WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026 | WENTWORTHCOURIER.COM.AU

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Wentworth Courier

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State of play

How Kellie Sloane MP is preparing for the toughest poll of all

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Picture: Justin Lloyd

Walking a fine line

With dual state and local roles, Kellie Sloane takes a nuanced view on housing but not Labor's 'culture war'. And this underdog is ready to fight the uphill battles, writes Thomas Sargeant

NSW Liberal Leader and Member for Vaucluse Kellie Sloane in Rose Bay. Picture: Justin Lloyd

Kellie Sloane has called Labor's housing targets for the Eastern Suburbs a "fantasy", rejecting the NIMBY label while claiming the government is "playing games with the east" on the subject.

How best to increase the state's housing supply is one of the top issues one year out from an election Sloane has an uphill battle to win and remains a fiercely contested topic in the Eastern Suburbs after a series of state-led rezonings.

The rezoning of land in Woollahra has been particularly contentious for local residents after government spokespeople claimed up to 10,000 homes would be supported around a new train station.

Balancing her roles as the state Liberal Leader and as Member for Vaucluse, Sloane says she is in favour of Woollahra Station but remains "fiercely critical" of what she sees as a lack of planning from the government.

"The idea that we could have 10,000 new dwellings in Woollahra and Edgecliff is a fantasy given how highly densely populated that area already is," she says.

"It makes sense to go up at Edgecliff station or at Bondi Junction, but there are parts of our community that it's going to be incredibly difficult for developers to acquire land and make that work."

Sloane cites confusion over whether the government plans on building in the airspace above Woollahra Station in her criticism of their planning.

"My concern is that the Labor government has been playing games with the community in Woollahra," she says.

Sloane pledges to fight for the government to stop "playing games with the east in some sort of culture war that they're trying to create between the east and the west".

While the Liberal Leader has said she wants to be "a chippie's best friend", her outlook on building in her own backyard is more nuanced.

"I don't like the phrase YIMBY or NIMBY because I think it's very arbitrary," she says.

"It says you're one or the other and planning and housing and development is quite complex and we need to be able to have considered conversations around what works and what doesn't."

While Sloane acknowledges Labor's sizeable increase in housing approvals, with the latest ABS data indicating a five-year high, she cites tradie shortages and points out "you cannot live in an approval".

"The completions aren't there, because it's too expensive for the builders," she says.

Sloane says a government led by her would pause a $12,000 fee for developers building new houses in Sydney, improve apprenticeship programs and rezone areas of Sydney's Inner West to deliver 10,000 homes.

"I will continue to fight for infrastructure to match development," she says.

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Minister for Planning Paul Scully says the Opposition Leader's stance on the train station is "disappointing".

"The Woollahra rezoning is one of almost 70 rezonings the Minns Labor government is leading around NSW to unlock more than 236,000 homes and 167,000 jobs," he says.

Responding to Sloane's comments on housing completion, he says "you can't have a completion without an approval".

"The Minns Labor Government's reforms are driving increases across the entire housing pipeline," he says.

"We are enabling the delivery of more homes so downsizers, families and young people can choose the communities they want to live in."

The housing fight is one of many battles the leader of the NSW Liberals has ahead of her. Luckily for her party, she's not one to back away from a fight.

The first-term parliamentarian took on the state Liberals' top job late last year, and has since seen

Clockwise from left: Kellie Sloane after receiving a standing ovation at the candlelight vigil in Bondi a week after the shootings; addressing the Liberal Party of NSW Meeting of State Council earlier this month; and at the 2026 Mardi Gras Parade on Oxford St. Pictures: Tom Parrish, George Chan, Christian Gilles

> No one prepares you for just how protective and responsible you feel for your community

her popularity sink in recent polling to below even that of her predecessor, Mark Speakman, while Premier Chris Minns's star rises ever higher.

But if the Member for Vaucluse is worried, she's not showing it.

"The polls that will matter the most will be in the lead-up to the election," she says.

"It's up to me to work really hard to make sure that people know who I am and what I stand for, what I stand up for, what I fight for and what my values are.

"There'll be challenges, but I knew that this job wouldn't be easy. I knew it would be hard – and I'm not afraid of hard."

Minns has a lead on Sloane as preferred premier at 48 per cent to her 24 per cent, according to polling conducted by DemosAU/PremierNational from February 24 to March 4.

Sloane waves away her personal approval in comparison to Minns as a result of his leadership after the terror attack at Bondi Beach.

"You saw that with premiers after Covid; during times of trauma like the Lindt Cafe siege this is consistent," she says.

One of the more worrying data points for the Liberal Leader is her recognition across the state – the same poll found 60 per cent of voters were "neutral" towards her.

"While our community is well aware of who I am in the Eastern Suburbs, I have a big job to remind the rest of the state who I am and what I stand up for," she says.

Sloane took the role of Opposition Leader barely three weeks before the Bondi terror attack, when the state saw a true test of her character.

"No one could ever have imagined that within three weeks of having that role, I would be confronted by scenes in our community that would forever change our state and our country," she says.

On the day of the attack, Sloane was speaking at a Hanukkah event in nearby Dover Heights when her security detail ushered her into the nearest vehicle – a Jewish community ambulance which was soon called to the scene.

Hatzolah first responder Rabbi Mendy Litzman recalls telling her: "Kellie, you know where we're going? We're going to a shooting. She goes, 'I know, I'm coming'. I was very surprised."

Rabbi Litzman's priority on the scene was to assist his colleague Yaakov "Yanky" Super, who had been shot in the attack. Arriving moments after the final shots, Litzman parked under the now-infamous footbridge and rushed into action to help the wounded.

"She ran right into danger with me," he says.

"She stayed around and helped. It was pretty amazing of her, very heroic. She's a true leader."

Litzman says Sloane would have seen "a lot of terrible things" on December 14, "terrible horrific scenes, crying and screaming".

Sloane recalls holding the hands of victims and asking lifeguards what she could do to help, but downplays what Litzman describes as her heroics.

"I jumped out and I went in to do what I could, just like so many other people did," she says.

"Like our surf life savers, local residents, people from the beach. I wasn't the only one.

"I was one of an army of people who ran into that scene and did our very best in different ways to help the victims."

The scale of tragedy in her own electorate was a shock to Sloane, who says "no one prepares you for just how protective and responsible you feel for your community".

"Your community feels like family and if something was happening, I wanted to go and help," she says.

Sloane says her experience at Bondi "definitely changed me as a person and as a leader".

"You can't see what I saw and experience what I saw and see the pain of the community without it changing you," she says.

"It's impacted me deeply, but it's also given me a resolve and a clarity that I didn't have before."

Sloane says the tragedy made it "crystal clear" to her how important leadership is for social cohesion.

"I have that clarity of purpose. I feel I always had it, but it's more visceral now."