

## Truth lost amid CCC battle

### Fight over who heads anti-corruption body obscures facts



**PAUL MURRAY**

So, is Mark McGowan calling his Labor colleague and fellow lawyer, Margaret Quirk, a liar?

In fact, is he saying that all four members of State Parliament's joint standing committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission are lying?

Because both Labor members, the Liberal and the Green have all put their names to a statement that the blocking of CCC head John McKechnie's reappointment had nothing to do with the agency's inquiry into MPs' entitlements.

But McGowan continues to insist it does, heaping blame on the committee's sole Liberal, Jim Chown, and saying on Sunday it was "verging on corrupt".

"The Liberal Party member up there who blocked him should declare why he did that, considering that Mr McKechnie was investigating Upper House Liberal MPs, I don't think it looks good for the Liberal Party," McGowan said.

But on April 23, the committee released a statement through its chair, Quirk, after rebuffing McGowan's push for McKechnie's reappointment for the second time, expressly repudiating that view:

"Because of unfounded public speculation about the motives for the committee's previous deliberations, it has been resolved to unequivocally reject any suggestions that the motivation for any members not supporting the appointment recommendation was the CCC's focus on parliamentary electoral allowances."

So someone is lying. It's either four people from three opposing political parties who are intimately involved in the

decision — or it's the Government.

Where does the truth lie? Quirk was a lawyer for the National Crime Authority before entering politics, a former Cabinet minister in the Gallop Labor government and is a 19-year veteran in State Parliament. She is no dummy.

Yet her carefully crafted statement seems to have been sidelined by the media, particularly the explanation about how the committee's decisions were reached: "The nature of those discussions is not detailed because it includes information provided by third parties in confidence and matters which may impact on the operational performance of the commission."

It is fair to assume the nominating committee headed by Chief Justice Peter Quinlan did not have access to the confidential information the joint committee obtained. The Premier also appears unaware of it.

Several reporters have named the Greens' Alison Xamon as the other committee member who declined to give majority support to McKechnie, after I made the point on April 18 that simple arithmetic meant it had to be more than just Chown opposing the reappointment.

It would be unsurprising for two Labor members on the committee to approve the recommendation from a Labor Premier. That's how party politics works.

But the committee is comprised as it is to be a check on the executive, not to act as its cipher.

What has transpired is the committee acting as it was constituted to do. And Quirk's statement suggests there were grounds.

Chown's refusal to provide bipartisan support was clearly not made in consultation with Opposition Leader Liza Harvey, who disagreed with him. And it

didn't go to the Liberal party room either. That would support a conclusion that Chown was acting on the secret information held by the committee. As it would for Xamon — sharing no common ground with the Liberal Party — who appears to have miraculously escaped any Labor criticisms. In fact, Labor committee member Matthew Hughes peculiarly referred in an indiscreet Facebook post to "the solitary whim of the dissenting member" when he must have known there was more than one. That warrants investigation.

This is not the only time the oversight committee has declined to accept the Premier's choice of a commissioner. As former committee chair Nick Goiran told the Legislative Council on April 16: "... on at least one occasion ... we said to the premier of the day, 'Sorry, premier, you can't have that particular person. You're not going to get bipartisan and majority support of our committee, and there is a specific operational reason for it'."

It was never the intention of the framers of the CCC legislation for a commissioner to serve two five-year terms. Certainly not when the incumbent is nearly 70, an age when Supreme Court judges have to retire. Originally, one five-year term was considered sufficient — so powerful is the post — but that eventually became a suggestion of two years for a second term if warranted. But like so much in this saga, that was never acted on. The reasons are lost amid the obsessive secrecy that has plagued the CCC's existence — and still does.

And speaking of secrets. What do the four members of the committee know that we don't?



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## Bosses need to plan to smooth way for return to work

With the threat of COVID-19 appearing to subside, a return to workplace normality may be only a month or less away.

Some anxious bosses are waiting for the exact moment when businesses of all shapes and sizes can flick the safety switch to activate the National Go Back to the Office Day.

But such a national day is based on false beliefs. Not only have some bosses misunderstood how a return to the office might unfold, they are under a false impression in relation to health and safety issues aimed at avoiding a re-emergence of COVID-19.

**GARY MARTIN**



The truth is our return to work will vary from industry to industry and from State to State. Bosses need to get their head around the possibility of choreographing a staggered return of workers. Already there are examples of workforces split into teams and alternating their time in the office and, soon, staggering their full-time return over weeks or even months.

Then there is the infection

risk associated with commuting. Maybe public transport travels need to be replaced with a safer car-pooling option.

Stepped-up cleaning measures, signs to remind employees to maintain a social distance and hand sanitisers positioned in strategic locations are a minimum. Consider the instalment of technology to provide access to rooms and lifts without the need to handle or press a button.

Bosses will need to contemplate how to provide increased elbow room, create more barriers between workers, minimise movement

around the office and obviate the need for large gatherings in conference rooms or break areas.

For some, this will require an office rebuild of sorts and that will take time. Many workers are fragile. Returning to the closeness of cubicles — even those spaced more generously — may well be considered creepy. There is an obvious need for opening windows or adjusting air-conditioning to increase air circulation and flow.

The possibility of regular COVID-19 screening for employees needs to be thought through and plans devised to

deal with any new infections. With hugs, kisses and handshakes on hold, there may even be need for a policy on greetings. And will all employees have to return to the office when WFH has served many individuals and businesses well? The bottom line is those bosses who fail to launch plans for a safe return to the office are likely to infect their workforce with a lack of confidence and respect in their leadership. That is one virus no leader wants to catch.

**Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA**