



07 Nov 2016
West Australian, Perth

Author: Andrew Probyn • Section: General News • Article type : News Item
Audience : 153,763 • Page: 6 • Printed Size: 932.00cm² • Market: WA
Country: Australia • ASR: AUD 16,339 • Words: 723 • Item ID: 682634552



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Miners' survey says Grylls in hot seat

EXCLUSIVE

■ **Andrew Probyn**
Federal Political Editor

Brendon Grylls is at serious risk of losing his Pilbara seat in the March State election, according to a poll that kickstarts a ferocious advertising campaign by the big miners against the Nationals leader's \$5-a-tonne iron ore tax.

As Federal Labor confirmed its opposition to the iron ore impost, a poll for the Chamber of Minerals and Energy found an almost 20 percentage point fall in Mr Grylls' primary support in the seat of Pilbara.

Pollster Utting Research found Mr Grylls had tumbled to just 19 per cent among respondents, with Labor recording 26 per cent, the Liberal Party 22 per cent and the Greens 12 per cent.

Most of the Nationals' lost support is parked with "others", which sits at 21 per cent.

This suggests the Liberals are on track to win Pilbara on March 17, winning 55 per cent of the vote against Labor's 45 per cent in a two-party preferred split.

Labor's Tom Stephens held Pilbara between 2005 and 2013, when Mr Grylls switched from his safe Central Wheatbelt seat.

The telephone poll, con-

ducted over November 1-3 with 300 respondents, found more were opposed to the tax (50 per cent) than supported it (41 per cent) and while Mr Grylls was still regarded positively, BHP

Billiton and Rio Tinto were rated higher among Pilbara respondents. Last night, the mining sector began a major television and newspaper campaign against the Grylls iron ore tax, which would apply only to BHP and Rio

Tinto and generate \$7.2 billion over four years.

The Federal Labor Party, itself once a target of a massive campaign by the big miners over a mining tax, has formally denounced Mr Grylls' plan as a tax on jobs that would hurt WA.

Labor frontbencher Tim Hammond likened the Nationals leader to Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, saying Mr Grylls appealed to populism but his policies did not bear scrutiny.

Writing in *The West Australian* today, Mr Hammond said the \$5-a-tonne levy was a tax on production that could kill new projects.

CME WA chief executive Reg Howard-Smith echoed this sentiment. "People in regional WA understand the Nationals' plan will cost them jobs now and into the future," he said. "They

understand that it is politics not policy and they are in the crosshairs."

As *The Weekend West* revealed on Saturday, the plan would also hit the Federal Budget, costing an annual \$690 million reduction in company tax receipts based on 2014-15 production figures, according to a preliminary Federal Government analysis.

Mr Hammond said Mr Grylls' mining tax reflected a trend in modern politics: "Find the tallest poppies in the field and shout loudly that the answer to our future prosperity lies in cutting them down."

This trend resulted in Brexit, he said, and allowed the "erratic and dangerous rhetoric of Donald Trump" to flourish.

"Mr Grylls' proposal is straight from the same play-book. And on first blush, one can understand why the proposal might garner some superficial attraction," Mr Hammond writes.

"Closer inspection, however, reveals many reasons why industry, as well as political parties of all persuasions, have rightfully given this idea the short shrift."

Under prime minister Kevin Rudd in 2010, Labor proposed the politically disastrous resources super profits tax on mining



companies.

After Mr Rudd's removal, the Julia Gillard government introduced a less onerous mineral resource rent tax, but this was axed by the Abbott government in 2013.

Mr Hammond alluded to the MRRT in distinguishing it from the Grylls proposal.

"In a perfect world, all taxes would be neutral in nature, so they don't affect production and investment decisions," he said.

"This is the worst possible time to impose this poorly designed new tax on mining production."

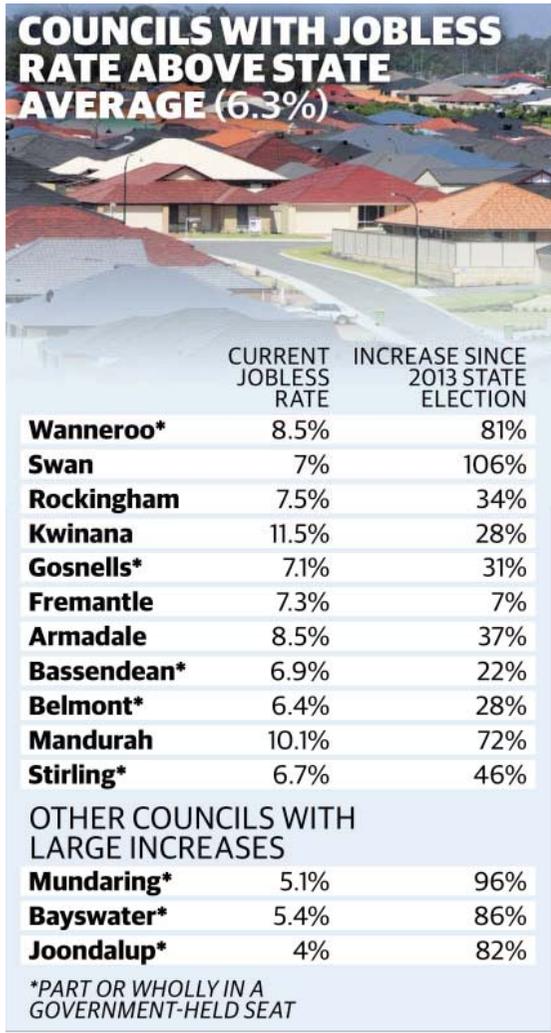
Mr Grylls said CME "push polling" would not dissuade him from taking his \$5 mining tax to the election.

"If they can convince the electorate that a 25¢ fee struck in the 1960s should remain in place indefinitely, then the seat will be close.

"But if I win the Pilbara

seat and the Nationals the balance of power in the face of a multimillion-dollar anti-Grylls campaign, then I will be claiming the strongest of mandates to finally modernise the unfair legacy of State agreements and increase the lease rental to \$5," he said.

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Brendon Grylls



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Matt Cooper at Armadale train station.
Picture: Sharon Smith