

GetUp split over links to Kerryn Phelps



GetUp activist Daniel Stone and business partner Sofia Madden.
exclusive

Brad Norington, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The GetUp activist group faces internal upheaval over its leadership's moves to support independent candidate Kerryn Phelps in this month's Wentworth by-election in Sydney and potentially strip the Morrison government of its one-seat majority.

With two Labor campaigners already playing key roles in the Phelps campaign, the involvement of GetUp has fuelled claims she is being used by the ALP as a faux party candidate.

The government faces a backlash from voters over the dumping of Malcolm Turnbull as prime minister, as polling shows the once-safe seat on a knife-edge ahead of the October 20 poll.

The Australian reported this week that Sofia Madden, an active campaigner for Labor in elections who builds websites for the party's federal and state headquarters and for individual ALP candidates, was working on Dr Phelps's campaign. Her involvement is in addition to that of Darrin Barnett, Dr Phelps's spokesman and a long-time Labor campaigner who worked for Julia Gillard before helping run Labor's campaign for the recent Braddon by-election.

Ms Madden's political links also run to GetUp. Her business partner in their joint campaign company, Principle Co, is Daniel Stone, formerly the NSW Labor Party's digital director and digital advertising manager for the federal ALP.

For the past year, Mr Stone, who worked with Ms Madden in the NSW ALP's head office during the NSW election campaign in 2015, has also been a director on the board of GetUp. The Weekend Australian sought comment from Mr Stone about whether he was taking an active role as a GetUp board member in helping to determine the group's position on the Wentworth by-election, as well as playing a role in Dr Phelps's campaign with Ms Madden through Principle Co. He did not return calls.

GetUp is gearing up to run a climate-change campaign in Wentworth in line with the policy positions of Dr Phelps, who says she wants to see "a fast-tracking to renewables" and is seen as the most likely candidate to defeat the Liberals.

The group's campaign director, Miriam Lyons, told The Weekend Australian that GetUp was campaigning for climate change, not candidates, but GetUp supporter Michael Mobbs said he understood GetUp was thinking of backing Dr Phelps, and the group would make "a fool of itself" and a "mistake" by doing so. Mr Mobbs, an independent former local councillor in Sydney's east, singled out on Facebook posts how GetUp's own opinion polls had asked only whether voters would support Dr Phelps or Liberal candidate Dave Sharma, and ignored Labor's Tim Murray, despite his commitment to "take action on cutting air pollution".

GetUp's own Twitter feed has appeared to throw its support behind Dr Phelps by declaring she represented "the 72 per cent of Wentworth voters who want to #Ban Live Exports" while "The Liberals? Missing in action".

Ms Madden has her own links to GetUp through her association with a related group, Purpose. She has worked on campaigns for GetUp as well as for Labor with Mr Stone. She did not return The Weekend Australian's call. Labor's NSW head office repeated yesterday that it was offering no help to Dr Phelps and any such claims were a Liberal Party distraction in the absence of policies to offer Wentworth voters.

A spokesman for NSW general secretary Kaila Murnain said Ms Madden was not a member of the ALP. He said she was not a party operative and there was no reason to consider her one as she was “just a supplier of services”. “I’ve never heard of Sofia Madden. She’s just a junior digital person who’s done some digital work for the party in the past.”

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