

LET ME COOK, ROGER

Premier states he is right man to stay at helm of Labor ahead of next election as he chases the Holy Grail of WA politics

Roger Cook at a press conference in November and, inset, enjoys lunch with his wife Carly at WA Museum Boola Bardip.
Pictures: Jackson Flindell and Carwyn Monck



EXCLUSIVE JOE SPAGNOLO

Roger Cook is chasing the Holy Grail of WA politics.

Not since Sir David Brand — who led the Liberals to four consecutive election victories in the 1950s-1960s — has any government achieved such a feat.

But the size of the election victory last March — 46 Labor seats to the Liberal and National parties' 13 in the Legislative Assembly — has Labor quietly confident that the Holy Grail is attainable.

"If the voters of WA believe we deserve a fourth term — and I think we do — then we will obviously take the opportunity to continue to keep the economy strong, making sure people have access to a quality job, health care when they need it and of course, a roof over their heads with strong housing policies," Premier Cook told *The West Australian* in his first major interview of 2026.

Mr Cook puts himself front and centre of the crusade to win a fourth term of government, declaring he will lead Labor to

the 2029 election. "I gave a commitment to the party to lead them to the 2029 election," he says. "I believe I'm the best person to be in that role."

But he declined to anoint a potential successor, seemingly aware that to do so would create a political firestorm.

"I have a full Cabinet of very high-level performers," he said. "There's any number of them that would be able to take over the role as leader, but they will have to wait some time."

Leadership ambitions of Treasurer Rita Saffioti and Energy Minister Amber Jade-Sanderson will seemingly need to wait a while.

Mr Cook also dismissed speculation of major changes to Cabinet in 2026.

"It's not on my agenda at the moment," he said.

But before Mr Cook and his foot soldiers launch an assault on a fourth term of government, Labor must navigate the start of a tricky third term.

This year presents as a tough one for West Australians.

Coupled with real prospects of

an interest rate rise this year, damning State figures reveal more than 23,000 people waiting for public housing — and at an average of two years — while more than 30,000 Synergy customers are on payment plans to meet their bills.

Mr Cook has housing and health at the top of his 2026 agenda — as well as making sure WA keeps its GST 2018 deal which delivered a "no less than 75 cent" floor.

"We will continue to focus on making sure WA remains the strongest economy in the nation and delivers quality jobs for our community," he said.

He pointed to a \$400 million-plus housing commitment in last month's mid-year budget review — which includes \$234m for more social and affordable accommodation — and an extra \$400m for health services on top of the \$1.5 billion previously announced for continuing maintenance and to upgrade emergency departments at public hospitals.

The Premier believes creating more jobs in WA will help man-

PROUDLY DECLARES



age some of the extra demand facing welfare agencies, who last year reported record numbers of West Australians seeking help.

“Fundamentally, the best cost-of-living relief that you can pro-

vide to someone is a quality job which allows them to participate in the economy,” he said.

Anyone hoping Mr Cook will reinstate power bill credits in 2026 is likely to be disappointed.

“Nothing is off the agenda, but

we want to be focused on targeted cost-of-living relief such as our rental assistance program, rather than broader, scattergun programs,” he said.

Looking ahead, Mr Cook says the next three years are a period

of “delivery” — on more than \$3b worth of election promises and other commitments, such as sinking nearly \$100m into a new NRL side for Perth.

Was the Perth Bears a self-indulgent project for the rugby

league-mad Premier? “Not at all,” he said. “We did a business case into the Perth Bears which shows it is going to make a big contribution to the Western Australian economy.”

Any regrets over sinking more than \$200m into a V8 Supercars racetrack and sporting and entertainment facilities at Burswood, now under the banner of Perth Park? Seemingly not.

“We will create a world class, sporting and entertainment precinct at Perth Park that will rival Melbourne Park,” Mr Cook said.

He made several bold declarations during the interview, including that emergency department revamps at Royal Perth, Sir Charles Gairdner and Midland hospitals will be finished by the next election year — in 2029.

He also said he was “pretty sure” the new Murdoch Maternity Hospital would be completed by the same year, while also confident deadlines would be met on closing all government-owned coal-fired power stations by 2030.

On a personal note, the 60-year-old says he is fighting fit — currently preparing for an open water swimming event in Bunbury — and enjoying some quality time with his wife Carly over a short summer break.