

Nationals can no longer be seen as 'lap dogs': party sources

SMH 11 September 2018

Alexandra Smith

The NSW Nationals will need standalone policies to differentiate themselves from the Liberals if they are to hold on to country seats in next year's state election, senior party sources say.

A senior National source said the party would need "three to five policies that are born and bred Nationals' policies" as a point of difference ahead of a tough battle to retain a majority government with the Liberals.



Independent candidate Joe McGirr will win the Wagga Wagga byelection.

Photo: Nick Moir

The Liberals' [thumping loss on the weekend in the Wagga Wagga byelection](#) has rattled the party and has also prompted the Nationals to start rethinking their election strategy.

The government suffered a 29 per cent swing against it in the byelection, which will see [local doctor and academic Joe McGirr win the seat as an independent](#). It will leave Liberal hands for the first time in 60 years.

[Ms Berejiklian said on Monday](#) that her government needed to "to listen better on the ground" with voters needing to know they were not being "taken for granted".

But speaking after the loss on Sunday, Ms Berejiklian also pointed the finger at her federal colleagues, [blaming the bitter leadership battle as one of the factors](#) that contributed to the spectacular loss.



*Gladys Berejiklian says her government needs to 'to listen better on the ground'.
Photo: James Alcock*

The byelection was called after Liberals MP Daryl Maguire was forced to quit parliament in disgrace after being caught on a phone tap trying to broker a deal with Chinese developers.

Speaking on Monday, Transport Minister Andrew Constance said the byelection showed that local issues were critical for the government.

"So, I think the key point and the key message out of this is that good government is about listening, responding, it's about having local members prepared to work damn hard for their communities," Mr Constance said.

"I think the key message out of Saturday is that if you're in politics for the wrong reason, you'll get caught, you'll get caught out, if not at the ballot box then in the case of Mr Maguire at ICAC and I think the message is pretty clear."

Opposition leader Luke Foley said the government had failed to recognise the people of Wagga Wagga's main concern - the deterioration of government services.

"It's not about us, that's what the Liberals and Nationals don't get, not some fantasy of running for 'president', it's about the patients who don't get a shower for three days, it's about the overcrowded classrooms," he said.

Asked about Labor's decreased primary vote in Wagga, Mr Foley said: "I'm confident Labor has beaten the Liberals in Wagga ... no one ever thought Labor had to win Wagga to form a state government."



New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian has said she accepts the "strong message" sent in the Wagga Wagga by-election loss.

A Nationals source said internal research had shown that the party's "favourability" had improved over the past 12 months, but the party would need "some serious Nationals policies".

"We used to be viewed as the poor cousins or the lap dogs, so it is important for us to be able to show that we are the party of country people," the source said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/nationals-can-no-longer-be-seen-as-lap-dogs-party-sources-20180910-p502wk.html>