

Community groups claim Nationals have 'lost support' in Cootamundra

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REPLACED: Former leader of the NSW Nationals Troy Grant with his replacement John Barilaro. Mr Grant stepped down as leader after a huge swing against the Nationals' in the Orange by-election.

As the New South Wales Nationals undergo a sudden leadership change off the back of a huge swing against them in the Orange by-election, community groups have claimed the Nationals have lost support in the Cootamundra electorate as well.

The Nationals suffered a 35 per cent swing against them on the primary vote in the by-election as voters expressed their outrage over decisions on the greyhound racing ban and forced council amalgamations and the party is now expected to lose the once-safe seat.

These two issues have created anger within the Cootamundra electorate, particularly as a result of the creation of the new Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council and Hilltops Council.

John Knight of the “Save Gundagai Shire” organisation thinks the trend seen at the Orange by-election is reflected in Cootamundra.

“I think it’s bleedingly obvious that what happened in Orange would happen here too,” Mr Knight said.

“If we had a by-election here the result would be the same.”

“Save Gundagai Shire” plan to put forward an alternative candidate at the next state election to draw votes away from Nationals MP Katrina Hodgkinson and the by-election result has buoyed Mr Knight.

“As long as Gundagai remains merged with Cootamundra we will continue to fight and put forward our candidate.

“I’m dead certain they’ve lost support,” he said.

Cootamundra-based NSW Farmers executive councillor Peter McClintock acknowledged the Nationals’ loss of support but was less certain whether it would affect Ms Hodgkinson.

“There’ll be a trend against the Nationals at the next election and it depends a lot on what they do between now and then,” Mr McClintock said.

“Katrina has been fairly vocal against the greyhound decision which has won her some votes back so it remains to be seen whether she still has the support.”

On Monday, leader of the NSW Nationals Troy Grant resigned because of his party’s terrible result in the by-election.

“I accept the result in Orange is a clear message that we haven't always got it right, nor have we always taken the community with us,” Mr Grant said.

Following Mr Grant’s resignation, John Barilaro was elected leader unopposed and speculation began to build for a cabinet reshuffle that may see Ms Hodgkinson return to the party’s frontbench.

Ms Hodgkinson said in a statement that Mr Barilaro “would bring a fresh approach to community based leadership.”

Let us know what you think in our poll.

Have the Nationals lost support in the Cootamundra electorate?

Yes 93.69% (104 votes)

No 6.31% (7 votes)

Total Votes: 111

<http://www.cootamundraherald.com.au/story/4293090/local-support-for-the-nationals-is-uncertain/?cs=581>