



Investigator defends Thomson probe

FWA

Pip Freebairn

The chief Fair Work Australia investigator into the Health Services Union said he should have had greater powers to collect evidence but defended the length of time taken to conduct the inquiry.

The inquiry found federal Labor MP Craig Thomson had breached 156 workplace laws when he was head of the union.

FWA investigator Terry Nassios was questioned by a parliamentary committee yesterday for the first time since the 1127-page report into the national office of the HSU was released in May.

Mr Nassios, who was quizzed by a House of Representatives committee over the telephone from his home in Melbourne for over an hour, said his investigation was "accurate" and "forensic".

He stood by findings made against Mr Thomson, who was found to have "provided false and misleading evidence" during interviews during the investigation, including around the use of union funds at escort agencies.

Mr Thomson told parliament in an

hour-long speech after the report was released that Mr Nassios was "selective and biased." The report alleged that Mr Thomson had used union funds to pay for prostitutes and spousal travel, and had withdrawn \$103,338 in cash advances using his union credit card.

"He was so biased, in fact, that I had to write to the general manager last year asking for his removal from this position," Mr Thomson said.

Mr Nassios said yesterday he disagreed with FWA general manager Bernadette O'Neill who told a senate committee that the investigation had taken an unreasonably long time.

"I am of the view that it was a proper investigation that took the appropriate period of time," he said.

As a lawyer, Mr Nassios said he was capable of producing a brief of evidence but had not been instructed to do so by Ms O'Neill.

The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions said in April it could not launch any criminal investigation over the FWA report because it did not constitute a body of evidence.

Mr Nassios agreed with Liberal senator Scott Ryan that FWA should have greater legislative powers to obtain documents from third parties.

An HSU-commissioned report into the use of union funds undertaken by BDO Kendall and commissioned by former national secretary of the HSU Kathy Jackson had only become available to Mr Nassios after it was disclosed during defamation proceedings launched by Mr Thomson against Fairfax Media.

"Certainly the report was a significant matter we looked at that gave us a lead into how our investigation may take place," Mr Nassios said.

Mr Nassios revealed that he took long-service leave earlier in the year due to a family medical emergency.

In the senate committee hearing in May, Mr Nassios was accused by the opposition of evading scrutiny by taking leave. The investigator is set to appear again in August, to be questioned over transcripts of interviews conducted by Mr Nassios during the investigation.



**Liberal MP
Bronwyn
Bishop during
yesterday's
parliamentary
committee
hearing.**

Photo: ALEX
ELLINGHAUSEN