

John Barilaro elected NSW National Party leader, Niall Blair his deputy

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Newly sworn-in Deputy Premier John Barilaro has declared "a clean slate" for the NSW Nationals hours after he was elected party leader following the dramatic resignation of Troy Grant over the Orange byelection.

After a ceremony at NSW Government house attended by his family, Mr Barilaro said the Nationals needed to be realistic about the party's poor showing in Saturday's contest.



NSW Deputy Premier Troy Grant resigns

Troy Grant speaks out about his decision to stand down after a disastrous by-election result in Orange. (Video courtesy: ABC News 24)

"We must be honest with ourselves and accept that the people of NSW – in this case the people of Orange – have felt that this government, that we the Nationals have let them down," he said.

Mr Barilaro, the minister for skills and small business, was on Tuesday elected unopposed as NSW Nationals leader, while primary industries minister Niall Blair became deputy after education minister Adrian Piccoli decided to not recontest.

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"Today is a clean slate for members of the Nationals party. We are now looking to the future," Mr Barilaro said.

Mr Barilaro confirmed he and Premier Mike Baird would hold off on a cabinet reshuffle until early next year to "take stock of what has happened, what the future looks like".

But he revealed he had offered Mr Grant "the opportunity to serve in a future cabinet and a future National party".

"That offer is on the table and will be negotiated over and talked about in the next days, weeks and months," he said.



Leader of NSW National party John Barilaro holding his 1-year-old daughter Sofia Barilaro moments before being sworn in as NSW Deputy Premier at Government House. Photo: Kate Geraghty

Asked if he felt any responsibility for the demise of Mr Grant, who is a close personal friend, Mr Barilaro said all members of the government "are complicit in the position we found ourselves in relation to the Orange byelection".

He acknowledged his support for the government's failed push to ban greyhound racing in NSW – viewed by some as a significant issue in the campaign.



John Barilaro has become the Deputy Premier and NSW Nationals leader:

Photo: Louie Douvis

"Troy showed that he's a man of integrity," Mr Barilaro said.

"That he took as the leader the responsibility and he fell on his sword. And I think that's the sort of man he is and that's why he will continue to serve the people of NSW".

Mr Baird said it had "been a difficult time for the National party, a difficult time for the government. But it's also a hopeful time."

Mr Grant announced on Monday he would quit as leader of the NSW Nationals and deputy premier, a day before facing a spill motion in his party room.

Mr Grant's leadership had been under enormous pressure after the Orange byelection, which saw a record 34 per cent swing against the Nationals candidate on the primary vote.

On Tuesday the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party candidate Phil Donato held a lead of just 78 votes over the Nationals' Scott Barrett.

In a statement on Monday, Mr Grant said it had been "an incredible privilege to serve in that role and lead a team whose sole focus is to serve the people of regional NSW".

"I hope that through my actions the NSW government is given the opportunity to pause and reset the way it is seen to be governing and our record of delivery can once more be front and centre," he said.



Troy Grant announced he would quit a day before facing a spill motion. Photo: Christopher Pearce

Mr Baird described Mr Grant as "a courageous and passionate advocate for regional NSW. Troy is a man of great integrity and it has been an honour to lead this government together."

But Coffs Harbour MP Andrew Fraser, who had planned to put the spill motion on Tuesday, said Mr Grant had "done what he should have done".

Mr Fraser supported Mr Barilaro becoming the new leader.

Barwon MP Kevin Humphries – another of Mr Grant's critics – also welcomed Mr Grant's decision.

"I think he's done the right thing," he said.

"The general public and certainly the broader community had tuned out as far as the leadership of the Nationals was concerned.

"That position was potentially not recoverable. We're better off dealing with these issues now than kicking them down the road."

The outcome in Orange is being blamed on a combination of factors, including the controversial move to close the greyhound industry – later reversed – and the forced amalgamation of local councils.

But Mr Grant's critics, including Mr Fraser and Mr Humphries, had argued the Nationals had lost touch with their constituents under Mr Grant's leadership.

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