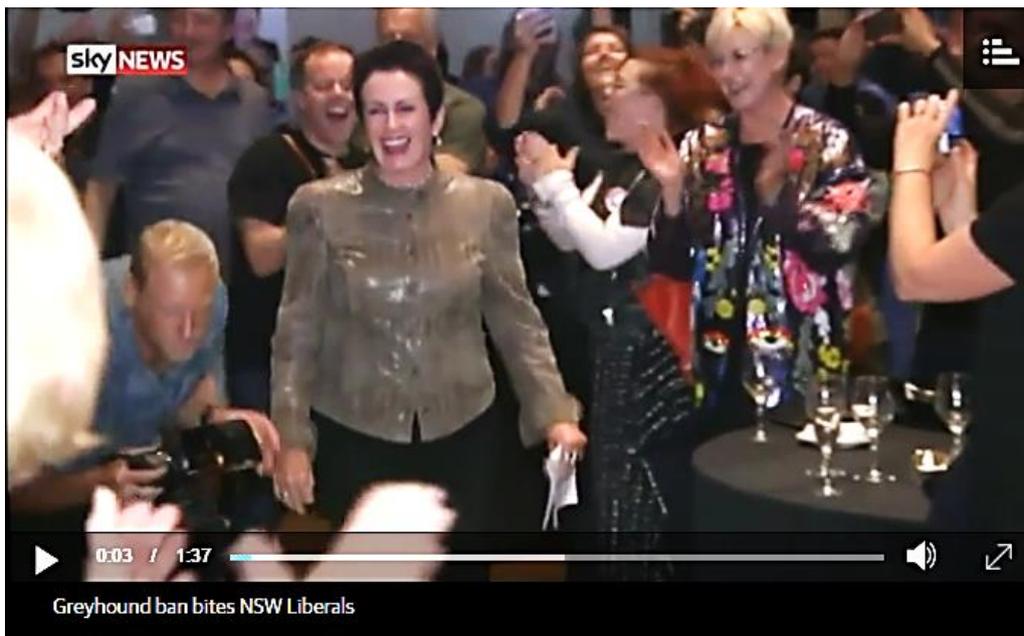


Macquarie St politics: Death by disunity

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Andrew Clennell



- **[NATIONALS IN REVOLT AS MINISTERS PRESSURE BAIRD](#)**

BACK when Barry O'Farrell was opposition leader, he took the politically opportunistic decision to block Morris Iemma's electricity privatisation.

Apart from the chance to thoroughly stuff up a premier (successfully, as it turned out), there was another reason O'Farrell went for the move.

He did not want to split with the Nats. O'Farrell knew the importance of not having the Nationals and Liberals divided.

Ironically, once premier, O'Farrell took a similar proposal to his party and then the Parliament.

It won in the Nationals party room by one vote.

Former deputy premier Andrew Stoner's enduring legacy is that he kept the Nationals together. Troy Grant is not having quite the same success when it comes to greyhounds.



Nationals leader Troy Grant



NSW Premier Mike Baird.

One big problem is that, as Racing Minister, it was he who took the minute to cabinet recommending the greyhound industry be banned.

As story after story appears of Grant possibly resigning if the party loses the Orange by-election; of Nationals speaking out against the greyhound racing ban, and the fact that three MPs crossed the floor and two of them were later sacked as parliamentary secretaries, the sense is created of a divided government lacking discipline.

It reminds me of 2008 when Labor fell apart over electricity privatisation. In such circumstances, pressure just builds and, sooner or later, something has to give.

And just as O'Farrell was going against his business base to take advantage of the Iemma government division over electricity, Opposition Leader Luke Foley is preparing to cash in on moving against the inner-city Left to cause dramas for this premier over greyhounds.

The mail I have is that you now have five Coalition ministers talking privately against the government's approach: Anthony Roberts, Stuart Ayres, Niall Blair, John Barilaro and Andrew Constance. Add to that a sixth minister, Pru Goward, who spoke up about it at cabinet and suddenly you have close to one-third of cabinet arguing for a reversal of the decision.

Roberts is also said to be lobbying to get ICAC-shamed Mike Gallacher back in cabinet.

That's not to say all these cabinet ministers are being disloyal. Some are just concerned Mike Baird and Troy Grant are about to fall over because of one lousy issue.



Baird people are annoyed that all this division comes despite the fact the premier took the greyhound racing ban to cabinet twice and encouraged ministers to speak out if they had problems. When it comes to the future of the government there are two key dates coming up.

One is when the Keniry report on compensation to greyhound owners is presented to government in mid-October. This is an opportunity for Nats to press for a reversal of the ban on the industry ahead of the November 12 by-election.

The other, of course, is November 12.

The proposed \$1500-a-dog compensation package is not considered enough to placate senior Nationals opposing the ban.

Last week, Troy Grant wrote an extraordinary six- page letter to the Nationals Party senior members, which appeared to indicate he is not for turning.

It read: “The greyhound racing industry has been receiving ‘second’ chances for more than 60 years.

“I’m strongly of the belief that yet another second chance would not change anything.

“As difficult as this decision has been, the greatest disappointment I have felt has been the party disunity that has occurred and the consequences of that disunity.

“As the Leader of the NSW Nationals at all times during the debate, I have shown nothing but absolutely loyalty to my fellow Nationals ...

“Each Nationals minister was, as I was, instinctively uncomfortable with the position that was ultimately adopted.

“It deeply saddens me that as a National, it isn’t as it should be an instinctive reaction to immediately defend the party and your cabinet, despite whatever private concerns we hold individually and then seek information before commenting in opposition.

“It deeply saddens me individuals in our party seek their own self-promotion for the consequence of such actions on their fellow Nationals.”

These are not the words to unite. They are the words of a hectoring former cop in the Deputy Premier’s chair.

As tragic as the Forbes floods have been, perhaps they give the opportunity for that ex-cop to get on ground he is familiar with and give the community a reason to vote National.

John Howard famously used to say that disunity is death.

There is plenty of it around Macquarie St at the moment.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/macquarie-st-politics-death-by-disunity/news-story/2fd17a4656309560acd8da94a3e392cf>