

# Liberal put ladies last

## Women's branch tells new members they must be vetted by a bloke

**EXCLUSIVE**

**ANNA CALDWELL**  
STATE POLITICAL EDITOR

A LIBERAL Party "women's branch" is telling prospective members they must be endorsed and approved by party powerbroker and lobbyist Joe Tannous if they want to join.

The bizarre edict was spelled out in an email by the Strathfield Women's Branch, in which the president explained she was so worried



**Joe Tannous and Liana Allan.**

about branch stacking she only lets people she knows, and who are vetted by Mr Tannous, join.

The rule has sparked fury from party members, incensed that a male party powerbroker appears to have been given the authority to vet members of the so-called women's branch.

It also exposes the extent of branch stacking paranoia in the party.

"The only people we let into our own branch at this stage are people we know AND who are approved and endorsed by Joe Tannous. Sorry I don't have better news for you on

this occasion," president Liana Allan wrote in an email dated July 16. In response, the member, a general citizen, escalated the concerns to the Liberal Party's women's council president Mary-Lou Jarvis.

"(She) said I would have to be endorsed by someone named 'Joe Tannous'," the member complained in an email to Ms Jarvis.

"I don't know who this is or why I would need to be endorsed by that person. It's not

as if he's a woman and should be allowed to endorse women to join a women's branch."

She also noted that she had previously been rejected by the branch.

The branch accepts male as well as female members, but is historically known as the "women's branch".

Liberal Party rules state branches can control who does and doesn't join their ranks.

Mr Tannous is the local president of the Strathfield

electoral conference but not the president of the branch in question.

A Liberal MP said: "You can't achieve the party's aspirational target of 40 per cent women in local government if you don't attract female talent into the branches."

A branch meeting agenda, scheduled for this evening, lists Mr Tannous as the guest speaker.

Ms Allan did not respond to a request for comment.



## N.S.W. LIBERAL LOBBYISTS APPEAR TO BE SUBSERVIENT TO FORMER MINISTER, MICHAEL PHOTIOS

Michael Photios, former senior Liberal MP, head of the Party's Left faction, close adviser to Ministers and Premier O'Farrell, Mr. Photios is responsible for sponsoring many MPs into Parliament.

His Main Clients include: Australian Hotels Association, Caltex, Merivale Group, N.S.W. Minerals Council, Sydney Fast Ferries, Transfield Services and XStrata Coal. (Premier State).

Mark Textor, Liberal pollster who advises the Premier, is very close with the Liberals' State Office and with Federal Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott.

His Main Clients include: Chemtex, Crown International Holdings Group, Land Use Investments and Consulting. (Crosby Textor).

Brian Tyson, former Coalition staffer who has close connections to Premier O'Farrell's Chief of Staff, Peter McConnell.

His Main Clients include: Cross City Motorway, N.S.W. Business Chamber, Bluescope Steel, Sydney Opera House and Westlink Motorway. (Kreab Gavin Anderson).

Peter Collins, Former Liberal Opposition Leader, who failed to be elected Premier but has created a lucrative business under the parent company STW, which used to own the powerful Hawker Britton Labor lobbying firm. The word is Hawker Britton has passed a large number of its clients on to the Liberal-leaning firm.

His Main Clients include: Alinta Energy, Cascade Coal, Canberra Airport, Association of Independent Schools, Corrs Chambers Westgarth and CSG, UNSW. (Barton Deakin).

**X** Joe Tannous, close political colleague of Michael Photios, who is under attack from the Right of the Liberal Party for staying on the State Executive, knowing he can maintain his influence in preselection results while benefitting financially as a lobbyist. Tannous' firm has as "Special Counsel" the former Howard Govt. Minister, Peter Reith, and former Liberal Senator, John Tierney.

His Main Clients include: China Rail Group 15, Direct Freight Express, Mars Property Group, Southern United Minerals and Thiess. (First State Advisors and Consultants).

Michael Photios looked odds-on to be exiled from State politics for life; the former Liberal Minister has since re-emerged as possibly the most powerful man in N.S.W. Mr. Photios is the man to approach if business wants to speak with Premier O'Farrell's Govt. as he pictures himself as one of the Premier's nearest advisers outside of Government.

Mr. Photios' Premier State lobbying firm is charging a fee of \$20,000 per month to major clients as a retainer in order to ask for advice on how to deal with Govt. and to win introductions to Senior Ministers. Mr. Photios has become the centre of controversy, with many MPs asking Premier O'Farrell to insist the former MP resign from the Liberal Party's State Executive because his lobbying work is a conflict of interest.

Mr. Photios is the boss of the Liberal Party's Left Faction and several MPs, including at least two Ministers, are said to owe their political careers to him, as he helped secure the numbers to get them into Parliament. Senior Right Wing MPs have requested Mr. Photios and his colleague and fellow lobbyist, Joe Tannous, resign from the Executive, saying there is a clear conflict. In the corridors of Macquarie Street word has it "that there's not a Minister who's not speaking about how dangerous it is for the Premier."

Mr. Photios was recognised as a major player in the Australian Hotels Association (A.H.A.) success against Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione's idea of lockouts in Kings Cross. The A.H.A. paid Mr. Photios a retainer of \$14,000 a month from the time Premier O'Farrell was elected, and he advises A.H.A. boss Paul Nicolaou.

Mr. Photios said he speaks to the Premier "regularly", but refutes ever having lobbied Mr. O'Farrell on behalf of his company's clients. But he does introduce clients to Senior Ministers. "I've introduced clients to the Minister for Transport, Gladys Berejiklian, Greg Pearce the Minister for Finance," he said. "We've found the cabinet process works superbly well," Mr. Photios added.

"Many of the Ministers are friends, and it would be commonplace to share political commentary over a dinner, over a drink, at a meeting," he said. "I've entertained Ministers in our boardroom with clients and I've obviously accompanied clients to see from time to time Members of Parliament."

Mr. Photios confessed he gives the Premier political advice.

A spokesman for the Premier stated, "any lobbying engagement has been carried out in accordance with current laws." The spokesman added "anyone employing a lobbyist to either get access or a favourable decision from the State Govt. is wasting money."

Mr. Photios lost the seat of Ryde in 1999, and later was dubbed the "love rat" by the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* after he deserted his then pregnant wife Janice for second wife Mela Purdie. He separated from Mela Purdie, with whom he had a three year-old son, in 2007 and then went on to marry a woman half his age, Kristina Iantchev.

Mr. Photios will not even consider resigning from the Liberal Party's State Executive. "I'm very heavily involved. It's my lifeblood," he said.