

## Laundy tells mate Turnbull to shut up



Malcolm Turnbull and the Member for Reid Craig Laundy, who has advised the former PM to stay out of the spotlight, warning he is damaging his legacy with ill-judged public comments. Picture: Britta Campion

exclusive

Ben Packham, Political Reporter, 11:00PM December 5, 2018

Malcolm Turnbull's closest confidant in parliament, Craig Laundy, has urged the former prime minister to stay out of the spotlight, warning he is damaging his legacy with ill-judged public comments.

The Australian can reveal the NSW Liberal backbencher has spoken to Mr Turnbull in recent days, suggesting, as a friend, that he refrain from further public interventions on factional and policy issues.

But as government MPs sought to smooth over party divisions, NSW Liberal senator Jim Molan, who was dropped to an unwinnable third spot on the party's Senate ticket, launched a blistering attack on the state division's "poisonous" factional system. In an opinion piece published in The Australian today, the former major-general and Operation Sovereign Borders chief blasts the "deeply distorting" influence of the factions and their ability to "stitch up" preselections under state party rules.

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“Their entire game is about power and influence,” Senator Molan says. “What does it say about those who rise to the top of such a system?”

Scott Morrison yesterday defended his decision to intervene in NSW preselections to save conservative MP Craig Kelly, but not Senator Molan or Queensland MP Jane Prentice. Mr Morrison, who pointed out that he wasn’t prime minister when Ms Prentice lost preselection, said his intervention was aimed at giving the party its best chance of staying in government.

“You form government by having the best members and candidates on the ground in the House of Representatives and that’s where my focus is to ensure the re-election of the government,” Mr Morrison said.

Mr Turnbull enraged MPs from across the factional divide by unsuccessfully lobbying moderates on the state executive to ignore the Prime Minister’s - instruction to save Mr Kelly, branding him the “most destructive member of the government”.

The Australian has also revealed Mr Turnbull has been in contact with Labor leader Bill Shorten and his successor in Wentworth, independent MP Kerryn Phelps, since the August 24 leadership spill.

Sources told The Australian that Mr Laundy spoke to Mr Turnbull out of concern for his friend, believing the former prime minister was feeding a growing sense of anger in the party towards its former leader.

Mr Laundy said he would “neither confirm nor deny” the subject of his conversations with Mr Turnbull, declaring: “Those discussions are private.”

A senior NSW moderate said Mr Laundry's advice to Mr Turnbull was sound. "There is a role for former prime ministers to raise important national issues, but it is best done judiciously," the source said.

Senator Molan was effectively punted from parliament from next year after he landed the third Liberal spot on the NSW Senate ticket, behind powerbroker Alex Hawke's preferred candidate, Hollie Hughes, and moderate Andrew Bragg.

In *The Australian* today, Senator Molan writes that the factional system has contributed to the loss of more than a million Liberal Party votes since 2013. He argues the NSW branch, unlike those in other states, is riven with factional infighting and "games", and is in urgent need of "true reform". "We can win with Scott Morrison as Prime Minister given his experience and ability, but we must inspire," he says.

Conservative powerbroker Concetta Fierravanti-Wells suggested Senator Molan didn't work hard enough. "Irrespective of whether the Senate preselection is by state council delegates — about 760 — or by the entire NSW Liberal Party membership as I have advocated — some 10,000 or so — profile counts for only so much," she said. "You still have to contact everyone, make the calls and lobby for the votes."