

Hanging and clinging: two state elections

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Peter Mares spoke to journalist Sue Neales and political scientist Haydon Manning about the likely shakedown in Tasmania and South Australia



Above: Premier Mike Rann addresses the party faithful on election night.
AAP Image/James Baker

South Australians and Tasmanians voted over the weekend, and the initial results were discussed on Sunday's edition of [The National Interest](#) [1] on Radio National. Peter Mares spoke to journalist Sue Neales and political scientist Haydon Manning about the key campaign issues and the likely shakedown after all the votes are counted.

IN TASMANIA, as predicted, voters have returned a hung parliament. The most likely outcome appears to be that the Labor and Liberal parties will each win ten seats in the twenty-five seat lower house, with the Greens picking up the other five. But two seats remain in doubt and await the final count of preferences in ten days' time.

Sue Neales is chief reporter for the Hobart *Mercury*, and she joined me on *The National Interest* on the morning after the election from the ABC's Hobart studios.

Peter Mares: Sue, how certain is this figure of ten Labor, ten Liberal and five Greens?

Sue Neales: Well, Labor's already attained its ten seats. The Liberals currently sit on nine, but are in with a chance to pick up both the undecided seats. But the more likely outcome is that they'll pick up one of them, in the north-east of Tasmania. The Greens currently have four seats and are in with a chance to pick up a fourth seat in Hobart, in the seat of Denison, but that's not certain either. There's an outside chance that an independent candidate, Andrew Wilkie – the Iraq whistleblower intelligence officer – will get that seat, and also the Liberal Party are potentially there as well. So it's still possible the Liberals could end up with eleven seats and Labor ten, giving them a clear win in that regard, but obviously in a twenty-five member parliament neither of the major parties will have a majority of seats.

So it could be ten Labor, eleven Liberal and four Greens, or it could be ten Labor, ten Liberal, four Greens and one independent? Or perhaps even an outside chance of ten Labor, nine Liberal and six Greens?

Absolutely right.

And we're not going to know the outcome of this for ten days?

No, nothing happens now for ten days. The electoral commission in Tasmania waits for the final postal votes to come in on Tuesday the thirtieth of March, and then they start the final cut-up and redistribution of votes under Tasmania's unique Hare-Clark electoral system. They can't start doing that until all the votes come in because they wait to see – it's very complicated – if any of the existing members have actually got a "quota," as they call it, under the system, because that determines whose votes get redistributed and preferences distributed first.

The Liberals have clearly won more of the primary votes than Labor – 39 per cent of the primary vote to Labor's 37 per cent. Now what does that mean if they are indeed equal in terms of seats, ten Labor and ten Liberal?

Well, Premier David Bartlett made a unilateral decision. He announced in the lead-up to the election that if it was equal he believed that the party that won the most primary votes overall, statewide, should be given the chance to form the next state government – he thought that was fair. The issue really is whether the governor, who will have the decision on some of this, will take that advice. The assumption is that, if it does end up ten Labor and ten Liberal, David Bartlett would advise our governor, Peter Underwood, that he thinks government should be offered to the Liberal Party. But the governor's not necessarily obliged to take that advice, and he might say to David Bartlett, well, under the Tasmanian constitution you are the premier, you should retain that premiership and your ministers should be sworn in as the next cabinet, until that government is tested on the floor of the house when parliament resumes.

And when does parliament resume?

That's another complexity in the Tasmanian system. We have rotating upper house elections, and we have two of our upper house members up for election on May the first. And the convention has been that parliament doesn't resume until both full houses can resume, which in the past has put the resumption of parliament after a March election right back until about May the twentieth.

So there'd be two months before parliament actually met?

Certainly Premier Bartlett has said that he wouldn't be prepared to wait that long if we are in the limbo of a hung parliament, so I would assume that parliament would meet again in late April, even if there are two upper house members missing.

So we could have a month of caretaker-type government, with David Bartlett remaining premier, if that is indeed what the governor suggests?

Well, whoever is sworn in as the government then is the government, and so cabinet can meet and executive decisions can be made, even before parliament resumes, and there's no need for caretaker conventions or to consult the other parties.

Why is David Bartlett happy to say that if the Liberals won more votes, even if the number of seats are equal, they should get the first go. Doesn't he

want it?

He's quite ambivalent on that. Certainly, in the past, minority governments haven't lasted the full distance and have all ended up in chaos – in some sort of partnership with the Greens, who obviously in this case do hold the balance of power again. So there is some sense in Labor circles, because they've tried this before, that really it's not such a bad thing if they don't take government because most likely the other side will muck it up and as they [Labor] regain their strength and the confidence of voters then hopefully, as Mr Bartlett said this morning, they could come back in as a majority government and put their plans for the future back in again.

So minority government is a poisoned chalice and it's better to let the Liberals drink from that cup?

Certainly that's how the premier sees it. And one of his closest friends and mentors is former Tasmanian premier, Michael Field, who tried minority government and sometimes says he wishes he hadn't.

What is the Greens' stated position on how it will go about negotiating with the major parties on who forms government?

Well, a very happy Greens leader Nick McKim last night said that the Greens had got a record vote in Tasmania – a record vote in Australia – of 21 per cent across the electorates. They're still hopeful that they will end up with five seats, potentially six seats. He still pointed again in his speech last night to a [negotiated agreement](#) [2] as his preference for how stable government can be formed. That's really what they have in the Australian Capital Territory, where the Greens and Labor have a [written document](#) [3] of aims and objectives and timelines that they agree to.

Obviously in Tasmania we have a situation where both Labor and the Liberals have said, we won't enter into a coalition with the Greens, and Greens leader Nick McKim has said, look, they've got to talk to us, but we're quite happy not to have a formal coalition with ministries and seats in cabinet and deputy premiers and things like that. He's always said that his key focus is stability, and that therefore he would prefer something like a negotiated agreement.

And he has, I think, said that the Greens wouldn't block supply.

Yes, he's certainly said that money bills would not be blocked.

Let's look at a couple of seats. In Denison, what's interesting is that Labor has won two seats [out of the five in the electorate] but it's lost two ministers.

That's right. We started off in Denison, which is the Hobart-based electorate, with Labor having three seats – including premier David Bartlett and two of his ministers – and there was one Liberal member who was retiring, Michael Hodgman, a veteran politician, and also Greens member Cassy O'Connor. Now what we've seen in Denison is a fascinating outcome where Scott Bacon, who's the son of former Labor premier Jim Bacon, has actually garnered substantially more votes than the two sitting ministers, Lisa Singh and Graeme Sturges. It looks like Labor will have only two seats in Denison: David Bartlett has been returned, but not with a massive personal vote, and Scott Bacon is the new Labor member in Denison at the expense of Lisa Singh and Graeme Sturges.

And we have a new Liberal member there, Matthew Groom, who's also the son of a former premier.

That's right. Matthew Groom polled extremely well – he was the leading candidate in Denison for the Liberals. And he is the son, as you said, of a premier. He is a lawyer who's particularly trained in renewable energy economics and technology, he works for the Roaring 40s company here, which specialises in wind power, and is seen as a real expert in emissions trading schemes. He certainly captured the imagination of a lot of younger voters, almost regardless of the fact that he was in the Liberal Party.

And then that fifth seat in Denison could go to the Greens or the Liberals, or it could go to Andrew Wilkie. Does Andrew Wilkie – the independent who campaigned on a no-pokies platform – give himself a chance?

I spoke with Andrew Wilkie this morning. He certainly gives himself a chance. He has more than half a quota, and the conventional wisdom is that once you have more than half a quota you're certainly in the running because you never quite know how preferences will flow. It would appear in Denison that probably the battle is going to be between Andrew Wilkie and Richard Lowrie, the second Liberal candidate, who's a well-known name around the northern suburbs of Hobart and has run on a small-business platform. Andrew Wilkie thinks that his preferences will come from all over the place, and it really depends if the Greens' second candidate, Helen Burnet, who's the deputy lord mayor of Hobart, is eliminated from the count, and her preferences distributed or redistributed before Andrew Wilkie. He's in with a very good chance.

One of the other seats where there's a very interesting result is Lyons, because of what's happened within the Labor Party. We have two incumbents, Michael Polley and David Llewellyn, who have sixty-two years of parliamentary experience between them, but one of them looks like being knocked off by a much younger Labor candidate, Rebecca White.

That's right. Labor actually had three seats in Lyons before the election, so they've also lost another sitting member, Heather Butler. But what happened in Lyons is that a twenty-seven-year-old political staffer, who also comes from a farm in the mainly rural electorate, has overtaken David Llewellyn in the votes. Now, it appears that she will win on preferences. Labor scrutineers are saying that she will benefit from a preference flow from other Labor candidates and appears to have beaten David Llewellyn. He's a sitting member, he's been in parliament since 1986, he's been a minister in almost every portfolio, and she ran entirely on a campaign of renewal, including some very humorous ads which talked about old politicians being "polly waffles" and "more of the same." Effectively, she targeted her own running mates, and the ploy appears to have paid off.

What is the future for David Bartlett himself, having delivered such a poor result as leader for Labor?

David Bartlett wouldn't agree with that. He says that Labor's internal polling shows that Labor was heading for a bloodbath two to three months ago – that at one point their internal polling showed they might only get seven members up. He says they ran an effective campaign and a good campaign, because it worked, and they actually gained up to 14 per cent extra votes during the campaign. So he thinks it's been a good campaign and they have managed to salvage a hung parliament [out of it] and are still within striking distance next time to go back into a majority.

He said this morning that he's talked to all his parliamentary colleagues and also to the ones who lost their seats and he has their overwhelming confidence to remain as Labor leader, with health minister Lara Giddings as deputy.

And Will Hodgman, the leader of the Liberal Party, must be riding very high, because he was the most successful of any candidate in the election.

His personal vote was very high. He and Nick McKim both polled extremely well. But in some ways you could say that the Liberal Party shouldn't be that happy – that going from seven seats to ten seats, while it's a gain, is perhaps not what they would have liked. You'd have to say that the Liberals need to re-examine their campaign. They played a very low-key campaign, perhaps thinking that they would get in on the dissatisfaction with Labor. I would argue that the election was more there for the grabbing than they actually managed to achieve.

MEANWHILE, in South Australia, Labor leader Mike Rann is not claiming victory but says he is cautiously optimistic that Labor will secure a third term. Labor looks like winning twenty-five seats to the Liberals' eighteen – despite the fact the Liberals won a bigger share of the vote.

Haydon Manning is associate professor and head of the Department of Politics and Public Policy at Flinders University, and he joined me from the ABC's Adelaide studios.

Peter Mares: Haydon, you predicted on this program on Friday evening that Labor would hold on to office with a small majority and it looks like you were right.

Haydon Manning: Yes, I'd like it to be as simple as that, but the seats didn't necessarily fall the way one might have predicted. But Labor have got their twenty-four, and probably one extra, so they'll have about a two-seat majority.

And yet, as you say, it didn't quite go the way we expected. For example, Labor has lost the seat of Adelaide, held by minister Jane Lomax-Smith, one of the more solid, respected members, I would have thought, of the Labor cabinet.

Yes, one would have thought that. But with a 15 per cent swing against Labor in Adelaide, Lomax-Smith, who was the education minister, was swept well and truly out of office. Whereas on the other side of town, out in the north and in the south, the story was different in the two most marginal seats, which I and others thought would fall in the swing that the opinion polls captured. In Light, which is to the north of Adelaide around the town of Gawler – outer-suburban northern Adelaide – Labor enjoyed a 2.8 per cent swing. Not bad at all for the local member, Tony Piccolo.

There was actually a swing to Labor in that seat?

Yes, a swing to Labor. I've done a bit of homework this morning, puzzling over why, and there are three key points. One, he was a mayor in the past, so he's very well known. There was a plan for Adelaide – the Greater Adelaide Plan – and Gawler initially wasn't included; now it has been, due to his efforts, so that gave him bonus points out among the voters. Plus special bus services and the electrification of rail – transport issues have helped Piccolo and the Labor Party out in the north.

And clearly, down in the south, in the seat of Mawson, which was the other most marginal Labor seat, which they've retained with a small swing, the duplication of the Southern Expressway was important. To quickly explain, back in the 1990s the state could only afford a new highway heading south to the southern beaches and suburbs that ran one way in the morning and back the other way in the afternoon. Labor got in early in the campaign and promised that the expressway would indeed be built as per the norm in other capital cities around the country. That clearly helped Leon Bignell, the incumbent in Mawson, who looked like he'd lose his seat. Plus it's said that he campaigned very thoroughly in the last seven or eight months.

So the Liberals have picked up Norwood, which is Don Dunstan's old seat of course, and also Morialta. But they have also picked up a seat from the Nationals. Karlene Maywald, who was a minister in the Rann government, has lost her seat, Chaffey, in the Riverland.

Yes, a 20 per cent swing to the Liberals out in Chaffey, clearly a bitter pill for Maywald, who'd been the Minister for Water Resources and undoubtedly had the hardest portfolio in the government, given the impact of the drought on horticultural communities across her electorate. So two long-serving ministers in the Rann government have lost their seats.

And what about independents? There were four independents going into this election; how have they fared?

Well, the independent out in the seat of Frome, Geoff Brock – who took that seat from the Liberals [in early 2009] when Rob Kerin, the former Liberal leader, retired and there was a by-election – has defended the seat with a very solid swing of about 12 per cent. This is a seat around Port Pirie...

And he was former mayor of Port Pirie, I think...

Yes, again that theme, going back to Tony Piccolo – the old local mayors who can run on the back of their acceptance in the community – it obviously helps. So Brock denied the Liberals a key seat they were after. In Fisher, Bob Such returns once again with a small swing his way; he's got a very strong margin there. And in the seat of Mitchell, Kris Hanna – the former Labor MP, then Green, then independent, who won the seat and surprised all of us back in 2006 – looks like he'll hold on. He's running second in the count to the Liberal; the expectation, of course, is that when all the preferences are counted he'll get over the line comfortably with Labor support.

And the other one is Mount Gambier, where Rory McEwen, who was a longstanding independent and also had been a minister in the Rann government, retired and that seat was expected to return to the Liberals. But the independent there looks like he might get up as well.

Yes, there were strong expectations that the Liberals might pick up Mount Gambier but at the moment the money's probably on Mr Pegler to win the seat and continue the tradition now of Mount Gambier electing independents. He's a more conservative MP and would have supported Isobel Redmond, I'd say, if she'd had a chance of forming government. Maybe next time.

The Royal Adelaide Hospital figured very largely in the campaign... [Labor promised a new hospital; the Liberals undertook to redevelop the existing facility.]

Well, this is very interesting. The swing against the key Labor ministers in their seats was extreme – over 12 per cent for all of them... You wouldn't read that as a vote of confidence in the government's decision to build the new hospital... I just think there's going to be a lot more selling needed to convince South Australians that the building of a \$1.7 billion brand-new hospital is a good idea...

And the policy on water. We saw Karlene Maywald lose her seat, and water seems to have counted against the Rann government.

No doubt about that. The Maywald loss is the obvious one. Redmond and the Liberals campaigned strongly on the issue of stormwater recycling and its potable human use. I think the government's going to be under pressure to answer questions about whether, sooner rather than later, stormwater can be properly treated and put into the reservoirs.

Isobel Redmond, the leader of the Liberals, made the very obvious point on this program: where do we think the water in the Murray comes from, after all? And as the former environment minister Malcolm Turnbull said to me once, the water in the Murray has been through many a kidney as well.

Absolutely. And this is the sort of conversation South Australians have now. They're well apprised of issues surrounding water and how we could use it more efficiently and effectively. And there's some criticism, as in all communities around Australia, about desalination. We're having a large, expensive desalination plant constructed, and that will be up and running in about a year, but the notion of being able to recycle something as basic as water certainly has an attraction out there in the electorate and served the Liberals well.

But in the end, what didn't serve the Liberals very well was in the last week, the suggestion that disunity is still harboured within their camp. And that could have cost them dearly in those marginals that they needed to win.

Indeed, because Vicky Chapman, a former aspirant to the leadership, refused to rule out a challenge to Isobel Redmond, and this reminded voters, I guess, that the Liberals were on about their fourth leader in four years.

And certainly Labor insiders that I talked to took that as their biggest free kick, and they used it during the last few days. •

These interviews were broadcast on ABC Radio National's The National Interest on Sunday 21 March. Audio is available on the program's [website](#) [1].

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