

PM's visit cancelled

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Prime Minister John Howard's first visit to the Bega Valley in 10 years scheduled for today [Wednesday] has been cancelled.

Mr Howard's press office confirmed yesterday that the PM had been struck down with the flu and had subsequently "postponed" his visit.

He had been scheduled to appear at an afternoon tea at the Bega RSL Club at 2pm today which has now been cancelled due to Mr Howard's absence.

This is Mr Howard's second cancellation in several months. Mr Howard had originally been pencilled in to open the new Caris Roarty wing at Imlay House in Pambula in May, but this trip was cancelled as it coincided with the funeral of Senator Jeannie Ferris.

The peaceful protest organised for the PM's arrival at the Bega RSL Club at 2pm today has also been cancelled, according to the local Your Rights At Work lobby group, the Far South Coast Community and United Unions.

The group had called on members of the community to greet Mr Howard by turning their backs on him in peaceful protest.

"This is to convey to the Prime Minister and his companion, the sitting Member for Eden Monaro, Gary Nairn, that just as they continue to turn their backs on the average Australian worker and their families through their unfair industrial laws, we will turn our backs on their government at the next election," the group said in a press release on Monday.

One of the protest's organisers, Helen Pratt, said the group was disappointed that Mr Howard and Mr Nairn would not be making an appearance.

The group will organise another protest if the PM's visit is rescheduled, she said.

It had also emerged this week that Bega Valley Shire Councillor Keith Hughes had been deleted from a list of invitees to the afternoon tea with the PM.

The Greens councillor was told by Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, Gary Nairn's office that he was not welcome at the afternoon tea.

"All Bega Valley Shire Councillors had been invited and I know that four of the other councillors will be in Sydney at the annual Local Government and Shires Association conference.

"Therefore, I was somewhat surprised to learn that our presence would stretch the RSL Club beyond its capacity."

Cr Hughes said he suspected the withdrawal of his invitation was pay-back by Mr Nairn for an April Fool's Day joke played on him by Cr Hughes' partner, Harriett Swift, and for which she was found to be in contempt of Parliament.