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Moira Deeming sets John Pesutto a legal deadline to withdraw 'Nazi smear'

EXCLUSIVE

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Suspended Victorian Liberal MP Moira Deeming has given Opposition Leader John Pesutto an ultimatum to issue a media statement making it clear that he does not believe she is a Nazi or Nazi sympathiser by 2pm on Thursday afternoon, or face legal action.

The threat follows [Ms Deeming's nine-month suspension](#) from the party which was agreed to by [both parties in late March](#), after Ms Deeming had spoken at a [Let Women Speak rally](#) which was gatecrashed by Nazis.

Notes from the meeting, [which have this week become the subject of controversy](#), state that the party agreed upon a compromise following [Mr Pesutto's attempt to expel her](#), which would involve the issuing of a media statement to "make it clear that no one was accusing Moira of being a Nazi, or Nazi sympathiser."

The resolution followed the [wide circulation to media by Mr Pesutto's office](#) of material attempting to link women with whom Ms Deeming spoke at the rally,

including British anti-transgender rights activist [Kellie-Jay Keen, also known as Posie Parker](#), with Nazis and other right wing extremists.

In an email sent to Mr Pesutto on Thursday morning, Ms Deeming indicated she did not believe Mr Pesutto had kept to the agreement.

“As I have made clear from the day John emailed the entire partyroom with the allegations against me, my principle priority has been to have my name cleared for the sake of my children,” Ms Deeming said in the letter.

“That is what I was promised in the partyroom. (Liberal Party veteran) Kim Wells negotiated with you all and persuaded me to accept a 9 month suspension to save John’s leadership, in exchange for exoneration from all allegations and imputations made against me (and automatic reinstatement), and I accepted those terms in desperation, just to get my family’s name cleared.

“But instead, as is well documented, leadership went right out and did the opposite, continuously, right up until this very week.”

Ms Deeming said her family had been “suffering unjustly”.

“This entire saga has been unjust. I have tried for 6 long weeks to mediate a mutually satisfactory joint statement, when it should have been done that same day,” she said.

“Thus, as per our discussions via Kim Wells and (Deputy Liberal Leader) David Southwick, if by 2pm today, we do not have an agreed upon statement that exonerates me from the charges laid against me, (as per the partyroom agreement) I will consider that the leadership have failed to honour the suspension agreement and I will be forced to challenge it officially, demand re-entry to the party room and instruct my lawyers to commence legal proceedings.”

Pesutto: Deeming was never accused of being a Nazi sympathiser

Mr Pesutto responded at a press conference on Thursday by saying [he would not exonerate Ms Deeming from the “charges laid against \(her\)”](#).

“I can say categorically that the exoneration that Moira has sought in the email this morning that has been leaked to media, which we expect to happen as soon as we received it, is that will not be happening, in the sense that what was in the motion stands.

“What changed was instead of an expulsion being the sanction, there was a lesser sanction of suspension, plus some wording around the statements which has been done,” he told a press conference.

“The outcome for the party room meeting on the 27th of March was very clear. It was based on a dossier which formed the basis of the motion. The party room overwhelmingly accepted the outcome of the meeting which was a nine-month suspension, a statement to be prepared jointly, which was in fact done on the day and then confirmation publicly which was done on many occasions ... which nothing on the dossier ever accused Moira Deeming of being a Nazi or herself having Nazi sympathy. Those things have been done.”

He said the minutes of the meeting had not been formally endorsed but argued that was because there were three different versions of the minutes which could not be reconciled.

“The reason that matter is coming back is because we haven’t formally endorsed the minutes of that meeting and those things have in fact been done.”

Mr Pesutto said [he was not concerned about Ms Deeming’s threat to sue him](#).

“If Moira Deeming is going to take action to sue me and effectively the Parliamentary Liberal party and the Liberal party that would be a matter for her to consider. She free to do what she wants, I’m focused on holding the Andrews government to account,” he told a press conference.

Asked if he would expel her from the party room if she sued him, Mr Pesutto said: “I’m going to be guided by the party room on these matters, obviously they would be serious steps for her to take... I’ll work with my colleagues.

He added he was “very confident” he had support in the party room.

“That was evidenced the other day when there was overwhelming support for what I proposed.”

‘Three or four terrorists’: Newbury, Guy

MPs earlier defended Mr Pesutto on their way into state parliament, with two key Liberals suggesting they were “terrorists” in the party after the [Opposition Leader was accused of reducing MP Renee Heath to tears](#) during the partyroom meeting on Tuesday, at which he led a motion not to accept her minutes of the March 27 meeting at which Ms Deeming was suspended.

“There are three or four terrorists who care more about blowing up the Liberal Party than they do Daniel Andrews,” said frontbencher James Newbury.

“They’re holding the Liberal Party hostage. They need to work out whether they’re Liberals or whether they want to sit on the crossbench. Everybody’s had enough. They need to do the right thing by the Liberal partyroom, by Liberal voters and by Victorians more broadly.

Former leader Matthew Guy attacked those making the allegations against Mr Pesutto for doing so anonymously.

“There’s a couple of terrorists within the parliamentary party who need to work out whether they want to sit with the parliamentary party or not, but the vast majority of us back John Pesutto and will continue to back John Pesutto because he’s a very good leader, and we’re not going to allow John Pesutto to be attacked in this way by a very small few who need to work out if they want to sit with us or not,” Mr Guy said.

Ask to name the “terrorists”, Mr Guy said to journalists: “The people who are on your telephone list. Go and check your SMS list.”

Upper House Liberal leader Georgie Crozier and her deputy Matt Bach also lined up to defend Mr Pesutto.

“It’s just a couple of people being mischievous, and you know, it’s disappointing actually, that these sorts of allegations are being made. John is a very good, decent

man,” said Ms Crozier, while Mr Bach said the claims were “a load of old cobblers”.

“John Pesutto always acts in a way that is decent and kind and inclusive,” he said.

Former leader Michael O’Brien said the claims made about Tuesday’s partyroom meeting “bore no resemblance to any meeting that I’ve attended, and can I just say that I think having been opposition leader, it’s a tough job. I think John Pesutto has displayed the patience of a saint.”

Brad Battin, who ran against Mr Pesutto for the leadership, said he would not discuss partyroom matters when asked whether Ms Heath had been “mistreated”.

Asked whether he believed the party would be in its current situation had the allegations against Ms Deeming been handled differently, Mr Battin said: “We look backwards to learn. We look forwards to improve,” and declined to comment further.

On her way into parliament, Ms Deeming declined to comment on Tuesday’s partyroom meeting, at which she was not present.

“Everything that I have to say about Liberal Party matters will be done internally for as long as I possibly can,” Ms Deeming said when asked whether she believed Ms Heath had been bullied.

Asked whether she believed the party would be in its current situation had her future within it been handled differently, Ms Deeming said: “I think everybody has their own opinion on that and I’m not going to comment.”

Backbencher Bev McArthur, who has publicly defended Ms Deeming, was asked whether she was one of the “terrorists”.

“I didn’t see what James Newbury said, but I wouldn’t give it any credence at all,” she said.

She said, “Ask Mr Pesutto”, when asked whether Tuesday’s bullying allegations would have arisen had the leader handled Ms Deeming’s situation differently.

Asked whether Ms Heath had been mistreated, Ms McArthur said: "I think she's had a tough time."

Asked whether that was Mr Pesutto's fault, she said: "It's probably collective responsibility."

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