

The Liberal party row over bullying has deepened, with the Minister for Women, Kelly O'Dwyer, declaring that MPs endured threats and intimidation during the leadership crisis.

At the same time a Liberal backbencher, Lucy Gichuhi, has flagged she is willing to out people when parliament resumes next week. She said she could not do it outside parliament but was “absolutely” willing to do so under parliamentary privilege.

O'Dwyer told the ABC the bullying was a longer term problem, and also pointed to “elements in the party organisation”.

The issue of bullying, in particular against female Liberals, flared when Victorian marginal seat holder Julia Banks cited it in her decision not to recontest the election. Another Liberal woman, senator Linda Reynolds, also highlighted standover tactics.

O'Dwyer said she'd had “conversations with many members of parliament, both male and female, and it is clear to me that people were subjected to threats and intimidation. And bullying.

“But that isn't just over the course of the last week. There are some people who have raised concerns about elements within the party organisation,” she said.

Asked whether she had ever been bullied or threatened by her colleagues O'Dwyer said, “There have been people in the organisation that have tried”.

She rejected those who, in response to the Banks statement, had said Banks and other complainants needed to toughen up.

“Frankly, I'm a bit disgusted by that. Julia Banks is no petal. She's no snowflake. And no princess”, O'Dwyer said, pointing to Banks' “stellar legal career” and her being the only member

of the government to win a seat off Labor in the 2016 election.

“There’s no question that politics can be robust,” O'Dwyer said. “Just as there’s no question that other careers can be robust. If you play Australian Rules football, it’s a robust sport, but we do not say it is at all acceptable for someone to punch you in the head behind play”.

O'Dwyer said Scott Morrison in the party room on Tuesday would make it clear he “has no truck with bullying.”

“He will set the standard and bullying is certainly not something that he will accept.”

She said there always needed to be an independent process if people wanted to make a formal complaint, but a lot did not want to do that.

Gichuhi said she would tell of her experience not only with the spill but more generally, “because this is a culture, this is a systematic kind of issue. I will say from when I joined the Liberal Party, from when I joined politics - and how, what, where I think would be construed or would fit the definition of bullying.”

She told the ABC she saw the intimidation used against others. “I had senators and ministers in tears. You know, that’s how hard it was. One of my colleagues was in tears the whole day.”

Gichuhi, who joined the Liberal party from the crossbench, was pushed in the recent preselections into an unwinnable position on the South Australian Senate ticket.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Minister for Women Kelly O'Dwyer says Liberals were “subject to threats” in leadership battle

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/minister-for-women-kelly-odwyer-says-liberals-were-subject-to-threats-in-leadership-battle-102608>