

AAP Newsfeed

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VIC: Premier absent in first sitting week

BYLINE: Edwina Scott

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Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu appears to be avoiding the limelight while his deputy Peter Ryan takes centre stage.

After a shock election win in November and the inevitable media frenzy that followed, Mr Baillieu spent several weeks in January touring flooded areas in the state's central, north and northwest reaches.

He occasionally appeared alongside volunteers at State Emergency Service briefings in Melbourne and notched up some television time in country towns chatting to elderly citizens battling the elements.

But Mr Ryan, who is also Nationals leader, has been the go-to man, delivering a string of media appearances on bushfire response, emergency flood measures and farmers battling a lot of bad weather - all of which fit neatly into his string of portfolios.

Back in Spring Street for the first sitting week of his parliament, Mr Baillieu has been apparently unable or unwilling to front the media before question time.

In a break with the daily agenda-setting doorstop favoured by his predecessor John Brumby, absence seems to be the new premier's preferred strategy.

Two key Ombudsman's reports were this week tabled in parliament, both highly critical of the previous government's administration.

An inquiry found government agencies - including Victoria Police and Corrections Victoria - had failed to notify welfare officers that more than 700 children had been in contact with 376 registered sex offenders.

Mr Ryan, wearing his Police Minister hat, called a media conference, announcing he would chair a ministerial taskforce to fix the reporting system he said was still not working.

"It is utterly unacceptable that a report of this nature should be tabled in the parliament of Victoria," Mr Ryan told reporters on Wednesday.

Then the long-awaited report into the Windsor Hotel scandal revealed that former planning minister Justin Madden had attended a meeting with his chief of staff Justin Jervis and two planning department officers where the idea of a fake public consultation over the redevelopment was raised.

Mr Madden had repeatedly denied any knowledge of the plan to halt the project.

One week later Mr Madden's media adviser Peta Duke accidentally sent an email to the ABC exposing the plan, triggering a parliamentary inquiry, a VCAT hearing and the final Ombudsman's investigation.

New Planning Minister Matthew Guy was sent out to condemn the report, describing it as "one of the most serious breaches of government trust in Victorian history".

He said the Ombudsman's report had exposed a culture of corruption, manipulation and contempt for parliamentary and government processes within the

Labor Party.

Mr Baillieu later added to the debate - inside the chamber.

"It is now a question of what is the former minister for planning doing on the front bench to represent the opposition," he said.

Despite this, Mr Baillieu took time to attend Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's 102nd birthday party and to launch the Melbourne Fashion Festival.

Melbourne University political scientist **Lauren Rosewarne** says Mr Baillieu's lack of media appearances are not a problem at this stage.

She says a spate of natural disasters and federal politics has dominated the media and the public is still in "summer mode".

"Let's say you disappeared in April when the budget's on in May, you're going to get scrutinised far more heavily then," Dr Rosewarne told AAP.

"On one hand I've noticed you're not seeing (Mr Baillieu) very much.

"On the other hand I haven't been thus far suspicious because ... media focus in a political sense has been federally and with the floods and natural disasters in general.

"The cameras of the nation aren't on Victoria."

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  27 of 33  

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