

## **IBAC needs powers restored and an adequate budget to operate effectively**

The new Victorian Parliament sat for a largely ceremonial day in December. But amid the pomp and ceremony and the Governor's visit, the Opposition introduced two very important and serious bills that seek to strengthen our integrity system.

One Bill, the [IBAC \(Restoration of Examination Powers\) Bill 2022](#), seeks to restore powers to IBAC options to hold public hearings; powers removed by Andrews in 2019, who sought to knobble IBAC. But Labor had and has a lot to hide. Like all long-term governments, they have become tired and arrogant, and the risk of corruption grows. By the 2026 election, Labor will have been in power for 23 of the last 27 years.

Stripping IBAC of key powers to hold public hearings was a defensive move by Daniel Andrews to close down future examination of Andrews Labor government ministers.

The changes preventing open hearings, or at a minimum making open hearing much more difficult, has had the effect of weakening IBAC and protecting certain wrongdoers.

Many hearings that would be held in public in other jurisdictions are now held in private in Victoria. One of the key functions of IBAC hearings was an educative function and a transparency function.

With this Bill's changes, IBAC will retain the ability to hold hearings in private where this is appropriate. It is one step in giving IBAC the powers it needs.

The second Bill, the [IBAC \(Facilitation of Timely Reporting\) Bill 2022](#), seeks to ensure the timely tabling of IBAC reports in Parliament while preserving relevant protections of the rights of those upon whom IBAC has commented unfavourably.

It arises because the Opposition has become aware of concerning delays in the tabling of a number of IBAC reports, including through [correspondence received from the former IBAC Commissioner](#), the Honourable Robert Redlich AM, KC. These reports have been caught up in legal delays and roadblocks. Whilst natural justice rights must be protected, this cannot forever delay reports and an appropriate balance must be struck. That is what this Bill seeks to do.

[Recent legal proceedings](#) concerning IBAC reports should not provide cover for a general stymying of report tabling by IBAC. But the Bill does enable the Commissioner to ultimately table a report. It is in the public interest that any legal processes that result from recommendations are commenced and that any learnings from the report leading to legislative or educational steps are implemented expeditiously. The Bill carefully preserves the powers of the Supreme Court and its ability to protect individuals.

It is a matter of common knowledge now that the Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, has been questioned by IBAC pursuant to at least three (Operations Watts, Sandon and Daintree) and possibly a fourth current inquiry (Operation Richmond). It is not known whether Daniel Andrews is a person questioned as a mere witness or whether he is a person of special interest at these inquiries. What is clear, is that when it comes to IBAC visits, Daniel Andrews is a frequent flyer clocking up more IBAC points than any premier in the state's history.

IBAC was created by the Baillieu Government to clean up the mess left by Labor prior to 2010. The whole Victorian community understands the importance of IBAC having the resources and powers, with adequate balance, to root out corruption in Victoria.

IBAC has been starved of funds by Labor. As Robert Redlich's October 2020 [Message from the Commissioner](#) stated:

*“It is deeply concerning that IBAC's budget has remained largely static since we were founded. This means that today IBAC cannot investigate a significant number of complaints of serious misconduct which may warrant our investigation.”*

The Coalition has twice sought to move in the Legislative Council substantial supplementation of IBAC and the Ombudsman's budgets. Key Labor voting Independents voted with Labor to deny IBAC and the Ombudsman adequate funds. Starving IBAC of proper funding has had the effect of limiting its corruption investigations into the Andrews Labor Government. Our integrity agencies deserve secure funding.

[IBAC and integrity agencies have called for secure funding](#) beyond the whim of the government of the day, a call that has been supported by the Liberals and Nationals. A modest last minute pre-election funding increase to IBAC does not provide the secure funding required.

The Hon David Davis MP  
Shadow Special Minister of State