

Brendon Grylls latest notch on Geoff Denman's belt



Advertising man Geoff Denman did most of his work in Qantas lounges. Picture: Stuart McEvoy.

ANDREW BURRELL THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM March 18, 2017

You may never have heard of Geoff Denman, but his brutal advertising campaigns helped depose Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard.

Now the advertising man has played a critical backroom role in the downfall of West Australian Nationals leader and Barnett government minister Brendon Grylls, whose daring plan to slug BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto with billions of dollars in royalties is dead after last weekend's election rout.

Mr Grylls lost Pilbara when voters in the mining electorate rejected his plan.

The Sydney-based Mr Denman — who was hired by the big mining companies to run the \$2 million-plus WA campaign — didn't even have an office during the six months he spent devising and implementing his plan to kill the Grylls tax. He did most of the work in Qantas lounges around the country.

Mr Denman, 55, rejected suggestions that the end of Mr Grylls's career showed that deep-pocketed mining giants had too much power in modern Australian politics.

"It wasn't our intention to depose anybody," he told *The Weekend Australian*. "It was just our intention for people to understand what the ramifications of the policy were going to be."

Mr Denman got his first taste of politics when he worked under the late Neil Lawrence devising the legendary Kevin 07 campaign that propelled Mr Rudd into The Lodge in 2007.

Three years later he worked on the devastating anti-mining tax advertisements that contributed to unseating the prime minister.

He then turned his talents to the anti-carbon tax campaign that helped Julia Gillard to her political demise in 2013.

Mr Denman said his work on the WA campaign began last year, with him spending many hours in focus groups alongside federal election campaign veteran Tony Mitchelmore.

Other key players on the campaign included former ALP national secretary George Wright at BHP, Rio Tinto's Ben Mitchell and WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy adviser Joey Armenti.

After listening to people in the Pilbara, Perth and other regions, Mr Denman discovered that many of them misunderstood elements of Mr Grylls's plan to increase a rental fee paid by the miners from 25c/tonne to \$5.

"The first part of (the campaign) was to correct the record," he said. "People thought all the miners were paying was 25c a tonne. So we made people understand what the real amount was."

The next phase of the campaign targeted the potential impact on jobs resulting from the planned impost.

"People can pick a flawed argument a mile away — they're not silly," he said. "The companies had to recoup that money from somewhere and it was ultimately going to come from jobs."

Mr Denman denied Mr Grylls's claim that the miners had run a scare campaign on jobs: "You can't scare anybody if they don't believe you, so you have to be credible before you move anybody one way or the other."