

Additional comments from Labor senators

1.1 Labor stands for integrity and transparency in government, and we have no tolerance for corruption. In January 2018, Labor announced that legislation to establish a National Integrity Commission would be introduced in the first 12 months of a Shorten Labor Government. Labor also said that we would be willing to work with the government to establish a National Integrity Commission during the current term of this 45th Parliament.

1.2 After spending almost a year rejecting calls from Labor and the crossbench to support the establishment of a National Integrity Commission and a mere two weeks after the Prime Minister dismissed it as a 'fringe issue', the Morrison government finally announced that it would backflip to establish a 'federal anti-corruption commission'.

1.3 Unfortunately, the model proposed by the government is grossly inadequate to the task. It has been roundly criticised by experts for its limited scope, limited powers and lack of transparency. The former head of the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Hon David Ipp AO QC, summed up the concerns of many when he said that the model proposed by the government was the 'kind of integrity commission that you would have when you don't want to have an integrity commission'.

1.4 Unlike the government's model of a secret tribunal with very limited powers, Labor members of this committee believe that a national integrity commission must have all the powers of a standing Royal Commission, and the power to hold public hearings where it is in the public interest to do so.

1.5 It will be an independent, statutory agency. The Commissioner will be appointed for a fixed, five year term. The Commission itself will be subject to oversight by a parliamentary committee.

1.6 Labor agrees with the majority of this committee that the models for a national integrity commission proposed in the bills introduced by Ms McGowan and by the Greens Party, which are the subject of this inquiry, should not proceed. While Ms McGowan's aims are admirable, the design of a complex body like this should be done with the help of a department over a period of months and the design then consulted on with legal experts, anti-corruption specialists and the wider Australian community. This process has not yet occurred.

1.7 Faith in the political class in Australia is at historically low levels. Some Australians believe the political system is broken altogether. We can't let this continue. If distrust develops between voters and their elected representatives, our democracy is in danger.

1.8 Labor believes that the establishment of a National Integrity Commission, with full independence from government and appropriate powers and resources, will help to set a standard and send a message—that corruption in any part of our Commonwealth is not acceptable.

1.9 Since Labor's announcement, momentum and popular support for a federal anti-corruption body has only increased. We are proud to have committed to establish a National Integrity Commission, with all the powers, resources and independence of a standing Royal Commission into corruption.

1.10 If a Shorten Labor Government is elected we will immediately get to work finalising the design and technical details of the National Integrity Commission, in consultation with legal and anti-corruption experts and the wider Australian community. And within a year of taking office we will introduce legislation to make a National Integrity Commission a reality.

Senator Louise Pratt
Deputy Chair