
Peris's race run after just one term

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Nova Peris's political career has ended as controversially as it started, after the Olympic champion shocked the Labor Party by quitting her safe Northern Territory Senate position in the middle of the election campaign.

Less than three years after Julia Gillard made a controversial "captain's pick" to install her into parliament, Senator Peris has left Labor scrambling for a replacement candidate.

The shock announcement that she was "moving on" from politics, which she did not convey to her staff before making the public announcement, comes amid fervent speculation about whether the former athlete will move into a high-profile AFL position.

It emerged on Monday night that Senator Peris had approached senior AFL executives about the position as the organisation's head of diversity. However, The Australian understands she is not the presumptive candidate for the hotly contested role, which is expected to be filled within weeks.

It is understood the AFL position would pay more than a senator's salary of \$199,040. Industry sources suggested the diversity role would pay about \$250,000.

Ms Gillard tweeted last night that she had no doubt Senator Peris would "continue to make her mark". While Bill Shorten praised Australia's first indigenous female parliamentarian as a "trailblazer", it is understood Senator Peris was not close to the Opposition Leader, who had overlooked her for a frontbench position. Labor sources say they had been disappointed with Senator Peris's efforts to campaign and say she had appeared "disengaged" in recent weeks but they were still shocked by her snap resignation. She was lashed by the woman she forced out of the Senate in 2013, Trish Crossin, who criticised the chaos inflicted by Ms Gillard's decision to override rank-and-file members to install Senator Peris.

Ms Crossin told The Australian Senator Peris had left behind an underwhelming legacy. "But this is what happens when you override a democracy," she said.

Earlier she described her response as "oscillating between anger and laughter". "It was a misjudgment and it was a mistake because the process was at fault," she said.

A senior powerbroker involved in corralling Labor's national executive to endorse the move told The Australian they were "dumbfounded" that Senator Peris had chosen to leave parliament given the "blood spilled" to get her there.

Asked about the performance of the senator as a representative for the Northern Territory, Ms Crossin said she believed the legacy did not live up to what people were expecting from the first female indigenous parliamentarian.

Country Liberal senator for the Northern Territory Nigel Scullion accused Senator Peris of abandoning her constituents.

The Opposition Leader praised the senator for "her service to this country". "She is a trailblazer: she is a trailblazer on the athletics track; she's been a trailblazer in the Senate; she's a distinguished Territorian; she's a distinguished indigenous Australian," Mr Shorten said.

"I'm very grateful for the time that she has served the Labor Party and the people of the Northern Territory." Senator Peris did not speak publicly yesterday, but said in a statement that she had never envisaged becoming a "career politician". "I'm now moving on and personally looking forward to the next chapter and journey of my life," she said. She said she would continue to be a "champion of change" fighting racism and prejudice.