



Numbers prompt Premier to distance himself

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Body

These Newspann results are a firm reminder to Roger Cook of the West Australian Premier's need to differentiate himself from -Anthony Albanese.

While the figures should settle any nerves Cook has ahead of his first election campaign as Premier, with his personal satisfaction rating sitting pretty and his government poised for a comfortable re-election, they confirm the headwinds facing his Canberra counterparts in their efforts to hold the ground they gained in their 2022 defeat of the Morrison government.

Cook's challenge is to ensure that the Prime Minister's struggles in the west don't cost WA Labor too many more seats.

He signalled his intent to put distance between him and the Prime Minister when he sat down with The Australian at the start of this year, describing his government as "proudly independent" and noting there were differences of approach between state Labor and its federal counterparts on a "whole range of issues".

First among those is the -Nature Positive law being pushed by federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek. Cook led the fight against those reforms, amid fears it would curtail WA's world-leading mining industry, and has already twice compelled Albanese to back-pedal on those plans. Just last month, he was taking aim at Labor backbenchers pushing for Nature Positive as east coast latte-sippers.

Cook was far less effective in his advocacy for the state's sheep farmers against the Albanese government's live exports ban, although the comparatively small scale of that industry should limit the electoral damage.

The Prime Minister has made nearly 30 visits to WA since his election, but it is unlikely state Labor would be encouraging any more trips -before election day on March 8. Certainly you are far more likely to find Albanese's face on Liberal campaigning material than that of Labor.

As for WA Liberals, it says a lot about their dismal position that there will be some in the party breathing a sigh of relief at these Newspann numbers.

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The 56-44 two-party--preferred result could cause the head of an opposition leader to roll in most other states, but in WA it shows that the party has clawed back some ground since the Covid wipe-out of 2021. Many in the party would grab right now any result that delivers them 10 or more lower-house seats, given the fear among some that the party will still be in an unelectable position in 2029.

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