

The minister in charge of integrity has just lost a lot of integrity

Christian Porter was pushing his toothless anti-corruption watchdog even as his behaviour was being investigated by the media.

Georgia Wilkins – *Crikey* -10 November 2020

https://www.crikey.com.au/2020/11/10/christian-porter-four-corners-integrity/?at=WmNTRIVxdmtnYmlEUUd2a25zbkd2dz09&utm_campaign=Weekender&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wkndr=T3k1emVybVhucmVFY3FSYU0yc3JPdz09

Now we know why Christian Porter might not want a federal integrity commission.

The attorney-general has been revealed as allegedly having a [history of sexism and inappropriate behaviour going back to the 1980s](#) and is facing the toughest scrutiny of his political career.

There is likely to be more to the *Four Corners* story than what was aired last night. A [rallying cry](#) by producer Peter Cronau suggests there were things that didn't get past the lawyers.

But former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull said he found reports of Porter's [public behaviour with a young female Liberal staffer](#) concerning enough to cause him to warn Porter about the risk of compromise or blackmail.

While the story raises questions about Porter's conduct towards female staffers, it also reveals a fundamental conflict of interest when it comes to the government's flawed integrity commission proposal.

As the country's most senior law officer, Porter has been in charge of designing the stalled anti-corruption watchdog, which was [widely criticised](#) when it was unveiled on November 2.

The proposed commission has no power to institute an investigation and would rely on MPs to "dob" themselves in if they reasonably suspected they had committed an offence. As [Crikey has noted](#), it could even help crooked ministers evade scrutiny further by allowing them to control what matters get investigated.

Porter and the government insist that any federal integrity body should hold hearings behind closed doors, arguing that government ministers don't deserve to have their careers "destroyed" in public hearings like the ones held by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Porter was [still pushing this line](#) earlier this month while *Four Corners* was investigating his behaviour and at a time he was apparently aware his reputation was on the line.

Anthony Whealy QC, chair of the Centre for Public Integrity, said Porter has been exposed as having a vested interest.

"I think there is now a real question mark over Christian Porter's involvement in the design of this model, and I think we have a better understanding of where he is coming from," he tells *Crikey*.

Porter has issued a statement rejecting some claims in the *Four Corners* story. But his response raises further questions about integrity. Not only did he refuse to give an interview to the ABC to respond to

the allegations, he now claims that he wasn't approached for a response — something the program denies.

If Porter survives the scandal, Whealy says the government will need to explain why he should keep the job of setting up a body that could eventually investigate his own conduct.

“It throws into relief that this is really what he's concerned about with an integrity commission,” Whealy says. “He doesn't want any public examination of ministers' behaviour.”