

This was published 5 years ago

Labor-crossbench push for banks commission of inquiry falls just short



James Massola

Updated June 16, 2017 – 12.09am, first published June 15, 2017 – 10.18am

- [Political Insider: Sign up for our newsletter](#)

A push by Labor and the crossbench to set up a banking commission of inquiry has fallen just short, after a tied vote in the lower house helped the Turnbull government stymie the move.

Earlier on Thursday, the Senate voted to set up a powerful commission of inquiry into Australia's big banks and financial sector, in a win for Labor, the Greens and the crossbench.

And in the final hours of the parliamentary sitting week, Greens lower house MP Adam Bandt, backed by crossbencher Bob Katter, moved to force debate on the commission of inquiry, which has much the same powers as a royal commission but reports to the Parliament, rather than the executive.

Following that, Labor moved a motion requesting Parliament's bill selection committee consider bringing on the Bandt/Katter bill for debate on August 14. That required just a simple majority, not an absolute majority of 76 votes, but the vote was tied 70-70, with Foreign Minister Julie Bishop missing the vote, and time ran out.



Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and George Christensen during the second reading of the Banking and Financial Services Commission of Inquiry Bill. ANDREW MEARES

That means, in effect, that a banking commission of inquiry is now much less likely to be established.

It can be debated as private members business in future but, unless two Coalition MPs agree to cross the floor, the opposition and crossbench parties will be two votes short of the 76 needed to force a vote on legislation.

Nationals MP George Christensen - who has indicated he is prepared to cross the floor and back a banking commission of inquiry - sided with the government.

The member for Dawson, in the lead-up to the crunch vote, was heavily lobbied by deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and Leader of the House Christopher Pyne in the chamber.



Greens senator Peter Wish-Wilson, born in Singapore is congratulated by Nationals senator John "Wacka" Williams and Iran-born ALP senator Sam Dastyari. ANDREW MEARES

Losing the vote would have been, at a minimum, embarrassing for the Turnbull government and potentially disastrous as it could ultimately have doubled as an effective vote of no confidence.

Mr Christensen tweeted afterwards he sided with his own party because the ALP's motion to have the commission debated in the House "does nothing. Parliament's [bills] selection committee has power to & will overturn it".

That prompted Labor leader Bill Shorten to accuse Mr Christensen of "going missing" at the crucial moment, and being a lion in his home town of Mackay, Queensland but a mouse when he got to Canberra.

Mr Pyne, meanwhile, suggested Labor was a shambles for initially trying to force debate on August 7 - which is not a sitting day and then claimed victory.

The Turnbull government has so far resisted a royal commission, or commission of inquiry, and instead imposed a \$6.2 billion bank tax, and announced a series of other reviews.

The vote comes a day before bank chiefs are due to front an inquiry into the Turnbull government's new bank levy. That bill will pass with support from Labor.

The commission of inquiry, according to the terms of reference, would appoint a former judge to inquire into and report back to Parliament on matters relating to the banking, superannuation and financial services industry.

It would examine misconduct by financial services staff and directors; ethical standards; the adequacy of legal regulations on the sector; the effectiveness of bodies that take and hear customer complaints; lobbying by banks and financial services companies of political parties and more.

Greens Treasury spokesman Peter Whish-Wilson said commission of inquiry "hangs like a Damocles sword over Malcolm Turnbull and the banks. Either Malcolm Turnbull sets up his own royal commission or he runs the risk that Parliament does it without him".

[Follow us on Facebook](#)