

Mike Baird declares greyhound industry shutdown date 'locked in'

SMH 30 September 2016
Sean Nicholls

Premier Mike Baird has given the strongest indication yet that a decision to ban greyhound racing in NSW will not be reversed, declaring the date the industry will end next year "is locked in".

Amid speculation the government will consider shifting its position on the greyhound racing ban in the face of fierce criticism and a plunge in popularity in opinion polls, Mr Baird reiterated that it was "the right decision".



Greyhound racing banned in NSW

NSW Premier Mike Baird announces a ban on greyhound racing in response to an 800-page report into "widespread cruelty" in the industry. Courtesy ABC News 24.

"As I have said, the date has been locked in," he said of the July 1, 2017, deadline.

"That is firm. What we have asked John Keniry to do is make some recommendations in relation to the transition."

The government is awaiting advice from Mr Keniry, head of the Greyhounds Transition Taskforce, as to how it should support the industry through the closure. His report is expected in mid-October.



NSW Premier Mike Baird says banning greyhound racing is the right thing to do Photo: Kate Geraghty

Mr Baird said the government has made "an absolute decision in relation to this issue. On the basis of evidence we put it through parliament. We think that is the right decision".

He said the "next step" was to consider Mr Keniry's report.

"We'll receive that, we'll consider it in cabinet and in our party rooms and we'll put a step forward from there."

Mr Baird denied there was a split between him and deputy Premier and leader of the NSW Nationals Troy Grant over the issue, which is causing angst in some rural electorates.

The government is anticipating a significant swing against it at the November 12 byelection in Orange and there has been speculation Mr Grant might push for a shift in position, which he has denied.

Asked about Mr Baird's comments on reversing the ban, Mr Grant said Mr Baird was "free to talk for himself as the premier of NSW".

"I'll continue to say ... the next body of evidence that we form our opinions and views on is in relation to the Keniry report and I ain't speculating any further than that," he said.

A Newspoll published on Thursday recorded a 51- 49 per cent result in favour of the Baird government on a two party preferred basis.

This is a shift of three percentage points from the March 2015 election result.

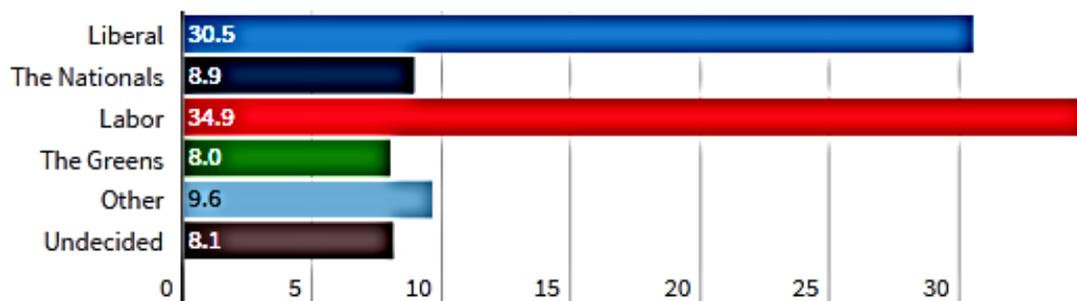
Mr Baird's approval rating took a significant hit, plunging from positive 39 points in December to negative seven points.

The result was similar to a Fairfax/ReachTel poll conducted last month which had the government and opposition at 50-50 on a two party preferred basis and gave opposition leader Luke Foley a narrow lead as preferred premier.

PREFERENCE VOTE

ReachTEL/Fairfax survey question:

If a state election were to be held today, which of the following would receive your first preference vote?



Source: ReachTEL poll 25 Aug 2016, 1609 respondents.

Responding to the poll result, Mr Baird acknowledged that decisions such as building the WestConnex motorway, lockout laws for licensed venues, council amalgamations and the greyhound industry ban had come "at a cost, a consequence."

"But in the long term I hope what the people of NSW see is not just myself but a government that listens, that makes decisions that are not necessarily popular but are the right things to do in the long term [interests] of the state," he said.

Asked why the government's message wasn't getting through, Mr Grant appeared to lay some blame on the media and suggested the public is not researching the issues thoroughly enough.

"[The media] aren't helping," he said.

"We can say it until we are blue in the face. People are collectively – and I acknowledge this – are collectively reading and hearing and talking about subjects ... without availing themselves of all the facts, all the circumstances".

"They (the people) are putting it all together to collectively have some angst against the government and the way it's made decisions," Mr Grant said.

He added that the community has "every right to have their views" on decisions they don't like.

"But we have an expectation and a responsibility to govern the state well, which we're doing," he said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/mike-baird-declares-greyhound-industry-shutdown-date-locked-in-20160929-grr7c8.html>