

Orange is the new blacklist

Nationals consider merger retreat

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EXCLUSIVE Miles Godfrey



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DEPUTY Premier John Barilaro will not rule out scrapping the proposed Orange council merger, as the National MP who vacated the seat demanded the plan be axed in the wake of the by-election defeat.

The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party won Orange after a massive swing against the Nationals, with voters angered by the now abandoned greyhound ban and the proposed merger of Orange, Blayney and Cabonne councils.

Andrew Gee, who sparked the by-election when he resigned the state seat to successfully run for the Nationals in the federal central west seat of Calare, last night said the merger must be dumped: “The voters of the Cabonne Shire have made their feelings about the forced merger very clear and I believe the NSW

government should heed that message and take any forced merger involving Cabonne off the table for good.”



Nationals Federal MP Andrew Gee *Nationals NSW Leader John Barilaro*

It is understood a number of state Nationals MP are in favour of overturning the planned merger but are yet to really push the issue.

State Nationals leader Mr Barilaro would not rule out axing the merger: “I was in Orange for two days last week to hear what locals had to say about various issues in the wake of the by-election result, and those conversations included council amalgamations.

“The views expressed were both for and against, so more conversations need to be had.”

Any change to the merger proposal would have to be approved by Premier Mike Baird.

But Orange Mayor John Davis yesterday called for urgent clarity, with projects on hold because of the delays. A planned mountain bike centre at Mount Canobolas is among the projects Mr Davis said was under threat unless Orange, Cabonne and Blayney pooled resources.

His preferred course was to merge but he said councils needed to know either way.

“I don’t think there’s a need to backflip but if they’re going to, well let’s do it and let’s move on,” he said.



Premier Mike Baird and Deputy Premier John Barilaro. Picture: Kym Smith



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