

Whatever it does, the Morrison government seems to find itself caught on the sticky fly paper. As if it didn't have trouble enough with trying to decide about the embassy in Israel and the religious freedom report, on Monday it became messily entangled in the issue of a national integrity commission.

On the first day of formal minority government, the crossbench flexed its muscle and the government bowed to the new reality.

Well, not quite bowed – but bought time by taking a line of least resistance.

After the independent member for Indi, Cathy McGowan, introduced her private member's bill for a national integrity commission, the House of Representatives considered a motion from the Senate which called on "the federal government to establish a national anti-corruption commission".

The government didn't oppose the motion, which went through on the voices.

It was claimed that Attorney-General Christian Porter wanted to set out the government's objections to the McGowan bill, which he couldn't do in private members' time.

The real reason was the government didn't want to test its numbers on the floor when there could be a defector or two from its own ranks.

Porter embarked on something of a lawyer's frolic as he pointed to dangers in the bill.

He warned that any public official who, it could be argued, had breached public trust or impaired confidence in public administration "would be liable to a finding of corruption", even for a trivial matter.

The ABC would come under the proposed body. So Porter conjured up the scenario of ABC political editor Andrew Probyn (who, it will be recalled, former ABC chairman Justin Milne wanted shot) being caught under the bill.

On Porter's account, that would be because Probyn was found in breach of the ABC code of practice's provision on impartiality for saying Tony Abbott was the "most destructive politician of his generation".

"Under this bill before the House—no ifs, ands or buts—Andrew Probyn would be found to have committed corruption," Porter declared.

He didn't sound as if he were joking but maybe the Attorney has a very dry sense of humour.

Not that McGowan is claiming her bill has the detail right. What she and other crossbenchers are trying to do is force the government's hand.

How far they'll succeed is not clear – they'll get something but not the full monty.

The government's preference would be to do nothing. But that's no longer politically viable. Labor is committed to a new anti-corruption body (once it didn't believe in one), and the level of public distrust of the political system makes this an issue that resonates in the community.

The government now finds itself in the rather bizarre situation of having voted for a "national anti-corruption commission" without committing itself to one.

In fact, such a commission is the least likely to get a tick of the three options before the government. Porter has all but written it off.

The other options, according to Porter, are expanding one of the existing 13 bodies that presently deal with integrity and corruption (probably the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity), or merging some of them to eliminate overlap.

Ideally the way forward would be by a bipartisan approach. The issues are indeed complex and state experience suggests the need for careful balances and protections. But bipartisanship not the way of things before an election.

Attacking Shorten, Scott Morrison accused him of being preoccupied with a “fringe issue”.

Morrison said the matter would be dealt with “through a normal Cabinet process”. Porter says this process is well underway. Indeed a lot of it happened under Malcolm Turnbull - Porter says he has been working on it since he became attorney-general nearly a year ago.

Both the embassy question and the religious freedom report are in “processes” at the moment.

The government received another prod on the latter when on Monday a Labor-chaired Senate committee recommended in its majority [report](#) that a ban on religious schools discriminating against gay teachers should be considered.

This goes much further than the government’s plan – bogged down in negotiations with Labor – for legislation to prevent discrimination against gay students. The opposition is expected on Tuesday to push the government to act immediately on its promise to protect students.

As the Liberals took in the devastating Victorian result, there was the feeling that the Morrison government was just holding things together.

Read more: [***View from The Hill: Labor's 55-45% Newspann lead adds to Liberals'***](#)

[weekend of woe](#)

Senate president and Victorian Liberal Scott Ryan, who rarely enters controversies given his position as a presiding officer, unleashed a restrained but pointed assault against the right of the party (and rightwing commentators).

Read more: [Senate president Scott Ryan launches grenade against the right](#)

Victorian Liberal backbencher Tim Wilson delivered a sharp message to the coal lovers. “If anybody thinks that there’s this great public sentiment out there that people really deep down hate renewables and they’re hugging something like coal, I say again — get real”.

That immediately encouraged a rerun of Morrison’s coal hugging in parliament.

In question time the Prime Minister was decidedly shouty and aggressive.

And, despite the crossbenchers now looming large in his world, he didn’t make time to sit in the chamber for Kerry Phelp’s maiden speech. He had other engagements, his office said.

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Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

View from The Hill: Day One of minority government sees battle over national integrity commission

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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