

Rio HQ boon in doubt due to convention centre drama

Mining giant limbo as centre revamp stalls



JESSICA PAGE

Treasurer Rita Saffioti insists she remains "very keen" to redevelop Perth's much-maligned convention centre, but won't be rushed into signing a potential billion-dollar cheque.

The West Australian can reveal local MP and Lands Minister John Carey and Basil Zempilas — then Perth mayor and now Opposition Leader — also voiced their support for the project in a video presentation to convince Rio Tinto to move its WA headquarters to the riverfront site.

Sources say the mining giant's plan to sign on as anchor tenant was revealed to senior staff three weeks ago, amid speculation that Simon Trotter's elevation to CEO could one day result in Rio Tinto's global headquarters shifting from London to Perth.

Instead of celebrating a coup, the development is now hinging on the Government to decide as early as this week whether it will go ahead amid reports of anxiety over the potential cost

to taxpayers. A price tag is yet to be revealed.

"We've been working really hard to make sure that we could get a new convention and exhibition centre, I'll say that very clearly," Ms Saffioti said on Sunday.

"We've thrown a lot of resources of Government to make sure that we can get a model that will deliver to the whole community, we're very, very keen to see a redeveloped Convention and Exhibition Centre. So we've been working through that, and that consideration is now before Government."

"We have to balance the cost versus the benefits, also the timing of that delivery and how it could be delivered."

"I note the Opposition didn't make a commitment to it at the election so, obviously, they weren't that serious about it either."

Mr Zempilas said health spending must be the first priority but suggested the PCEC upgrade should take priority over a Ilwaco racetrack and amphitheatre.

"It is an absolute no-brainer," Mr Zempilas said.

Other States are circling to steal major events, if the project isn't finished as planned by 2029.

The West revealed on Saturday that Brisbane is on standby as an alternative host for the LNG 2029 conference, which is expected to generate economic benefit worth up to \$100 million.

Ms Saffioti said that was not a primary consideration, ahead of a meeting of the Government's expenditure review committee this week.

"We need to make sure we get the best value for money for the State," the Treasurer said.

"We need to go and make sure that this project can be delivered as we wanted, so we're going through all those processes now."

"It is a big, big project."

Joint venture partners Wyllie Group and Brookfield hold a 35-year lease over the PCEC site and described negotiations as positive on Sunday.

"We have been working very positively and collaboratively with the Government," Wyllie

Group managing director Melissa Karlson said.

"We look forward to continuing to do so over the coming months to finalise a proposal that will transform our city and at the same time show great value for money benefits for the State of WA."

"As with any project that requires funding in a changing fiscal environment, we are committed to continuing to finalise the project throughout the rest of 2025 to ensure the final investment decision is made and is affordable."

Ms Karlson was alongside Premier Roger Cook and Ms Saffioti when the proposed design was unveiled in January last year.

That design included commercial office space, a new hotel, two residential towers and a new ferry terminal.

At the time, Ms Saffioti was Tourism Minister and called the redevelopment a "massive opportunity" to transform the waterfront and cement Perth's status as a "world-class destination" for business tourism.

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