

Mike Baird to continue with council mergers after Orange shock

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Jacob Saulwick

Mike Baird says he will continue to pursue the state's council amalgamation agenda following the Nationals' disastrous showing in the Orange by-election on Saturday.



Mike Baird: 'It's a terrible result'

The NSW Premier is shocked by the result of the Orange by-election with the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party likely to win the seat from the Nationals. *Courtesy: ABC News 24.*

- **Troy Grant quits as Nationals leader**

Local opposition to the planned merger of Blayney, Cabonne and Orange councils was credited with being partly responsible for the comprehensive swing away from the Nationals, which also claimed the leadership of Troy Grant.

The merger of those councils has been delayed following a legal challenge, and there is a similar situation with another 10 councils across Sydney and NSW.

Mr Baird has already performed an about-face on the banning of greyhound racing, but told reporters on Monday the government would be continuing to pursue the planned mergers.

"What we have seen with councils... I genuinely think there is a fear of the unknown," the Premier said.

"If you look at councils that have come together, it's smaller head offices that give councils more capacity to provide additional services and build more infrastructure for their communities," he said.

"Councils that have come together under our plan, they are already doing that. We strongly see the benefits being delivered [for] the councils that have come together and that's my expectation for those remaining councils."



Voting in the Orange Byelection Ross Williams and Janette Churchill.
Credit: Jude Keogh Photo: Delyse Phillips

A spokeswoman for the Save Our Councils Coalition, Carolyn Corrigan, said about 20 members of the community group attended Orange on Saturday and heard opposition to forced mergers was "the major issue" among voters.

"The sense of betrayal that the community feels towards the Baird/Grant government on forcing council amalgamations ... that sense of betrayal has been building," Ms Corrigan said. "The result didn't surprise me at all."

Councils have had mixed success challenging their amalgamations in court. In some instances, the Land and Environment Court has discovered omissions in the process used to merge councils. But the government has not yet said what it will do about these omissions, or when it might seek to rectify them.

Keith Rhoades, the president of Local Government NSW, the group representing councils across the state, said the Orange result demonstrated the unpopularity of mergers.

"This massive repudiation of forced amalgamations comes hot on the heels of the September 10 local government elections, where voters of stand-alone councils sent an equally clear 'back off' message to the Liberal/National Government," Cr Rhoades said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/mike-baird-to-continue-with-council-mergers-after-orange-shock-20161114-gsoqy8.html>