

NSW Government to lose Wagga Wagga in massive backlash

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AAP Ash Cant

A MASSIVE backlash against the NSW Government is expected to see it lose the seat of Wagga Wagga with a 29 per cent swing against the Liberal Party.



*An anti-Liberal sign at pre-poll in Wagga Wagga ahead of the by-election.
Picture: Dylan Robinson Source: News Corp Australia*

Independent Joe McGirr is predicted to take the Wagga Wagga seat held by the Liberals since 1957.

The crushing defeat delivered by voters comes after the by-election was triggered by sitting Liberal MP Daryl Maguire's resignation after [a corruption scandal](#).

Swings against the government were up to 36 per cent in some booths, with early counting giving the Liberal candidate Julia Ham even standing with the Labor Party on about 25 per cent of the vote.

In the 2015 NSW state election, Wagga Wagga scored the Liberal Party 53.8pc of the primary vote.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian blamed the recent Liberal leadership upset in Canberra for voters abandoning the party in Wagga Wagga.

Ms Berejiklian conceded the party was likely to lose its seat on Sunday.



Independent candidate Joe McGirr at Ashmont Public School. Voting day for the Wagga Wagga by-election. Picture: Dylan Robinson Source: News Corp Australia

“It’s likely that we’ll get the highest primary vote, but, of course, not enough to hold the seat. It’s the most likely outcome is that Independent Joe McGirr will win the seat,” she said.

Ms Berejiklian [told reporters](#) her government will take full responsibility for the massive loss in Wagga Wagga.

“The people of Wagga sent me and my government the strongest message yesterday and I’ve heard it,” [she said](#).



Liberal candidate Julia Ham at the Liberal election party at The Commercial Club for Wagga Wagga by-election. Picture: Dylan Robinson Source: News Corp Australia

She took responsibility for the poor result, but then described the federal leadership coup, combined with the local corruption scandal that sparked the early poll, as “the perfect storm”.

“The timing of the by-election, which coincided with other major events, other major political events, could not have been foreseen,” Ms Berejiklian told reporters in Sydney on Sunday.

Labor leader Luke Foley criticised Ms Berejiklian for attempting to shift some of the blame to her federal colleagues.

“It’s a bit rich to say, ‘I accept responsibility, but it was my federal colleagues’ fault’ in the same breath,” Mr Foley told reporters in Wagga. “For the final count to be between Labor and independent after six decades of entrenched

Liberal representation, that's an electoral earthquake here in Wagga and Ms Berejiklian needs to hear the message."

The former sitting Wagga Wagga member, Daryl Maguire was forced to resign his seat after he was secretly recorded trying to strike a deal with former Canterbury City councillor Michael Hawatt.

The independent frontrunner for Wagga Wagga in the NSW Riverina is local doctor, academic and independent candidate.

Dr Joe McGirr was feeling "quietly optimistic" when he addressed his supporters from his backyard on Saturday night, although he wasn't expecting a result until Sunday.

"A lot of people are really excited ... there's a sense to make a change," he told AAP in Wagga. The doctor will not join the coalition once in government.

Although Dr McGirr is favoured, Country Labor's Dan Hayes is still in with a chance.

"People have been lining up early and for me that's an indication they're ready to vote, they're ready to make a change — where that change will go is still tough," Mr Hayes told reporters yesterday.

Mr Hayes said regardless of the outcome, the community has "made Wagga marginal again". He also suggested local and national scandals that plagued the Liberal party of late have angered the community.

In a scathing statement, Gladys Berejiklian tried to shift some blame to Canberra.

"The infighting in Canberra was a huge concern and, when combined with the actions of a former member, it created an atmosphere where people's cynicism with politics was off the charts," the statement read.

However Federal Senator Jim Molan dismissed these concerns, saying getting rid of Malcolm Turnbull was necessary.

But he did admit voters hadn't appreciated the chaos the leadership spill caused.

"People were very disappointed that we were spending time taking about ourselves and to ourselves but it's something that every now and again that you've got to go through," Senator Molan said.

"We don't go through leadership spill for fun, I can tell you that."

Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack wouldn't speculate whether the federal coalition was to blame for the loss in Wagga, saying the government wasn't intending to losing the seat.

The Liberal Party won the Wagga Wagga seat by a margin of **12.9 per cent** in 2015.

Acknowledging what appears to be an inevitable loss, Liberal candidate said she would consider running in March.

"It may be over but it's something that I would certainly stand for again," Ms Ham said.

<https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/nsw-government-to-lose-wagga-wagga-in-massive-backlash/news-story/227afcebe0245289114bd84ac5ee056e>

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