



[Albanese government accused of 'deep division' and 'confusion' over Israel-Hamas conflict stance](#)

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Highlight: Sussan Ley's comments come after Labor MPs including Ed Husic and [Anne Aly](#) break ranks to condemn Israel's blockade on Gaza Follow our [Australia](#) news live blog for latest updates Get our morning and afternoon news emails, free app or daily news podcast

Body

Sussan Ley has accused the Albanese government of "deep division" and "confusion" over its official stance toward the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

The science minister, Ed Husic, said on Thursday morning he was concerned Palestinians were being "[collectively punished for Hamas's barbarism](#)" in the besieged Gaza Strip, with the death toll rising to more than 3,000.

The foreign minister, Penny Wong, has so far acknowledged Israel's right to defend itself and urged all sides to show "restraint" in protecting civilian life.

But other Labor members have broken ranks to condemn Israel's blockade on Gaza and its subsequent retaliatory attacks, which were prompted by a surprise assault from Palestinian militant group Hamas on Israeli citizens earlier this month.

The Labor backbencher Maria Vamvakinou on Thursday urged the federal government to call on Israel to back down from its planned ground invasion of north Gaza.

Ley said the Albanese government needed to make clear what its official stance was amid the "confusion".

The deputy opposition leader also accused Husic of "freelancing on foreign policy" after he delivered [the strongest condemnation](#) yet of Israel's reprisals in Gaza by a member of Labor's cabinet.

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Ley warned there were "longstanding consequences" for ministers speaking out on an official position.

"Ed Husic's claims this morning have exposed Labor's deep division on the question of Israel and raised serious questions about whether these comments reflect a new official position of the Albanese government," Ley said.

"Anthony Albanese must immediately clear up the confusion and explain whether he agrees with his cabinet minister or not."

The prime minister referred back to Monday's motion in question time on Thursday, which condemned Hamas and urged the Israeli Netanyahu government to "operate by the rules of war".

"We mourn every single life that is lost, whether Israeli or Palestinian. The children who have been killed, the families torn apart. There is widespread suffering, no question about that," Albanese said.

Vamvakinou on Thursday said the federal government should take on a more "active role" in bringing peace to the [Palestine and Israel conflict](#).

"The blockade has to end, the actual incursion into Gaza shouldn't happen and another way forward would be calling for parties to come to some dialogue to try and avert this humanitarian disaster," Vamvakinou said.

Fellow frontbencher **Anne Aly** had earlier stood by Husic's comments, saying it was "difficult to argue" that Palestinians, including [hundreds of children who had been killed](#), were not being "collectively punished".

The calls echo those made recently by the Greens, with the leader, Adam Bandt, supporting Husic and Aly's comments.

Bandt said the ministers were sharing "the reality of what is happening on the ground" and that it was time for the Labor government to "catch up" and call for the invasion to end.

"What the ministers are saying is right, and that must lead the Labor government to shift its position and now call for an immediate ceasefire and for the invasion to end," Bandt said.

"Because otherwise, that collective punishment, and the deaths and starvation and dehydration of civilians, is going to continue."

Earlier this week, the Labor senator Fatima Payman and MP Julian Hill also spoke out by condemning the killing of innocent civilians in Israel and Palestine.

Husic said there was "an obligation on governments, particularly the Israeli government to ... follow the rules of international law and to observe, in particular, that innocents should be protected".

"I am very mindful of the words of our prime minister in saying that protecting innocent lives is not a sign of weakness.

It is a sign of strength. That is a really important thing that needs to be considered. I genuinely believe there needs to be a de-escalation. I don't think it's in Israel's interest, long-term, to engage in the occupation of [Gaza](#)."

Collective punishment is [prohibited by international law](#), including article 33 of the Geneva conventions. Wilful killing of civilians and extensive destruction of property beyond what is necessary are war crimes.

In a speech to the house on Tuesday, Vamvakinou said collective punishment was not within the rules of war, and that the people of Gaza should not be seen as "collateral damage".

"Let's be clear: 'not within the rules of war' is doublespeak for 'illegal', doublespeak for 'crime'. The indiscriminate targeting of an unarmed civilian population, 40% of whom are under 15 years old, is not within the rules of war," she said.

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"The occupation of Palestine, the longest ongoing military occupation in modern history, and the siege and blockade of Gaza is illegal."

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