

Federal Nationals say greyhound ban is hurting support for the Turnbull government

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Heath Aston

The federal National Party in NSW is united against the Baird government's plan to abolish greyhound racing as senior Coalition figures worry that anger in regional areas at the dogs ban, combined with the recent focus on same-sex marriage, is weighing on the poll-challenged Turnbull government.

Fairfax Media has spoken to every NSW National in the federal Parliament or their office and found blanket opposition to the state government's plan to shutdown the greyhound industry.



Joyce: Greyhound decision bites Baird

Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce blames NSW Premier Mike Baird's move to ban greyhound racing for his poor local election results. (Video courtesy ABC's Insiders)

Some Nationals have gone on the record for the first time with their view that NSW Nationals leader Troy Grant and Premier Mike Baird should retreat from their vow to wind up the controversial \$350 million industry from July next year.

Nationals leader Barnaby Joyce, who has not read Michael McHugh's damning report into greyhound racing and said he has "no intention" of doing so, conceded the political fall-out has leached from state politics into the federal sphere.



Member for Calare Andrew Gee, NSW Nationals candidate for Orange Scott Barrett and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce. Photo: Twitter

"I think you should be very cognisant of the views of the people and I think it's having an effect [federally], yes," he said.

Mr Joyce was quick out of the blocks to support NSW greyhound owners and trainers, as was Riverina MP Michael McCormack, who has described Mr Baird's decision as one pitched at "latte-sipping, keyboard warrior, long sock-wearing elitists from the north shore [of Sydney] who live life through rose-coloured glasses and have never been to a greyhound track".

Andrew Gee, whose decision to run for the federal seat of Calare precipitated the looming Orange byelection being viewed as a referendum on the greyhound ban and the leadership of Mr Grant, said he opposes the shut-down.

"I do not support the greyhound racing ban and never have. Barnaby Joyce took this issue to the federal Nationals' partyroom . . . there wasn't a single dissenting voice," he said.

The issue is likely to be discussed prominently when the state party MPs meet on Monday after a break from Macquarie Street.

David Gillespie, whose seat of Lyne is on the NSW north coast, said he would not have made the decision Mr Grant did.

"I would have given them two or three years to fix it up, saying we will monitor you closely," he said.

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The NSW government plans to ban greyhound racing from July 2017. Photo: Craig Golding

Parkes MP Mark Coulton said: "I'm not in favour of it but I am respectful of the decision they made at state level. It's a big issue and there is a lot of talk locally. I'm not in favour of the ban."

Mr Joyce's deputy Fiona Nash declined to comment but Fairfax Media understands she believes the issue has been mishandled and therefore does not back the ban despite concerns around animal welfare.

Ahead of a potential showdown on Monday, a state National claimed there was widespread opposition while another said dissenters would be "full of it when it counts" and warned that challenging Mr Grant's position would set off an uncontrollable explosion.

"The party has never been so divided," said a state MP. "But what happens next? That is the million dollar question".

A senior Liberal MP believes the issue is also taking a toll in outer-metropolitan areas where a lot of people are also not enamoured with the ongoing debate over marriage equality.

Both issues are being seen outside the capital cities as evidence that the policy priorities of the Baird and Turnbull governments are closer to the preoccupations of inner-urban elites than ordinary voters, the MP said.

"Who cares about us?" was how he described the sentiment being picked up from calls to his office.

Recent polls suggest that regional voters and the over 50s have become the most likely to switch to Labor since the federal election and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has insisted that his sole focus remains the economy.

He has repeatedly refused to state his opinion on the greyhound ban, saying he does not meddle in state issues.

With James Robertson

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/federal-nationals-say-greyhound-ban-is-biting-coalition-at-all-levels-20161005-grvirm.html>