

## Malcolm Turnbull leaves Julie Bishop in the hot seat in Abdel-Magied affair

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---



Malcolm Turnbull has left the decision on Yassmin Abdel-Magied's place on the council for Australian-Arab relations with Julie Bishop. AAP/Lukas Coch

Malcolm Turnbull engaged in an unedifying cop-out when questioned about the Yassmin Abdel-Magied affair on Friday.

Quizzed by 3AW's Neil Mitchell, Turnbull described her Anzac day Facebook post – “Lest. We. Forget. (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine...)” – as “very inappropriate”. But he would not be drawn on whether she should remain on the government's Council for Australian-Arab Relations.

“I'll leave that to the foreign minister. Julie said she's going to reflect on that,” he said.

Abdel-Magied also presents one ABC program, and there have been calls for the public broadcaster to dismiss her. Turnbull said “that's a matter for her employer”.

Conservative Liberal senator Eric Abetz has written to Bishop saying Abdel-Magied should be dismissed from the council. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has also said as much. “I don't believe she should be paid anything from the federal government, that's my personal view,” he told 2GB's Ray Hadley on Thursday.

The council is described on the foreign affairs department's site as “a non-statutory, regional council” coming within the department. It “seeks to strengthen Australian-Arab relations by advancing areas of shared political, economic and social interest and building a greater awareness and appreciation of each other's cultures and values.”

Members get a fee when on council business.

## Malcolm Turnbull leaves Julie Bishop in the hot seat in Abdel-Magied affair

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---

Abetz said in a press release that Abdel-Magied:

... has demonstrated that she is unfit [for the council post] and lacks the judgement to build stronger Australian-Arab relations and as a result her appointment should be terminated as a matter of urgency.

To understand the significance and high regard Anzac Day is held in our Australian culture should be a minimum and basic requirement to serve on such a body. Ms Magied fails that test.

As Abetz himself noted, Abdel-Magied served on the federal Anzac centenary commemoration youth working group. She would be fully aware of the significance of and regard for Anzac Day.

She didn't fail a "test" – she linked a political comment on contemporary matters to the words used in Anzac and other remembrances. When she received outraged reactions she deleted the political part of the post and apologised. One would think that should have been more than enough.

Removing Abdel-Magied from the council would be wrong in principle and counter-productive in practice.

Bad in principle, because it would be saying that the government has the right to censor what council members can and can't say in forums which have nothing to do with their council role.

Unwise in practice, because it would be open to the accusation of targeting a Muslim woman for expressing her view, further inflame the matter, and set an unfortunate precedent, possibly encouraging trawling for controversial comments made by others on advisory bodies.

Before Bishop replies to Abetz's letter, the foreign affairs department may seek advice from the council.

## Malcolm Turnbull leaves Julie Bishop in the hot seat in Abdel-Magied affair

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---

Turnbull will presumably talk to the minister privately. But publicly Bishop has been left alone squarely in the sights of the right.

If Bishop says, as she should, that Abdel-Magied will remain on the council, those who have been baying for retribution will direct their ire at Bishop – though no doubt they will reserve some for Turnbull too.

What Turnbull could have said was: “Many people were offended by Abdel-Magied’s post but, as you have heard me often say in the context of the 18C debate, my government doesn’t believe that giving offence should be grounds for curbing free speech”.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

**Read more** <http://theconversation.com/malcolm-turnbull-leaves-julie-bishop-in-the-hot-seat-in-abdel-magied-affair-76874>