

Orange by-election fallout: Nationals stay calm despite swing

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THE Victorian National party believes it still has community support despite the NSW branch receiving the biggest swing against a sitting party in the weekend's Orange by-election.

Orange, in Central West NSW, was held by the Nationals for 70 years, but a 33.8 per cent swing against them proved voters were not happy.

The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers candidate Philip Donato picked up 23.6 per cent of the swing.



Victorian Nationals leader Peter Walsh was not concerned about a similar backlash in his state, saying his party was “very focused on representing the electorates that send us to parliament”.

“There were two key drivers of the result in Orange,” Mr Walsh said. “The first was local government amalgamations, and the second was the Greyhound ban — even though it was reversed it was too little, too late.”

On a two-party preferred basis, Mr Donato was yesterday ahead of the Nationals candidate Scott Barrett by 103 votes. A recount is expected and the final result won't be known for several days.



Mr Donato said the Nationals had been “subservient” to the Liberal Party for “not sticking up” for voters on council mergers and the now--overturned greyhound ban.

Charles Sturt University associate professor in political science Dominic O’Sullivan said a swing against the Nationals was expected but its size was “unprecedented”.

However, Prof O’Sullivan said a by-election allowed people to cast a “protest vote without changing the government”.

“Some people feel marginalised from the decision-making process, so that’s how we can explain Brexit, Trump’s win in the US and the by-election in Orange,” he said.

Prof O’Sullivan said it would be hard for the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers party to position itself as a serious rural and regional party.

“By renaming they did that in a symbolic way, but now, especially if they win the seat, they need to do it in a substantive way.”

The result led to NSW deputy premier Troy Grant resigning as Nationals NSW leader. John Barilaro was elected as leader, with NSW Primary Industries Minister Niall Blair to be his deputy.

<http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/news/politics/orange-byelection-fallout-nationals-stay-calm-despite-swing/news-story/8f0de053dc9369ea9b296710259187c2>