

## POLITICS

## Regional Liberals make case for Nationals to back net zero emissions target

By political reporters [Nour Haydar](#) and [Matthew Doran](#)

Posted Tue 19 Oct 2021 at 12:02am



Warren Entsch says the benefits of "moving for a decarbonised society far outweigh any of the negatives". (*ABC News: Ian Cutmore*)

Regional Liberals are making the case for the Nationals to back a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, with some expressing frustration the junior Coalition partner is presenting itself as the sole voice of country communities.

The Coalition party room will meet in Canberra on Tuesday morning — the first time the two parties have come together since [Nationals fail to land on climate policy position](#).

Some Nationals remain vehemently opposed to the policy, arguing regional communities and industries will be destroyed in the pursuit of lower carbon pollution.

Speculation abounds over what concessions might be offered to the Nationals to get them over the line, with suggestions tens of billions of dollars will need to be poured into regional communities and industries.

The pressure to come to a resolution is growing, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison due to attend the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow at the end of the month.

### Key points:

- Some Nationals remain vehemently opposed to the policy, arguing it will harm regional areas
- Many Liberals and Nationals believe it is inevitable Australia will adopt the target
- Liberals are downplaying suggestions only the National Party represents regional Australians

New South Wales Liberal senator Hollie Hughes, who lived in the regional town of Moree for many years but now resides in Sydney, believes the Nationals will eventually yield.

"I think as we go forward, the majority of members of the National Party will probably support net zero towards 2050," she said.

"I think the conversation has certainly matured over the last couple of years."



Senator Hollie Hughes stressed "the Liberal Party represents significantly more rural and regional seats than any other parties". (ABC News: Tamara Penniket)

But she was keen to stress the constant refrain from Nationals members and senators that they were the only politicians voicing the concerns of voters living outside of metropolitan areas did not ring true.

"There are a number of parties that represent seats in rural and regional Australia," Senator Hughes said.

"But the Liberal Party represents significantly more rural and regional seats than any other parties."

In recent weeks, the Nationals' senate leader Bridget McKenzie has railed against calls from inner-city Liberals to adopt a net zero target.

She ramped up that rhetoric on Monday in parliament, when grilled about the issue by members of the Opposition and the Greens.

"You don't live where we live, you don't serve the people we serve, and out of sight is out of mind for the major parties in this building," she said.



Senator Bridget McKenzie says the major parties are unaware of the concerns of regional Australians. (ABC News: Ian Cutmore)

Liberal whip Rowan Ramsey represents the electorate of Grey, which covers more than 90 per cent of South Australia.

"I think we all accept this is a coalition," he argued, seeking to downplay the perception of tension between the Liberals and Nationals during the debate.

But he said adopting a net zero target ahead of the Glasgow talks was inevitable.

"I think there's a general acceptance that as the developed world — at least in the developed democratic world — is moving on in this area, there's an expectation that Australia will take similar positions," he said.

"But having said that, I think there is a great distrust of what some nations are saying, and how their actions will measure up."

Mr Ramsey echoed comments from the Prime Minister that any commitment by Australia to cut emissions would be meaningless without other big emitters such as China following through.

His electorate includes some of South Australia's most productive agricultural regions, as well as heavy industries such as the Whyalla Steelworks and the Port Pirie smelter.

"[My community] will not want to take risks with Australia's economy, particularly the regional economy, that actually makes us more vulnerable to other people's misbehaviour around the world," he said.



Liberal MP Rowan Ramsey says adopting the net zero policy is inevitable. (ABC News: Nick Haggarty)

Tony Pasin, who represents the neighbouring electorate of Barker, was not as convinced about the merits of a net zero target.

"The position makes me deeply uncomfortable, but the cold hard reality is that international capital markets and international commodity markets are demanding this of Australia and Australian producers," Mr Pasin said.

"In that sense, I feel a little like King Canute – whilst I'd like to push the waves back, the reality is we can't."

While a 2050 net zero target may well become Australia's policy, the Prime Minister has ruled out increasing the nation's 2030 emissions reduction target of 26 to 28 per cent — a benchmark set by Tony Abbott six years ago.

Mr Pasin argued increasing that short-term commitment would be a bridge too far.

"We made a very clear commitment to the Australian people at the last election," he said.

"If we are to remain credible and have the integrity the Australian people expect of us, we need to maintain that commitment."



Bridget McKenzie, Barnaby Joyce, David Littleproud and their Nationals colleagues failed to reach a decision on the policy during a party room meeting on Sunday. (ABC News: Ian Cutmore)

Joining the Prime Minister at the COP26 summit will be the Coalition's special envoy for the Great Barrier Reef, Warren Entsch.

The Liberal MP for Leichhardt, which stretches from Cairns to the Torres Strait, knocked back concerns a net zero target would harm regional Australia.

"I've got two World Heritage areas which are very, very important within the boundaries of my electorate.

"I have agriculture, mining, and very remote communities.

"I do believe that the benefits of actually moving for a decarbonised society far outweigh any of the negatives."



MP Tony Pasin likened resisting the emissions target to pushing back waves. (*Supplied: Tony Pasin* )