

# Disastrous Orange result can be repeated in Lane Cove Electorate

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The Baird government's disastrous result in the weekend Orange by election was due to anger over forced mergers and will be repeated in the Seat of Lane Cove, according to the Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition.



*Phil Jenkyn and Ross Williams Co-convenors of Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition at a polling booth in the Orange By-election.*

The Liberals and Nationals had held Orange since 1947 with around 73 per cent of the vote, ten per cent more than Lane Cove Liberal MP Anthony Roberts who won the local Seat with just over 60 per cent of the vote at the last election.

The outcome in Orange is expected to be decided by Thursday, with Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party candidate Philip Donato close to winning on preferences.

“Whatever the result, the message to Macquarie Street is clear” Mr Donato said.

“We are a real alternative!”

Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition supporters were in Orange where spokesman Phil Jenkyn said there is the same anger against forced mergers as there is in Hunters Hill and Lane Cove, which are being forced to merge with Ryde against the expressed wish of more than 80 per cent of recently surveyed ratepayers.

“It’s now absolutely clear it will only take half the swing we’re seeing in Orange for a credible independent, conservative candidate to defeat the Liberals in Lane Cove,” Mr Jenkyn said.

“And there are swings from 70 per cent up to 90 per cent against Baird across Cabonne Shire, which is taking legal action to stop a forced merger with Orange, the same as Hunters Hill and Lane Cove are taking legal action against a forced merger with Ryde.

“In fact the one thing that really struck us is there is exactly the same anger in Cabonne about being forced to merge with Orange that we see in Hunters Hill about being forced to merge with Ryde.

“People in Cabonne also left us in no doubt there is a lot of distrust with the Baird government, because it broke its promise there would be no forced mergers.”

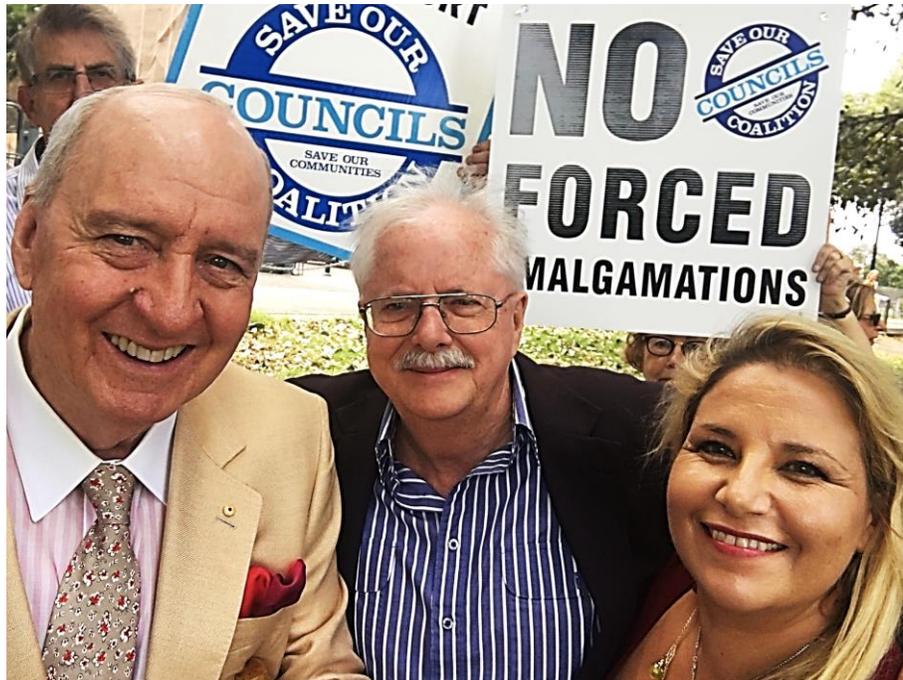
Ross Maroney, a retired school teacher in Orange said the threatened forced merger was decisive.

“The people around here in the surrounding villages are terrified.”

Asked whether federal government issues had contributed to the swing, Turnbull frontbencher Steven Ciobo says there is no doubt it was localised.

“It is the issues of what specifically happened in relation to greyhounds and council amalgamations,” he said.

Significantly, broadcasters Alan Jones and Ray Hadley were in Orange of Friday where they blasted Baird's forced mergers and underscored the power of the press.



*Alan Jones AO, Phil Jenkyn OAM and Aurelia Roman – No Forced Amalgamations!*

“Alan Jones and Ray Hadley have a way with words and so does John Booth at The Weekly Times,” Mr Jenkyn said.

“Media coverage, when it reflects community anger and is in the public interest is highly influential, while Philip Donato, a former police prosecutor, has shown that a trusted local and independent conservative candidate can absolutely shine and blow a Baird government minister out of the water.”

While the Hunters Hill Coalition points to striking similarities between the government's probable loss in the safe seat of Orange and the predicted loss of Lane Cove, there are differences.

Heritage protection and local democracy have emerged as crucial game changers in the local fight against forced mergers and popular MP Anthony Roberts has well established heritage credentials, particularly his role in saving historic Gladesville Hospital.

But that has not stopped Liberal supporters deserting the Party over forced mergers.

In the most prominent recent desertion, Hunters Hill's Emeritus Mayor Sue Hoopmann publically resigned from the Liberal Party in protest against "money and power" politics and warned that – in other suburbs hit by forced mergers – homes in heritage streets have been demolished and redeveloped without the knowledge or consent of neighbours.

The risk of this happening locally is significant because Ryde Mayor Bill Pickering refuses to back down on his "do-it-yourself" heritage policy where it is up to home owners – not councils – to heritage list their historic homes at their own expense.

This is despite repeated warnings by Ryde Labor Cllr Jerome Laxale of the heritage "desecration" the Liberal policy will have across a mega council area as well as Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn's grave concern if Hunters Hill loses its Local Environment and Development Control plans in a mega council, dominated by Ryde.

"Local people want to have a say about the character of their municipality," Mayor Quinn said.

Mr Jenkyn agreed.

"People are white hot angry about wanting to preserve the heritage and local democracy of our harbourside municipalities and Alan Jones is right to say local people will not trust a government that so blatantly breaks its election promises," Mr Jenkyn said.

"A Liberal defeat in the Seat of Lane Cove will be totally consistent with what is happening to Baird in the opinion polls.

"We now have a pretty good gut feeling about Hunters Hill and Lane Cove and what we saw in Orange will happen locally, make no mistake about it."

In recent interviews with Coalition voters in Hunters Hill and Lane Cove, voters have expressed a virulent opposition to Ryde as a forced merger partner.

"Ryde councillors couldn't organise an orgy in a brothel," Lane Cove Liberal Cllr Scott Bennison told The Weekly Times.

"People in Lane Cove do not want to merge with Ryde!"

Ryde MP Victor Dominello recently described the Ryde councillors as "dysfunctional".