

North Shore byelection candidate Carolyn Corrigan says uninformed voters may have influenced election

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James Robertson

A losing candidate in Saturday's North Shore by-election will take the extraordinary step of legally challenging the election results to try to instigate an inquiry into claims election officials provided incorrect information to voters.



Liberal candidate Felicity Wilson under fire

The Liberal byelection candidate, who admitted she signed a statutory declaration with incorrect information about her residential history, is still the favourite to retain the seat of North Shore. Vision courtesy ABC News 24.

Mosman Councillor Carolyn Corrigan was on Thursday morning declared to have lost Saturday's byelection for the seat of North Shore by about 3400 votes on a two-party preferred count despite a [15-point first preference swing away from the Liberal Party](#).

Cr Corrigan secured 45.3 per cent of the two-party preferred vote on the final count. But the government declared victory on a tense election night after it became apparent that not enough preferences were flowing to her from other independents and the Greens to close the gap with Liberal candidate Felicity Wilson.

In an extraordinary eleventh-hour appeal Cr Corrigan formally asked the Commission to suspend its announcement of results pending an inquiry in a letter sent late on Wednesday.



"There's so many aspects of concern": Carolyn Corrigan. Photo: Edwina Pickles

Cr Corrigan said voters were confused about how preferences flowed under NSW's electoral system and that officials may have provided advice that was "incorrect, misleading, incomplete, inappropriate, unsolicited and gratuitous".

The Electoral Commission denied it provided incorrect advice and said it has no power to suspend the announcement of results, which Cr Corrigan said would lead her to file a challenge in the Court of Disputed Returns.

"I feel that I have no choice but to do so," Cr Corrigan said. "There's so many aspects of concern".

The Corrigan campaign says it has been contacted by 20 people who allege they were told to "just vote one in any box" by officials stationed at polling booths.

Cr Corrigan said an official voting guide printed by the Commission ahead of the by-election did not provide information about NSW's optional preferential voting system.

A spokesman for the Commission said it had received four complaints about the byelection, an amount it did not consider unusual for an election of this size.

NSW elections are conducted under a system of optional preferential voting and there is no ballot option which allows voters to mark support for one candidate and have preferences automatically allocated by parties, as used to happen in federal Senate elections.

The Commission has denied it provided incorrect advice.



Felicity Wilson, candidate for the byelection for the seat of North Shore with Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Photo: Andrew Darby

A spokesman said: "It should be noted that [law] requires that each ballot paper issued for a Legislative Assembly election must contain the following voting instructions:

"Write the number 1 in the square next to the candidate of your choice. You can show more choices, if you want to, by writing numbers in the other squares, starting with the number 2."

The Electoral Commission said it routinely conducts post-election reviews and feedback from complaints would be accounted for.

The Liberal Party declined to comment.

Cr Corrigan said the campaign had exposed considerable confusion in the electorate about preferential voting and questions about information provided by the Commission, which she hoped to remedy with the suit, even if the outcome of the election were unchanged.

In a final count published by the Commission on Thursday, Liberal candidate Felicity Wilson was declared to have won North Shore by 54.7 to 45.3 on a two party preferred basis, down from about 71 per cent to 29 per cent the 2015 state election.

The government also retained former Premier Mike Baird's seat of Manly with James Griffin claiming 60.5 per cent of the two party preferred vote and resisting a swing of about 14 percentage points against the party.

In Gosford, Labor's candidate Liesl Tesch extended the party's hold on what had been a highly marginal seat by about 12 percentage points to claim 62.5 per cent of the two party preferred vote.

Former Premier Mike Baird and ex-health minister Jillian Skinner quit politics, causing the byelections in the north Sydney seats. The ALP MP for Gosford, Kathy Smith, resigned with health problems.

The proportion of exhausted preferences was about 8.5 per cent in Gosford (which had six candidates), 14.5 per cent in North Shore (eight candidates) and 21.5 per cent in Manly (twelve candidates).

Ballot Paper
Legislative Assembly Election – Electoral District of
North Shore
Held on 8 April 2017

▶ DIRECTIONS FOR VOTING
PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

- Write the number **1** in the square next to the candidate of your choice.
- You can show more choices, if you want to, by writing numbers in the other squares, starting with the number **2**.
- Fold this ballot paper so your vote cannot be seen and place it in the ballot box (or in the envelope provided).

CANDIDATES

<input type="checkbox"/>	FINE Harry INDEPENDENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	CORRIGAN Carolyn INDEPENDENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	MUTTON Ian INDEPENDENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	WILSON Felicity LIBERAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	BEAUMONT OWLES Brian VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA PARTY (NSW)
<input type="checkbox"/>	ALICK Justin THE GREENS
<input type="checkbox"/>	LESSING Ila ANIMAL JUSTICE PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	NILE Silvana CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (FRED NILE GROUP)

A copy of Saturday's ballot paper.

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<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/north-shore-byelection-candidate-carolyn-corrigan-says-uninformed-voters-may-have-influenced-election-20170412-gvk3jr.html>