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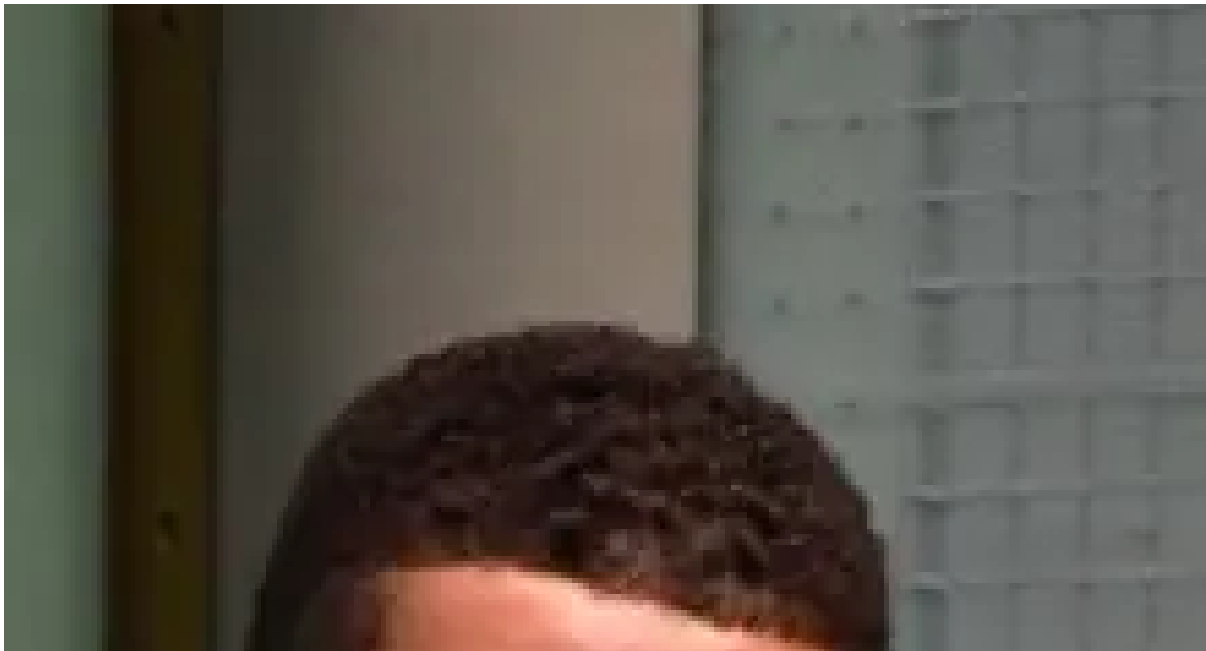
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## Disability commissioners face 'unmanageable' conflicts

**Tom McLroy** *Political reporter*



Jul 23, 2019 — 4.58pm





Greens senator Jordon Steele-John secured support for a royal commission from the government. **AFR**

Advocacy groups are increasing pressure on Scott Morrison to replace disability royal commissioners John Ryan and Barbara Bennett, after Greens senator Jordon Steele-John described their positions untenable.

Disabled People's Organisations Australia and other campaigners said the success of the royal commission, announced by the Prime Minister in the days before the federal election campaign, was at risk because of significant conflicts of interest stemming from Ms Bennett and Mr Ryan's public service careers.

Senator Steele-John called on Labor and crossbench MPs to support the disability

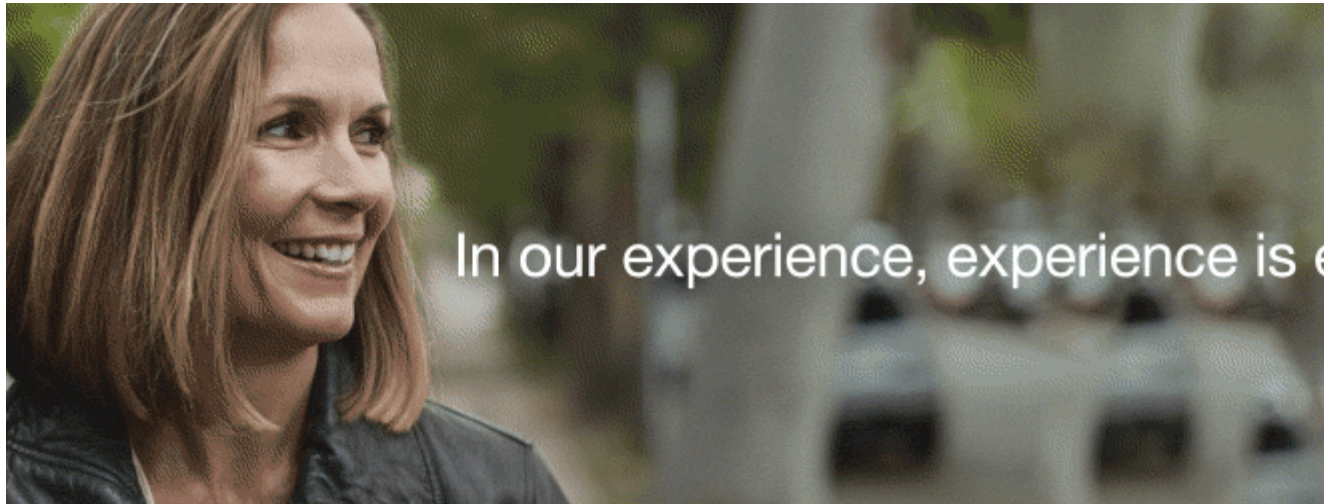
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which has oversight of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, means she should step aside.

Mr Ryan, a former NSW shadow minister for disabilities, had been an employee with the NSW Department of Families and Communities and put in charge of closing down disability institutions in 2013 and relocating residents.



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"They are being tasked with investigating their own work. It's just not appropriate," Senator Steele-John told *The Australian Financial Review*.

"I think the government got these two individuals into this mess. The government should take responsibility and fix it.

"These are not bad people. They have been committed public servants for a large part of their career, but the reality is they have conflicts of interest that are unmanageable."

Senator Steele-John was due to make a speech to the Senate about the commissioners on Tuesday evening.

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That is what the government is asking people to do and we are not going to cop it.

People with Disability Australia boss Matthew Bowden said national and state systems designed to protect or offer justice to people with a disability had failed.

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“Our concern is that two of the proposed commissioners have very recent, extensive and significant backgrounds working for the very institutions that will be examined by the royal commission — state and federal public services, which is a direct, strong and unmanageable conflict of interest,” he said.

“As people with disability, we must know that we can give evidence to the royal commission into violence against us safely, that we can tell our stories to those who do not hold unmanageable conflicts of interest.”

Former Federal Court judge Ronald Sackville is heading the royal commission, which will run for three years.

Disability rights advocate Rhonda Galbally, Disability Discrimination commissioner Alastair McEwin and Aboriginal advocate Andrea Mason have also been appointed as commissioners.

The terms of reference require investigation of what should be done to prevent and better protect people with a disability from from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation; how to achieve best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to complaints; and how to promote a more inclusive society.



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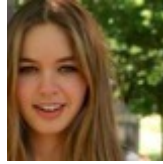
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