

By-election: Mayor Neoh tipped to run for Nationals



Having dipped out of Liberal pre-selection for the South West Coast by-election, W'bool City Council Mayor Michael Neoh is tipped to be running for the Nationals. Image: ABC Radio.

Comment – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]H[/dropcap]aving dipped out of the Liberal pre-selection race for the South West coast by-election, Warrnambool City Council Mayor **Michael Neoh** is tipped to contest the seat for the National Party.

Bluestone understands that Mr Neoh resigned from the Hamilton branch of the Liberal Party soon after withdrawing from the Liberal Party pre-selection – which is fast attracting as many entries as the Melbourne Cup – and is to be confirmed shortly as the Nationals candidate.

Mr Neoh's nomination by the Nationals would give him a clear run at the highly-prized seat, without enduring a potentially embarrassing face-off against Liberal Party contenders including **Tom Naphine**, the son of Dr **Denis Naphine**, agriculture activist **Roma Britnell** and former Upper House MP **Donna Petrovich**.

Mr Neoh could not be contacted today for comment and the National Party's Victorian head office was tied up in its national conference in Canberra.

Sources have told *Bluestone*, however, that Mr Neoh's candidacy for the National Party was all but assured.

The somewhat surprising move fits with Mr Neoh's [cryptic comment](#) after withdrawing from Liberal Party preselection earlier this week that he was "keeping his options open".

Mr Neoh repeated the same [comment to the ABC earlier](#) today:

"I certainly would love to represent rural and regional Victoria but at this time I still want to keep my options as wide as possible," he said.

While some thought Mr Neoh might run as an independent, *Bluestone* has been told that Mr Neoh decided he could only run with the support of a major party behind him.

Again, his comments to the ABC today support this view:

"I think some of the ingredients that are really important to any candidate are having full support and having a platform to do that."

The Nationals last held what was then the seat of Warrnambool from 1985-1999 under the hugely popular **John McGrath**.

While this latest move may see Mr Neoh build upon his political aspirations, it will also present a major challenge to the Liberal Party by splitting the conservative vote between the two Coalition partners.

This will be music to the ears of independent **Roy Reekie** and Greens candidate **Thomas Campbell**, who will be looking for any advantage they can to pull back a seat that requires an almost 12% swing to change from Liberal hands.

Unlocked – read our earlier comment piece here: [By-election: are we on a road to nowhere?](#)

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