



## Divided Liberals remain reluctant over backing for Rudd's apology

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At least one Liberal MP has foreshadowed abstaining from next week's historic apology to the Stolen Generation in Federal Parliament as the coalition struggles with internal divisions despite reaching agreement to support the apology.

A group of WA Liberal MPs who had previously condemned the apology have, in spite of their personal beliefs, fallen in line behind Brendan Nelson's directive and agreed to vote with Labor's proposal next Wednesday. But several members hoped to express their opposition in speeches to Parliament.

Thousands of Aboriginals are expected to converge on Canberra on Wednesday when the official apology is offered on behalf of Parliament to Aboriginal children who had been forcibly removed from their parents.

It is understood no coalition MP will cross the floor but at least one, Canning MP Don Randall, said he was considering abstaining.

"Considering my views, it would be rather hypocritical of me to take a contrary view, unless I've been somewhat persuaded," he said.

"I think we need to move on but on

behalf of my electorate I have a position to stick to. I think the party got it right because now is an opportunity to move on."

Influential Liberal Nick Minchin said Malcolm Turnbull's decision to publicly support an apology without consulting his colleagues cost him the Liberal leadership. Mr Turnbull narrowly lost December's leadership battle to Dr Nelson.

"We wanted a leader who would respect the authority of the party room and not announce changes in policy without proper consultation with the party room," Senator Minchin said.

WA Senator Mathias Cormann spoke against the apology at Wednesday's joint party room meeting. He said he would not abstain but would speak out if given a chance to address the Parliament.

"The reason there's division in the Liberal Party is because there's division in the Australian community," he said. "I personally have got an issue with the term stolen, I don't agree with it, and I've also got an issue with the concept of intergenerational responsibility."

"But despite my reservations I will go along with the recommendation from our leader, and I will go along with what was in the end the unani-

mous decision of the party room."

Newly elected WA MP Steve Irons also said while he did not agree with the apology, he would vote for it.

"The majority of people in my electorate didn't want to say sorry and I took their message (to the joint party room.) But as a first-time attendee my role is to stand up and vote, even though I might not agree with it personally. I still don't think it will achieve anything."

Dr Nelson has urged Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to allow MPs the chance to speak on the apology in Parliament but Mr Rudd has not confirmed whether he will allow this.

Member for Tangney Dennis Jensen said rather than vote against the apology, he would use the chance to speak to convey his disappointment.

Asked how he reconciled his opposition to the apology with his decision to support it, Dr Jensen said it was a "complex" issue. "My views haven't changed, but we should move on," he said.

Shadow indigenous affairs minister Tony Abbott said the coalition had come to a "sensible" decision, but he was one of many members to oppose the use of the word "stolen."