

Zali Stegall, Tony Abbott slam GetUp for campaign ad depicting him refusing to save drowning swimmer

GetUp ad featuring 'Tony Abbott' 0:30



GetUp will release an ad featuring 'Tony Abbott' in the electorate of Kooyong.

Warringah candidate Zali Stegall has joined rival Tony Abbott in condemning GetUp for their ad which depicted the former prime minister as a lifesaver refusing to save a drowning swimmers. “I don’t approve of that kind of advertising, I think you need to focus on policies and not smear campaigns in relation to people,” she said. When asked if she had been in contact with GetUp about keeping the campaign clean, she said she had no association with the activist group.

“I don’t have anything to do with GetUp so I’m not speaking to them,” she told reporters.

Mr Abbott demanded GetUp apologise for the campaign ad. “It was unbelievably tacky and it’s really up to GetUp, and the candidates that GetUp backs to apologise,” Mr Abbott said.

The activist group was this morning forced to remove the ad, in which Mr Abbott is seen sitting on a beach eating an onion as a woman begs him to help save the swimmer, after widespread condemnation from lifesavers and social media.. “I believe they have (taken the ad down) but they should never have thought it’s a smart thing to demean the work of 150,000 or so volunteer

lifesavers,” the former prime minister said as he faced off with Independent candidate Zali Steggall at the ballot draw.

Ms Steggall also condemned the ad.

Bill Shorten has also joined the chorus of condemnation, calling the ad “really stupid and grossly disrespectful to ... surf life savers.” Mr Shorten said this morning. “In terms of GetUp they’re independent from us. Some of the stuff they say I haven’t agreed with, some of the stuff in the past I have, but this ad is well out of line.” “You can have your disagreements with Tony Abbott but I respect the fact that he’s a surf lifesaver.”

The organisation is in full campaign mode against Mr Abbott, who is facing a challenge from independent candidate Zali Steggall in his northern beaches Sydney seat of Warringah. But the activist group pulled the ad after it was branded “inappropriate” and “distasteful” by the Royal Life Saving Society and in the wake of the deaths of two lifeguards who drowned trying to rescue a swimmer at Port Campbell over the Easter weekend. A further five people drowned over the long weekend.

Mr Abbott has been a long-time surf lifesaving volunteer in his electorate.

The video shows an actor, dressed up as Mr Abbott wearing a pair of “budgie-smugglers” and a lifeguard cap, relaxing on a beach chair while eating an onion like an apple and holding a lump of coal.

As a swimmer cries help and a passer-by appeals to “Tony” to save him, the actor says, “Ah, look, I think you’ll find that the science isn’t settled on that.” “Why should we act first,” asks the fictional Mr Abbott, refusing to save the swimmer, “I think I’ve given you the response you deserve.” It ends with a voiceover: “The climate’s changed, Tony. Why haven’t you?”

Comments on the video posted on Youtube derided GetUp for their antics. “I’m not fan of Abbott, but this is a seriously lazy ad that won’t convince anyone to vote against him,” wrote one commenter.

“To portray in (an) ad that Tony Abbott would just allow someone to drown without moving an inch to help is just disgusting & low,” wrote another.

Another commenter called GetUp “total grubs” for using “volunteers like this who save our lives”.

Royal Life Saving Society chief Justin Scarr said the video was extremely insensitive, coming after Victorian father and son lifesavers drowned trying to rescue a tourist at Port Campbell.

“There’s nothing funny about drowning, the ad is very poor taste, especially in such a tragic week,” he said. “I will leave the politics to others but feel compelled to call it out for what it is, on behalf of the families of the 250 Australians who drowned over the past year.”

The ad, which was authorised by GetUp’s chief Paul Oosting, was uploaded to Youtube on Monday and pulled down around 8am this morning.