Question Time on the 11th September during which, under parliamentary privilege, he accused me of being the source of smears against him, of being discredited and disgraced, and making a reference to me having 'groomed a girl', implying I was a paedophile. His comments appeared clearly to be, in part at least, catalysed by my engagement with the Committee.

In at least one subsequent media appearance on 2GB on 13th September in an interview with Ray Hadley, Minister Dutton again criticised me as being discredited and told listeners of that program that I was under criminal investigation. In this interview Minister Dutton attacked my second submission as also being discredited, presumably referring to the recent incomplete returns from the Department of Home Affairs to Questions on Notice and discovery requests from the Committee.

I have noted that a number of Government ministers, including the Prime Minister on the ABC's 7:30 Report on 11th September, have repeated the 'discredited' lines on multiple occasions across a wide range of media platforms and interviews.

Moreover, it is extremely concerning that a member of the Committee, Mr Eric Abetz MP, has made public comments regarding the credibility of my evidence before I have had a chance to complete that evidence with the benefit of records obtained through a comprehensive discovery process. Mr Abetz is quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald on the 12th September as saying that he believes, relying on an incomplete set of data with clearly obvious discrepancies provided by the Department of Home Affairs, that I am 'discredited'.

My very strong view is that I am appropriately engaged with the Committee as a non-compellable witness who has not yet provided my full evidence pending comprehensive discovery processes being completed. It is a blight on the parliament and it erodes the integrity of the Senate Committee's deliberations that I can be so publicly, gratuitously and unashamedly attacked in the manner in which I have described, particularly by an active member of the Committee, before the full evidence has even been adduced.

It is beyond my knowledge to state definitively what is motivating government members to mount and sustain this attack on me. I am obviously aware that my evidence thus far contradicts the Minister's statements on the issue of visa interventions but to put this into context, mine is simply one piece of evidence in a much broader mosaic and the Minister has the absolute prerogative to contest facts, put evidence before the Committee, either in writing or in person, without resorting to public attacks.

Minister Dutton's incendiary remarks in Question Time on the 11th September came immediately after he took a question without notice which in part referenced an article in The Age that day alleging he inappropriately sought to influence recruitment processes for two Queensland Police Service officers seeking employment with the Australian Border Force. While I have detailed knowledge of those recruitment events, it is evident from The Age article that I was not the source of the article, nor have I made any public comments on the events. It is also totally disconnected from the matters under the Committee's inquiry.

I can only presume therefore that my engagement with the Committee, coupled with other presumptions on his part in a broader suspicion, have catalysed these discrediting attacks. I contend that this unprecedented behaviour not only impedes the Committee's current inquiry and jeopardises the veracity of its ultimate findings but establishes a wicked disincentive for any non-compellable witness to attend future Senate inquiries to present relevant evidence.

I am willing to continue to cooperate with the Committee inquiry however before I do so I ask for you to ensure a comprehensive discovery activity is undertaken by the Department of Home Affairs, not just for the provision of ministerial intervention briefs which fall into the parameters of the Committee's inquiry, but for the provision of data which I have identified in my second submission.

I am adamant the conversation I have described in both of my submissions took place and I am equally adamant that Departmental and ABF records exist which corroborate the statements made in my submissions.

I contend that once the full Committee has assured itself that the discovery processes have been exhausted then it would serve the Committee's inquiry to invite the Minister for Home Affairs, his Chief of Staff, and me to provide oral evidence and be cross-examined. This would ensure a level playing field and an opportunity for the Committee to assess and compare the veracity of the witness evidence in this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Roman Quaadvlieg