



Nelson slips on Libs' policy

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BRENDAN NELSON did little to shore up his shaky leadership yesterday by calling for measures to stop indigenous mothers spending their baby bonus on alcohol – when such restrictions already existed in the Northern Territory.

In a speech to the National Press Club, the Opposition Leader said the bonus should be paid into an education trust fund because a sudden injection of thousands of dollars into dysfunctional communities had

a devastating effect when spent on alcohol and other vices.

But Dr Nelson appeared to be unaware that under the Howard government's emergency intervention last year into more than 70 Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, the baby bonus, worth \$4187, was quarantined.

Whether paid as a lump sum or instalments, it could only be spent on such items as food, school lunches, rent and other essentials and on not tobacco, alcohol, pornography or gambling.

Yesterday Dr Nelson said: "One of the changes that has to be considered in terms of the baby

bonus is the way that money is delivered like a human tornado into remote Aboriginal communities with all of the devastation that it has.

"I don't care if I'm accused of being patronising.

"When you have four or five thousand dollars turn up into an impoverished community which is dysfunctional in every way, shape and form, it has a devastating impact.

"I argue that most of that baby bonus should be invested, instead, in a trust for that Aboriginal child to support his or her
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education when they reach school age." Dr Nelson has previously called for the intervention to be extended to all other Aboriginal communities outside the Northern Territory.

Later a spokesman said Dr Nelson wanted his idea for the money to be paid to an education trust fund to apply to Aboriginal communities outside the Territory.

Dr Nelson did not answer why the Howard government, in which he held a portfolio, did not impose on the baby bonus the nationwide restrictions he was now demanding. He said it would be inappropriate to discuss what had happened in cabinet.

Dr Nelson used the speech to lay out the direction for the Liberal Party, which would be

hinged on the five themes of prosperity, federation, the environment, national security and social cohesion.

It coincided with the latest Newspoll showing his rating as preferred prime minister had improved marginally, from 7 per cent to 10 per cent.

There are signs of growing general unrest within the party, with the frontbencher George Brandis insulting the foreign policy credentials of Alexander Downer and suggesting he leave Parliament.

Mr Downer had privately berated the Liberals' Senator Russell Trood for a speech and book criticising the Howard government's policy on Iraq, asylum seekers and the US alliance.

Senator Brandis took a shot

at Mr Downer by saying Senator Trood, an academic, was "the pre-eminent foreign policy expert in the Parliament".

"People who served in the previous government who have indicated their intention to leave the Parliament, one might think perhaps they've had their time."

Earlier yesterday the Coalition partners were at odds inside the party room over the future of wheat sales. The Government proposes abolishing the single desk for a more deregulated system of wheat sales.

The Nationals oppose such a measure, whereas most Liberals support it. Dr Nelson declined to express his view yesterday, saying he was waiting for a Senate committee to report.