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NSW MP Resigns After Rape Conviction Verdict

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A New South Wales lawmaker has resigned from state parliament after being convicted of raping two young men, ending weeks of defiance amid mounting political pressure and an imminent parliamentary vote to expel him.

Gareth Ward, 44, was found guilty in July of sexually abusing two men aged 18 and 24 between 2013 and 2015. Despite his conviction and current incarceration while awaiting sentencing, Ward had refused to step down from his position as the independent MP for Kiama.

On Friday, just one hour before the New South Wales Legislative Assembly was set to vote on his expulsion, Speaker Greg Piper announced Ward's formal resignation had been received and was effective immediately.

Ward's decision followed a failed legal bid earlier in the week to block the expulsion vote.

Leader of the House Ron Hoenig reflected on the historic nature of the proceedings, stating: "Not in 107 years has this house been required to expel a member, and the fact that we were about to make such a determination is a pretty shameful exercise." He added that Ward should have stepped down immediately after the jury delivered its guilty verdict.

Ward's resignation now triggers a by-election in the electorate of Kiama, a regional seat located around 130 kilometres south of Sydney.

The former MP is due to be sentenced next month but has already lodged an appeal against his convictions.

The case has generated strong reactions across the political spectrum and the wider public, given the severity of the charges and Ward's refusal to vacate office even after being found guilty. Calls for reform around automatic suspension or expulsion of convicted politicians have resurfaced, although such measures currently remain under parliamentary discretion.

Ward had served as a prominent conservative voice in New South Wales politics, and his departure marks a significant shift in the region's political landscape. The upcoming by-election is expected to draw attention from both major parties as they vie for control of the now-vacant seat.

While Ward maintains his innocence and is pursuing an appeal, the outcome of that legal process remains pending.

All imagery accompanying this article should feature accurate visuals of New South Wales Parliament or the Kiama region. Avoid use of unrelated or foreign imagery.