

Barnaby Joyce's public scolding from Malcolm Turnbull exposes uncomfortable rift

By political reporter [Jane Norman](#)

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VIDEO: Prime Minister bans sexual relations between ministers and staff. (ABC News)

An uncomfortable gulf has been [exposed between the Prime Minister and his deputy](#), after Malcolm Turnbull delivered a scathing dressing down in which he refused to endorse Barnaby Joyce and told him to consider his position.

The Nationals Leader has been under immense pressure since it was revealed — 10 days ago — he had left his wife of 24 years and is expecting a baby with former media advisor Vikki Campion.

In a bid to relieve that pressure — and buy him some time — Mr Joyce has taken personal leave and will not act in the prime minister's role when Mr Turnbull travels to the United States next week.

Mr Joyce limped to the end of the worst week of his political career, in which he was forced to endure damaging headlines about his private life, quell a mutiny on his leadership and defend himself against allegations he breached ministerial rules.

But perhaps the most ugly point came late on Thursday when, in an unprecedented move, Mr Turnbull publicly scolded Mr Joyce for his, "shocking error of judgement" that "set off a world of woe".

He said Mr Joyce would "obviously" need to reflect on the events of the past week and "consider his own position".

"Barnaby made a shocking error of judgement in having an affair with a young woman working in his office," he said.

“In doing so he has set off a world of woe for those women, and appalled all of us.

"Our hearts go out to them."

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Asked repeatedly whether Mr Joyce should resign, Mr Turnbull indicated his hands were tied because of the secretive agreement between the Liberal and National parties to form government.

But there is a widespread view within the Liberal Party that Mr Joyce has damaged the Coalition beyond repair and one Cabinet minister told the ABC, his future as Nationals leader was "untenable".

Mr Joyce is digging in — and his National colleagues are publicly backing him — but his future in politics remains very unclear.



VIDEO: Malcolm Turnbull announced in Question Time his deputy would be on leave next week. (ABC News)

Sex ban warning to all ministers: O'Brien

Mr Turnbull has moved to limit the damage, and regain some of the moral ground, announcing a shake-up of the "truly deficient" Ministerial Code of Conduct.

From Thursday, he said ministers would be forbidden from having sex with staff members, regardless of whether they are married or single.

"Today in 2018, it is not acceptable for a minister to have a sexual relationship with somebody who works for them," he said.

"It is a very bad workplace practice."

While the rule will be difficult to enforce, it will give Mr Turnbull a mechanism to sack ministers who engage in behaviour like Mr Joyce's in the future.

But the change has had a mixed reaction, with warnings that details about ministerial sex lives will now be in the public interest — and not just of interest to the public.

Nationals MP Llew O'Brien told the ABC Mr Turnbull's changes were a warning to all ministers and not just targeted at Mr Joyce.

"If it is the case that any current ministers are having affairs with staff members, this is now a call from their Prime Minister that this needs to stop," he said.

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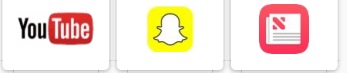
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