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Key Coalition figures call for migration cuts

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EXCLUSIVE

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Coalition leaders Angus Taylor and David Littleproud have signalled support for linking immigration to housing stock in a policy the opposition is likely to release before the upcoming Farrer by-election to draw support back from One Nation.

As the powerful Australian Hotels Association warns against drastic cuts that could hurt pubs, Taylor's opposition is discussing changes that would make it harder for people to gain permanent residence and citizenship by making them prove they are law-abiding, learning English and contributing to the economy.

Mirroring changes made in countries including Denmark, the Coalition is mulling whether to increase the number of years it takes to qualify for permanent settlement, according to senior party sources unwilling to speak publicly.

No decisions have been finalised in a migration package the party is expected to reveal some time before the Farrer byelection, sparked by Sussan Ley's retirement, on May 9.

Taylor, who has made the "restoring Australia's way of life" slogan a core part of his message, used the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to praise Canada's migration policy.

Prompted by Justin Trudeau

after a public backlash over migration and house prices and continued by Carney, Canada's centre-left government slashed migration numbers.

It contributed along with other factors to a decline in house prices and a rare fall in population last year. It also arguably hurt Canada's sluggish economy.

Taylor yesterday said in a speech to mark Carney's visit that Canada was "getting immigration under control and ensuring it's conducive to social cohesion".

In a separate interview on 3AW yesterday, Taylor said: "We've got to balance migration with housing supply".

Desperate opposition strategists have focused on migration and cultural issues to try to regain the trust of conservative voters who have shifted en masse to One Nation, before moving to new economic policies.

Development of the Coalition's migration policy was thrown into chaos when a plan being worked on by Ley's office was leaked.

Sections of the leaked document, including a ban on migration from mostly Muslim-majority regions under terrorist control, may not end up in Taylor's final policy. The leaked plan's target of limiting net overseas migration to 175,000 is likely to remain.

Littleproud, speaking to this masthead's *Inside Politics* podcast on Wednesday, said state governments had failed to build enough homes and "we need to buy them time to rebuild and to build supply". The federal government, he said, could help by cutting migration.

Reflecting the shift in the migration debate and the risk of alienating migrant communities, Littleproud said: "We had quite a harsh migration policy [at the last election] in the eyes of many pundits. What Peter Dutton and I took to the last election ... is probably pretty close to where One Nation got to."

Australian Hotels Association chief executive Stephen Ferguson, who represents the nation's hoteliers, was in Canberra this week on a mission to emphasise the value of migration.

"We've got to be very careful," he said. "If the kitchen can't open because you don't have enough chefs, then the bar person doesn't have a job, and the barista misses out."

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Angus Taylor