

# Liberals to cede Wagga Wagga to Nationals after byelection defeat

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NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian is set to cede the electorate of Wagga Wagga, held by the NSW Liberals for more than six decades until last month's devastating byelection loss, and allow the Nationals to contest the seat at the next state election due in March.



*Gladys Berejiklian and Julia Ham walk the streets of Wagga Wagga ahead of the byelection earlier this month. PHOTO: NICK MOIR*

The move will inflame tensions between the Coalition partners, with some Liberals already suspicious of the role the Nationals played in the loss of Wagga Wagga to independent candidate Joe McGirr following the resignation of disgraced Liberal MP Daryl Maguire.

A ballot circulated to the NSW Liberals' executive to be voted on later this afternoon, obtained by *the Herald*, calls for the party to not run a candidate in March.

"The resignation from Parliament of Daryl Maguire caused a byelection for the seat of Wagga Wagga, which was held on Saturday, 8 September 2018," it reads.

"The Liberal Party selected Julia Ham as its endorsed candidate for that by-election.

"Unfortunately, the party suffered a significant swing in that contest and did not retain the seat.

"Given the result, the Premier is recommending that the party not contest the electoral district of Wagga Wagga at the 2019 state election, to enable the National Party to run a candidate."

Sources said it was expected the motion would be agreed to this afternoon.

Before the election, Nationals leader John Barilaro said if voters "dismiss a Liberal candidate" it would give him the right to negotiate to allow the Nationals to contest the seat in March.

Ms Ham suffered a massive swing against her, largely picked up by Dr McGirr, who won the seat with 59.6 per cent of the two-party preferred vote.

The byelection followed the resignation of Mr Maguire, who stood down from the Liberal Party in July after recordings were played to the Independent Commission Against Corruption which appeared to show him trying to strike a multimillion-dollar deal for Chinese developers.

Mr Maguire had held the safe Liberal seat since 1999.

Comment has been sought from Ms Berejiklian and Mr Barilaro.

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