

Meg Webb's call for AFL contract renegotiation a litmus test of stadium support in Tasmanian parliament

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The Hobart stadium project will live or die depending on how Tasmania's parliament votes. (Supplied: Macquarie Point Development Corporation)

In short:

The proposed stadium at Macquarie Point, a project that has divided opinion in Tasmania, will need to pass a vote in both houses of parliament if it is to proceed.

A motion by an independent in the upper house to call on the government to renegotiate the deal with the AFL has failed, with debate concluding late last night.

What's next?

The AFL has repeatedly said if the roofed stadium at Macquarie Point is not built, Tasmania will not have a team.

An independent motion urging the Tasmanian government to renegotiate its deal with the AFL has failed in the upper house of parliament.

The motion was expected to give the best indication yet of how the Hobart stadium project may fare when it appears before the upper house, which is key to its future.

It was moved by Independent MLC Meg Webb, and asked the Tasmanian government to "reopen negotiations with the AFL regarding the location and construction timeframe of any associated stadium".

Debate continued into the late hours of Tuesday evening, before being defeated in a 4-10 vote, with multiple independents siding with the major parties to vote against it.

Those who supported the motion were independent MLCs Meg Webb, Mike Gaffney and Rosemary Armitage, and Greens MLC Cassy O'Connor.

The Macquarie Point stadium, which has divided Tasmanians across the state, is currently being assessed by the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

Last week, the commission released a [scathing draft report](#), claiming the costs of the project far outweighed the benefits.

The government is now considering pulling it out of the Project of State Significance (POSS) process and introducing bespoke legislation to approve it.

Macquarie Point is hemmed in by a highway, a working port, heritage buildings and a knoll, with just enough space for a stadium. The Planning Commission has laid bare the problems.

Regardless of whether it continues through POSS, or bypasses the planning system through enabling legislation, the stadium will need to be approved by both houses of parliament.

Given it has unconditional support from both major parties, its passage through the lower house is all but guaranteed, meaning the real test will be in the upper house.

To pass, the project will need support from at least two independents.

The AFL has repeatedly said that without the stadium there will be no Tasmanian team, which has since been launched as the Tasmania Devils.

Agreement with AFL 'beggars belief'

Key players react to the release of a scathing Tasmanian Planning Commission draft report which outlines a slew of concerns with the Macquarie Point stadium project.

Addressing the Legislative Council, Ms Webb said Tasmania could not meet the deal the premier had signed with the AFL.

"I am now here suggesting a way forward to keep that dream alive because Jeremy Rockliff has mismanaged this so woefully," she said.

"It beggars belief that any serious person with our state's best interests in mind would've signed us up to an agreement that imposes a massive development in the heart of our capital city which, having been genuinely assessed, should have no possibility of being responsibly approved under our planning system.

"There is simply no universe in which it is OK for the premier to have legally bound our state to delivering a project that has not, and likely cannot, successfully pass through our planning system."

'Deeply concerning and greedy'

The AFL's 19th team licence is officially awarded to Tasmania, with Premier Jeremy Rockliff saying "generations" of Tasmanians have been waiting for this moment. Follow live.

Ripping into both major parties for their unconditional support of the stadium, Greens MLC Cassy O'Connor said she wished "a pox on both their houses".

Ms O'Connor, who voted to support the motion, said "the air would've been thick with testosterone" when [Premier Jeremy Rockliff met with then-AFL chief executive Gil McLachlan to sign the contract](#) that locked Tasmania into building a stadium.

"There is no sign in here of there being any negotiation," Ms O'Connor said.

"It is the most one-sided, arrogant, nasty contract. No concern for this island's finances, no concern for what the Tasmanian people might think or want, but gouging into the state's books and finances in a way that is deeply concerning and greedy.

"The AFL knows, they know, we've earned this team. They know we've been one of the strongest football states since the game began in Australia."

Government 'committed to delivering' stadium

Leader for government in the upper house, MLC Leonie Hiscutt, said without the Macquarie Point stadium there was no Tasmanian team, making it clear the government had no intention of reopening discussions with the AFL.

"Tasmania has fought for many decades to achieve our AFL team and now that we have a signed agreement for a licence we must get on and deliver," she said.

"Macquarie Point was strategically chosen as the preferred location for the multipurpose stadium due to its location adjacent to the central business district and surrounding businesses and experiences, its accessibility and the facility's potential to be part of an activated and vibrant mixed use precinct.

"We are 100 per cent focused and committed on delivering this game-changing precinct and stadium, which will create thousands of jobs and deliver economic activity for decades to come."

Independent says stadium 'unlikely to benefit' state

Independent MLC Mike Gaffney voted in support of the motion.

He told parliament the Liberal government had "failed to take the time to ensure a deal that transparently benefits Tasmania".

"Consequently ... the deal has resulted in a commitment to massive debt for a controversial stadium that is unlikely to benefit our state," he said.

Mr Gaffney said Tasmania was not in a financial position "to undertake hundreds of millions of dollars of investments on a whim".

Motion is premature, MLC says

Independent member for Elwick, Bec Thomas, voted against the motion.

She told parliament to make a "fully informed" decision she needed to understand all the information available and that she felt the Legislative Council was "getting a bit ahead of ourselves".

"I feel like at some point honourable members who've argued for or against today will be back here to do it all over again," Ms Thomas said.

"It appears they've made up their mind without all the information, without clarity on the decision-making process that's now to be followed and that's their prerogative — but I can't do this."

Ms Thomas said she would make a decision on whether or not she supported the stadium "when the time is right".

"Now is simply not that time."

Independent member for Huon, Dean Harriss, said for parliament to be able to make a "considered" decision over the project, the Project of State Significance process needed to play out.

"The government clearly does not appreciate the draft integrated assessment report.

'The premier says it stacks up. He now has a chance to demonstrate how and why it does."

Ms Webb said the failure of her motion, after a "marathon debate", was a "missed opportunity".