

Dutton accuses Quaedvlieg of “grooming” a young woman, in new angry clash

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has launched an extraordinary fresh personal attack on the former head of the Australian Border Force, Roman Quaedvlieg, accusing him of “grooming” a woman 30 years his junior and of being the opposition’s “Godwin Grech”.

Under opposition questioning in parliament, Dutton sheeted home the claims that have been made against him to Quaedvlieg, who was dismissed from his Border Force post over helping his girlfriend obtain a position in the organisation.

Labor asked Dutton about an allegation he had played a role in getting a job at Border Force for a former police colleague and friend - who subsequently became a liaison officer in his office.

Dutton said there had been no interference with the process – the man had been employed on merit.

“This smear is coming from the former Australian Border Force commissioner, a man who was as commissioner sacked from his position, a man who had groomed a girl 30 years younger than himself,” Dutton told parliament.

He labelled Quaedvlieg “discredited and disgraced”, and accused him of putting out “fictitious bits of information he can’t back up.”

Dutton said Quaedvlieg’s former executive officer was now a senior adviser to opposition leader Bill Shorten.

He said Quaedvlieg was “someone the Labor Party should not rely on”, calling him “your Godwin Grech”.

Grech was a senior treasury officer – and also a secret source of information to the then

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opposition - who in 2009 faked an email in which an adviser to then prime minister Kevin Rudd purportedly sought favourable treatment for a political supporter.

Malcolm Turnbull, who was opposition leader, used the email to call for Rudd’s resignation; he ended up seriously discredited when the forgery was discovered.

Dutton has been pursued over the use of his ministerial discretion to grant tourist visas to two au pairs, overruling the advice of officials who had stopped them on the grounds there was evidence they intended to work, in breach of their visa conditions.

The latest allegations, [in Fairfax Media on Tuesday](#) , said Dutton pressed Quaedvlieg to help two Queensland police officers get jobs with Border Force.

After Dutton’s attack, Quaedvlieg immediately hit back on Twitter: “Curious, stuttering, rambling comments. What was that 2002 comment re mates in the QLD Police? I left the Qld Police in 2000. Grooming? Are you serious? That has a legislative meaning. Is that what he meant? Parliamentary privilege huh?”

After Dutton slammed errors in it, Quaedvlieg had to change his account of the alleged intervention of a Dutton staffer in one of the au pair cases.

He had given the account in a letter to the [Senate inquiry](#) into the matter. In a subsequent letter he admitted getting the timing wrong, and suggested the intervention might have related to another case – although he continued to insist it had happened.

The Senate inquiry, which had been due to report this week, has now been extended until next week.

In a statement late Tuesday Quaedvlieg said Dutton’s attacks arose from what he, Quaedvlieg, had said in his [correspondence](#) to the Senate inquiry.

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He said it was “extraordinary behaviour from a Cabinet Minister to preemptively impugn the character and reputation of a witness attempting to engage properly in a parliamentary process which ostensibly affords the same privilege to that witness that he, Mr Dutton, comfortably shielded under today to accuse me of the criminal offence of sexual grooming.

"While errors of fact can be made, and tolerated where corrected, personal smears to the tenor of those made by Mr Dutton with respect to his parliamentary statement today that I ‘groomed a girl...’ are disgusting and offensive and I call on him to formally withdraw that comment.

"I reserve my prerogative to seek recourse through the parliamentary oversight mechanisms”

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.

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