

'Rearguard action by factional warlords': Abbott slams Lib compromise

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Divisions between Malcolm Turnbull and Tony Abbott intensified on Saturday as the NSW Liberal Party voted against reforming its preselection system immediately in favour of delayed change understood to be supported by the Prime Minister, but which Mr Abbott decried as only benefiting "factional warlords".



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull addresses the party faithful at the Liberal conference on Saturday. Photo: AAP

At an [extraordinary party convention](#) at the Rosehill Racecourse last year about two-thirds of members supported a motion which would drastically overhaul preselections and have state and federal MPs selected by plebiscites of local members.

That change, dubbed the Warringah motion, came with the strong backing of Mr Abbott and allies on the party's right wing, which has seen its power reduced over the past decade.

But to enter the party's constitution, it needed the support of 60 per cent delegates to the party's state council on Saturday and despite last-minute endorsements from luminaries such as former prime minister John Howard 55 per cent of delegates voted down the proposal.



Tony Abbott outside the conference. Photo: AAP

After a marathon debate, party delegates instead voted for a compromise solution that would delay reforms until after the next state and federal elections, or up to five years and retain some role for party officials.

“There is one motion that represents the will of the members and there is another that represents a rearguard action by factional warlords,” Mr Abbott said before the vote.

The alternative Bennelong motion, which is supported by several senior Liberals, will bind the party factions behind a compromise.



Call for unity: NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Photo: AAP

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Mr Turnbull both appeared on the front of a brochure for a "unity ticket" supporting the compromise alongside representatives from the party's three main factions such as senior right winger NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet.

Speaking inside the conference at Sydney's Town Hall, the two leaders avoided explicitly backing either motion but they both emphasised the need to retain power in both federal and state elections next year while also praising preselection reform in general terms.

"We have to win both those elections decisively," Mr Turnbull said. "There is a huge amount at stake. It's critical that we are battle ready.

"Only the Coalition can be trusted to keep our borders secure and determine, on Australians' behalf, who comes to our country and the terms on which they come."

Mr Turnbull's speech was met with rousing applause, in stark contrast to 2015 when he told the same event the party was "not run by factions", a remark that was met with derision.

Supporters of the compromise argued introducing change now could open up sitting MPs to challenge and destabilise the party.

Ms Berejiklian similarly emphasised the need for unity.

"How can we forget the legacy of the likes of Eddie Obeid, Joe Tripodi and Ian Macdonald," she said. "The risk of Labor only reinforces the need to be strong and united."

Supporters of both options clashed outside the entry of the party's state annual general meeting on Saturday morning, with Mr Abbott's endorsement appearing atop two brochures endorsing immediate reform.

Spokesmen for the Premier and Prime Minister have declined to comment on which option they supported.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/rearguard-action-by-factional-warlords-abbott-slams-lib-compromise-20180210-p4yzw5.html>