

PM says he never opposed disability inquiry as Coalition sets up new roadblock

Scott Morrison now says the government will support setting up the inquiry, claiming it was a ‘cruel lie’ he was opposed to it



Scott Morrison, Christian Porter and Peter Dutton during a division in parliament last week. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Paul Karp

Sun 17 Feb 2019 13.21 AEDT

The attorney general, Christian Porter, has claimed agreement from the states would be required for a disability royal commission, as the Coalition prepares to vote for a motion calling for such an inquiry while refusing to say when and how it will set one up.

On Sunday, Scott Morrison said the motion “will pass” with government support, claiming it was a “cruel lie” that he had opposed the idea but promised only

consultation on a future inquiry.

On Thursday Coalition senators voted against a Greens Senate motion calling on the government to establish a royal commission into the “violence, abuse and neglect of people with a disability”.

Morrison said there was “no suggestion” the government would have opposed the motion in the House of Representatives, claiming its extension of question time was not designed to avoid the vote because the issue could not have been debated with no message yet received from the Senate.

“Tomorrow, the motion that will come from the Senate will pass,” Morrison told reporters in Tasmania. “It won’t be opposed by the government and was not going to be opposed by the government.”

The about-face reduces by one the backlog of issues set to challenge the Morrison government in the lower house when parliament resumes on Monday, with Labor and the Nationals demanding it overturn its opposition to small business access to justice measures and Labor planning to push its private members bill on payday lending and rent-to-buy schemes.

Morrison said that Labor had been discussing a disability royal commission for two years but failed to produce draft terms of reference. He promised to consult with the disability sector, states and territories in a non-partisan way, but set no timeframe for establishing a royal commission.

Porter said that a royal commission “looking backwards into issues around disability care is essentially a royal commission that would look into state facilities”.

“That, I think, would, at the very least, require consultation and agreement with the states, and likely letters patent from the states,” he told ABC’s Insiders.

“So the idea that you could effect that royal commission simply through a Greens motion in parliament I think misunderstands the complexity.”

Under former federal disability agreements, state and territory governments administered accommodation support for people with disabilities. The National Disability Insurance Scheme progressively transferred disability care to private providers.

Asked if the Morrison government will vote for the motion but refuse to set up a royal commission, Porter replied the idea needed to be “discussed very closely with the states”.

“You would need to have assurances from the states, and I think, likely letters patent from the states, before you get to that point.”

Earlier, Greens senator Jordon Steele-John told Sky News he was “sick and tired of non-disabled people playing politics with our lives” by “inventing a reality in which they never opposed a royal commission”.

“The facts are: Scott Morrison’s government voted against a Greens motion to establish this royal commission three times,” he said.

“Bill Shorten’s Labor party took two and a half years to come on board with the concept.”

Steele-John said that - in contrast to the aged care royal commission called within 24 hours of a critical Four Corners episode - disability care had featured in two Four Corners episodes and a Senate inquiry “and yet we’ve had no action in this space”.

“We’ve had nothing but obfuscation. Both Bill Shorten and Scott Morrison need to reflect upon why it took them so long to see the need for our lives to be protected and for justice to be done for our community.”

Steele-John called on the government to “announce this royal commission and get to work providing disabled people with justice”

South Australia’s Murray Darling Basin royal commission was marred by a lack of cooperation between the federal and state government, with the commonwealth even prepared to litigate in the high court to prevent its public servants being called.

In his final report royal commissioner Bret Walker said he did not fight the case because he was not granted an extension of time, but said there was “no doubt that compulsory processes of this royal commission could be enforced in other states and territories of the commonwealth”.

“This is no more remarkable than the effective service of court process, such as a subpoena, requiring a resident of Wodonga to attend court in Albury. Extra-territoriality was never an issue.”

Since you're here...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading and supporting our independent, investigative reporting than ever before. And unlike many news organisations, we have chosen an approach that allows us to keep our journalism accessible to all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford.

Readers’ support powers our work, giving our reporting impact and safeguarding our essential editorial independence. This means the responsibility of protecting independent journalism is shared, enabling us all to feel empowered to bring about real change in the world. Your support gives Guardian journalists the time, space and freedom to report with tenacity and rigor, to shed light where others won’t. It emboldens us to challenge authority and question the status quo. And by keeping all

of our journalism free and open to all, we can foster inclusivity, diversity, make space for debate, inspire conversation - so more people, across the world, have access to accurate information with integrity at its heart.

The Guardian is editorially independent, meaning we set our own agenda. Our journalism is free from commercial bias and not influenced by billionaire owners, politicians or shareholders. No one edits our editor. No one steers our opinion. This is important as it enables us to give a voice to those less heard, challenge the powerful and hold them to account. It's what makes us different to so many others in the media, at a time when factual, honest reporting is critical.

Every contribution we receive from readers like you, big or small, goes directly into funding our journalism. This support enables us to keep working as we do - but we must maintain and build on it for every year to come. **Support The Guardian from as little as \$1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Disability
- Scott Morrison
- Coalition
- Tasmania
- Australian politics
- Liberal party
- Christian Porter
- news