

Stuart McDonald letter to Sir Robert Sparkes, 28 July 1987
(Chapter 16, p. 195)

Dear Sir Robert,

Thank you for your letter of 27 July 1987, supported by a similar one of today's date from Sir Charles Holm. I will take this opportunity to respond to both of these letters in this reply.

Both of the letters were received and circulated to all delegates to the Management Committee, and I have to say there was no support for any of the sentiments expressed. In particular, delegates were singularly unimpressed to learn that your letter had been released to the Brisbane media.

The main objection of your letter, Sir Robert, was based on the assumption that Management would take a vote on the question of Coalition. This was a wrong assumption. It had never been my intention, nor that of Ian Sinclair, to try to put this matter to a categoric vote and attempt to overthrow or reverse a resolution of Federal Council.

The point was that last Thursday's meeting of the Federal Parliamentary National Party unanimously empowered Ian Sinclair to enter into preliminary discussions with John Howard on Coalition prospects. The Party Room also required Ian Sinclair to make no decisions prior to reporting back and discussing all aspects with the Party Room. It further required Ian Sinclair to discuss the issue with the States. Obviously, the best avenue to achieve this requirement is via the Federal Management Committee. Accordingly, we had a useful discussion on the matter in Management, and I regret that neither you nor Sir Charles saw fit to join in those broad discussions. The result of those discussions was that the following resolutions were carried, either with significant majority, or unanimously:

- That Federal Management confirms the traditional autonomy of the Federal Parliamentary Party.
- That should the majority of the Parliamentary Party opt to go back into a Coalition with the Liberal Party, so be it.
- That Federal Management has no reason to believe that State Management of any affiliated branch of the National Party will cause Senators or Members any problems if the Parliamentarians decide to go back into Coalition.
- That Federal Management recommend to Federal Council that it endorses the above resolutions as the view of the Federal Council.

The question you raise as to the constitutionality or propriety of holding a Management meeting in the absence of there being an elected Leader in the Senate is, frankly, an irrelevant and fatuous argument.

As you well know, there is nothing in the Constitution that says a Management meeting cannot be held unless all positions are filled. Also, there is no requirement that a specific period

of notice be given before calling such a meeting - the whole intention of Federal Management is that it should manage the day to day affairs of the Party, and should be able to meet at regular intervals and, if necessary, at short notice.

We always try to arrange Management meetings at times that are most convenient to delegates. When I spoke to Sir Charles on Saturday morning, he indicated that today, Tuesday, would be the only time he would be available and he would see if you would also be available.

The other four State Presidents said that they could attend on that date. On this basis, and wanting to ensure Queensland would be represented, today was fixed for the meeting. It was not until 11 pm on Sunday that Sir Charles got back to me to say that Queensland could not come to the meeting until after Friday's meeting of the Queensland Management Committee. I have to say I find this reason difficult to understand. You and I both know that neither you nor Sir Charles need any discussions with your State Management to formulate views on any issues you may wish to put to the Federal Management. Incidentally, the Victorian Management Committee is also meeting on Friday, and its State President, Laurie Neal, believed it was important to come today, so that he could report at the end of the week to his Executive. John Paterson was also firmly of the view that if Federal Management did not meet before Friday, then there would be very little point in it meeting at all.

I think all that needs to be said about your argument that Federal Management should not meet until the election result is finalised, is that today's discussions proved that your view is totally wrong. There is more than enough information available on the election to enable an accurate and thorough assessment of the result and what it meant for the National Party. Again, I am sorry that you were not here to contribute.

Finally, I must take the strongest objection to Sir Charles' contention that Ian Sinclair 'wants to go his merry way and to hell with the Organisation'. The very reason for this meeting was to enable Ian Sinclair to INVOLVE the Organisation. The view Sir Charles has expressed concerns me particularly, because it indicates that he has no intention of displaying any support for the elected Federal Leader of the Party -- something which we must achieve urgently if we are to repair the enormous damage done to the Party during this year. Unfortunately, I sense that, as a result of your letters, you are not genuinely interested in trying to reunite the Party.

You will of course, be sent the Minutes of today's meeting in due course. In the meantime, I can assure you that I will not be releasing this letter in any form whatsoever to the media.