

State election Orange: Group claims council mergers still on government agenda

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UNITED WE STAND: Brian Halstead, Luke Sanger, Brenden May, Matthew Stadtmiller, Phil Donato and Will Tuck in Robertson Park. Photo: DAVID FITZSIMONS

Orange and Cabonne "dodged a bullet" in avoiding council amalgamations, an anti-forced council merger group claimed on Friday.

The Save Our Councils Coalition released a report into the forced mergers of councils since 2016 by the state government in Orange on Friday.

Spokesman Will Tuck said the report showed the forced mergers had not achieved targets quoted by the government.

"The people of Orange were right to reject council mergers," he said.

"If you think mergers are off the table as [Premier] Gladys Berejiklian says, why does her local government minister say 'maybe they are, maybe they are not'.

"Mergers are still on, they just want to win the election first.

"Orange and Forbes and Parkes need to know if the state government is not punished for their misdemeanours then it will go on beyond the election. Council mergers, if they are returned, will come back."

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Will Tuck, Save Our Councils Coalition

Mr Tuck said the mergers had not worked. "They have lost money hand over fist," he said.

SOCC president Brian Halstead said SOCC's own analysis had shown a combined deficit of \$48 million from 13 merged councils.

"There is no evidence forged mergers make any saving," he said.

"Proposals were unrealistic and misleading – forcibly merged communities should be given the right to a demerger referendum and if successful, get their independent councils back."

Member for Orange Phil Donato called for the auditor-general to investigate the council mergers.

"It was clearly rejected in the Orange byelection, the idea of forced mergers," he said.

He said some of the biggest swings in voting against the government were recorded in small communities.

Luke Sanger, the Country Labor candidate in the Orange election said a Labor government, if elected, would stop forced mergers.

"We will completely rule out forced mergers, so far as I am aware, the paperwork is already [being done].

"We will put forward a legislative mechanism to give the communities and the councils [the power] to merge or demerge of their own volition."

Matthew Stadtmiller, the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers party candidate for the seat of Cootamundra, said forced mergers in his region had caused distress.

<https://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/5944705/council-mergers-still-on-agenda-claims-anti-merger-group/?fbclid=IwAR3jrqXS9DFfouR10l4PmrAvElrWMsMKmrKPh3KIFcCKuu73Q2HvAt6AgPs>