



Environmental record election threat to ALP

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Body

The Labor MP facing a teal challenge in the Western Australian state seat of Fremantle has acknowledged a strong push-back from local voters on the Cook government's environmental record.

Simone McGurk, who has held the traditionally safe Labor seat since 2013, on Tuesday said locals were quizzing her at length about her government's climate credentials amid a challenge from Simon Holmes a Court-backed candidate Kate Hulett.

The Cook government was a strong agitator for the Albanese federal government to abandon its so-called Nature Positive laws, which were opposed by the state's resources sector, and late last year introduced an overhaul of the state's environmental assessment process that was criticised by environmental groups.

Even some within Labor ranks have been critical of the government's record, with retiring MP Chris Tallentire publicly slamming his own party's environmental reforms last year.

Fremantle is famous as a centre for arts, culture and alternative lifestyles, with the Greens finishing runners-up to Labor in the 2021 state election.

State Water Minister Ms McGurk said she had had many conversations with people in Fremantle and said the public sentiment towards the Cook government was "by and large positive", and that voters understood the balancing act facing the government.

She said the government had already moved to close the last of the state-owned coal-fired power plants, had ended the logging of native trees, had banned single-use plastics and had expanded the amount of declared conservation estates across WA.

But Ms Hulett told The Australian that doorknocking by her and the Voices for Fremantle community group had found the environment was the top issue in the electorate "by a mile", and residents were "embarrassed" by the Cook government's lack of more meaningful action.

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"It feels like the government don't think that the environment's a vote winner, and they don't care about it. That's the sentiment in the Freo population," Ms Hulett said.

"We've got the most Liberal-like Labor Party we've ever had, they're effectively Liberals wearing red T-shirts," Ms Hulett said.

"People are angry, they're disappointed, they feel really let down." She said she had met many lifelong Labor voters in Fremantle who had told her they would no longer be voting for the party.

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