

# Stop the sleaze, please

## A federal ICAC is desperately needed

Paddy Manning – *The Monthly* 16 June 2020

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A clean-out of the Victorian branch of the ALP looms after a third minister, Marlene Kairouz, [quit](#) the Andrews government this morning in the continuing fallout from the devastating *60 Minutes* [investigation](#) into industrial-scale branch-stacking led by party powerbroker Adem Somyurek. The ALP national executive is considering the crisis, and may audit or intervene in the state branch, but there would be approximately zero public expectation that Labor will now (or ever could) eliminate factional rivalry or branch-stacking, which bedevils every major political party from the Nationals to the Greens. Victorian premier Daniel Andrews and federal Opposition leader Anthony Albanese will take the opportunity to make fresh inroads against the faceless men and women. Victorian police and the state's anti-corruption commission are investigating, although Kairouz noted "these matters do not relate to any allegations of criminality or corruption". Already there are federal implications. For voters, the obvious structural solution is to raise the bar on all politicians, and insist on the introduction of a strong federal anti-corruption agency.

A strong federal ICAC would be able to investigate any federal Labor link to the branch-stacking in Victoria, including the potential misuse of taxpayer-funded political staffers, as Greens leader Adam Bandt [told RN Breakfast](#) this morning. Just like last week, however, the federal government prevented debate on the Greens' bill for a federal ICAC (which has Labor and crossbench support and has already passed the Senate), with Bandt [tweeting](#) today: "It's rort after rort and scandal after scandal in this place, but Libs keep running a protection racket."

Bandt is right. Every other day there is a new scandal. At the galling-but-minor end of the spectrum is this morning's example from *Guardian Australia*, which [revealed](#) how Stonnington City Councillors were dismayed that a three-year-old, \$4 million sports grant had been used by Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack as justification for his VIP government jet flight before last year's Melbourne Cup. Others represent a frontal assault on Australia's democracy, such as last night's ABC [Media Watch](#) interview with former ACT attorney-general Bernard Collaery, who is now subject to a secret trial over his client Witness K's revelations that Australia illegally bugged Timor-Leste on behalf of Woodside Petroleum. His comments were genuinely disturbing:

Bernard Collaery: We've just got a summons. It's faceless. Who is driving this? ... Who wants to jail me and why?

Paul Barry: And what's the answer?

Collaery: I don't know. My family don't know ... It's a bad dream. It's ruined my practice and everything I've worked for. It'd be different if I felt that I'd done something wrong. It's sheer, unadulterated, vindictive injustice, as far as I'm concerned.

The plight of Bernard Collaery and Witness K can be added to a string of scandals that have been allowed to fester under the Coalition – from Helloworld to #watergate – which ought to be the subject of independent investigation. Attorney-General Christian Porter, who is simply too busy with his added responsibility for an ambitious industrial relations agenda, has run out of excuses for further delaying the introduction of the government’s own legislation. They can’t gag this debate forever. A federal anti-corruption watchdog with teeth, which could take on all sides of politics, is long overdue.