

# By-election: Mayor Neoh tipped to run for Nationals



Having dipped out of Liberal pre-selection for the South West Coast by-election, W'bool City Council Mayor Michael Neoh is tipped to be running for the Nationals. Image: ABC Radio.

## Comment – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]H[/dropcap]aving dipped out of the Liberal pre-selection race for the South West coast by-election, Warrnambool City Council Mayor **Michael Neoh** is tipped to contest the seat for the National Party.

*Bluestone* understands that Mr Neoh resigned from the Hamilton branch of the Liberal Party soon after withdrawing from the Liberal Party pre-selection – which is fast attracting as many entries as the Melbourne Cup – and is to be confirmed shortly as the Nationals candidate.

Mr Neoh's nomination by the Nationals would give him a clear run at the highly-prized seat, without enduring a potentially embarrassing face-off against Liberal Party contenders including **Tom Naphthine**, the son of Dr **Denis Naphthine**, agriculture activist **Roma Britnell** and former Upper House MP **Donna Petrovich**.

Mr Neoh could not be contacted today for comment and the National Party's Victorian head office was tied up in its national conference in Canberra.

Sources have told *Bluestone*, however, that Mr Neoh's candidacy for the National Party was all but assured.

The somewhat surprising move fits with Mr Neoh's [cryptic comment](#) after withdrawing from Liberal Party preselection earlier this week that he was "keeping his options open".

Mr Neoh repeated the same [comment to the ABC earlier](#) today:

"I certainly would love to represent rural and regional Victoria but at this time I still want to keep my options as wide as possible," he said.

While some thought Mr Neoh might run as an independent, *Bluestone* has been told that Mr Neoh decided he could only run with the support of a major party behind him.

Again, his comments to the ABC today support this view:

"I think some of the ingredients that are really important to any candidate are having full support and having a platform to do that."

The Nationals last held what was then the seat of Warrnambool from 1985-1999 under the hugely popular **John McGrath**.

While this latest move may see Mr Neoh build upon his political aspirations, it will also present a major challenge to the Liberal Party by splitting the conservative vote between the two Coalition partners.

This will be music to the ears of independent **Roy Reekie** and Greens candidate **Thomas Campbell**, who will be looking for any advantage they can to pull back a seat that requires an almost 12% swing to change from Liberal hands.

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