

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Power, immigration top agenda for Tony Abbott's 'return'

Brad Norington, The Australian, 12:00AM June 7, 2018

Tony Abbott has not ruled out a comeback as prime minister, identifying power prices and reducing immigration as the first issues he would tackle.

Accepting his fate rested in the hands of his partyroom and Sydney electorate, Mr Abbott said yesterday he was "here to serve", while adding, "whatever capacity I can serve in depends upon others".

The former Liberal prime minister had been asked whether he would run again one day by a staffer from the Kyle and Jackie O radio show towards the end of co-launching a new book, How political correctness is destroying Australia, by education commentator Kevin Donnelly.

Speaking at Sydney's Sofitel Hotel, Mr Abbott said he was in the hands of voters from his northside electorate Warringah, and then in the hands of his party.

One audience member called out: "We all want you back."

Mr Abbott did not mention Malcolm Turnbull by name. Nor did he suggest he would seek to displace Mr Turnbull from office.

But he did receive support from broadcaster Alan Jones, his co-launcher, who said he was glad Mr Abbott had decided to stay in politics to prosecute ideas, not bow out as some had urged. Responding to a comment by Jones that a crisis in Western political leadership and education would not have continued if Mr Abbott remained prime minister, Mr Abbott said: "I wish. What you discover in big jobs is that you don't have all the power that you would like.

"I discovered, for instance, as prime minister that there were many things the government couldn't do. It couldn't get every aspect of its budget passed because the Senate wouldn't let us. All too often, centre-right governments are in office but not in power." The one "absolute essential" in politics was to know your own mind, Mr Abbott said, and anyone wanting to have influence should be prepared to call out folly.

Asked to nominate one thing he would “fix” if prime minister again, Mr Abbott picked two. “Take the pressure off the cost of living by doing something about power prices,” he said. “The next thing you would do is scale back the rate of immigration.”