

THE AUSTRALIAN

Tuesday, August 15, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

Daniel Andrews must apply same standard to D'Ambrosio as to dumped ministers

RACHEL BAXENDALE

Follow [@rachelbaxendale](#)



By RACHEL BAXENDALE
VICTORIAN POLITICAL REPORTER
Follow [@rachelbaxendale](#)

6:34AM AUGUST 15, 2023

The Australian's new commentary newsletter. Sign up to get the nation's sharpest writers, with their bold opinions and incisive analysis in your inbox every Sunday.

[Sign up](#)

The pressure is on [Daniel Andrews](#) to explain why [close factional ally Lily D'Ambrosio](#) should be treated any differently to [four other ministers who lost their jobs in 2020 and 2021](#) over branch-stacking allegations.

When news broke in June 2020 of [claims concerning Adem Somyurek – the powerful powerbroker](#) the Victorian Premier had [twice promoted to cabinet](#) – he used it as the perfect opportunity to dispatch a factional enemy.

Andrews expelled Somyurek from the Victorian Labor Party and forced his allies, [Marlene Kairouz and Robin Scott](#), to resign from cabinet.

The Premier referred the matter to IBAC, prompting an investigation that would ultimately force the resignation of [fellow minister Luke Donnellan](#), and a factional realignment that would result in all prominent Somyurek allies being barred from contesting the 2022 state election.

Andrews ordered a [national takeover of the Victorian branch of the ALP](#), preventing grassroots members from voting in preselection ballots and on other party matters for three years, and commissioned [former premier Steve Bracks and federal deputy Labor leader Jenny Macklin](#) to investigate the branch-stacking.

But despite [repeated claims from Somyurek](#) and others on the Right of widespread branch-stacking in the Premier's Socialist Left faction, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission only investigated Somyurek's "Mods" grouping.

And while party officials have publicly indicated that Bracks and Macklin's investigation resulted in a purge that has resulted in the Victorian ALP losing about a fifth of its 16,000 members from both Left and Right factions, none of the details of the probe have ever been made public.

Until now.

The leaked party records, details of which The Australian is publishing for the first time today, indicate that the ALP branch associated with one of Andrews' key ministers and closest allies – the woman he has entrusted to deliver his signature policy of reviving the State Electricity Commission and who some see as the next deputy premier – lost the most members of any Victorian branch, including those of Somyurek and Kairouz.

If D'Ambrosio was not aware that her electorate officer, Lidia Argondizzo – a former MP – was allegedly engaging in branch-stacking through the use of bulk cash membership payments – allegations she denies of course – she should have been. If she was not aware in 2020 that a large proportion of her 132 branch members were not legitimate, she should have been.

It is also unfathomable that after a [2018 Ombudsman's report into the Red Shirts rorts](#) saw the Victorian ALP repay almost \$400,000 of misused taxpayer money, D'Ambrosio was still allowing party branch meetings to take place in her office as recently as 2019.

And then there's the matter of the forging of dead men's signatures. It is not entirely clear who committed these forgeries.

And regardless of who did it, it was done with the clear aim of providing political advantage to the Socialist Left faction of the Labor Party, to which D'Ambrosio and the Premier belong. The conduct that has been revealed as having taken place inside D'Ambrosio's branch appears to have been at least as bad as that which prompted the resignations of other ministers, and ultimately ended their Labor Party careers.

Andrews must apply the same standard to D'Ambrosio.

He must also make public the findings of Bracks and Macklin's investigation, so that Victorians can judge for themselves how widespread the branch-stacking was and who was involved.

Furthermore, he should refer the evidence surrounding allegations of branch-stacking in D'Ambrosio's branch – and particularly the forging of dead men's signatures – to IBAC. Anything less would reek of hypocrisy.

RACHEL BAXENDALE, VICTORIAN POLITICAL REPORTER

Rachel Baxendale writes on state and federal politics from The Australian's Melbourne and Victorian press gallery bureaux. During her time working for the paper in the Canberra press gallery she covered the 2016 fe... [Read more](#)



Topics

[Victoria Politics](#) / [Daniel Andrews](#) / [Climate Change](#)

SPONSORED CONTENT

A stranger on a plane saved my sanity

Just had a baby and finding your parenting 'village' isn't appearing? Three parents get real about how they created theirs.

SPONSORED

Health condition causes blindness

Jocelyn feared she was a burden for her family. But thanks to a simple procedure, her life was turned around.

SPONSORED