

WEBB MOTION new threat for the Devils

MLCs set to take vote on Macquarie Point stadium

Sean Ford

TASMANIA'S fledgling AFL club faces a new threat. MLCs are set to vote on a motion aimed at asking the state government to reopen stadium negotiations with the AFL.

The AFL has consistently said there will be no team without the roofed stadium proposed for Macquarie Point. The motion, from Nelson independent Meg Webb, is expected to be debated on April 8.

Her move brought a sharp response from the state government.

"Ms Webb has yet again sided with the extreme Greens in her bid for re-election," Business Minister Eric Abetz said. "The people of Nelson should know that a vote for Ms Webb is a vote to kill our Tasmania Devils."

Ms Webb's motion will seek support for the Legislative Council to call on the Rockliff government "to secure the ongoing future of Tasmania's AFL team, to seek to reopen negotiations with the AFL regarding the location and construction timeframe of any associated stadium".

Ms Webb said the government should reopen negotiations over the stadium's location and construction timeframe in light of concerns raised by economist Nicholas Gruen and the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

She said the motion would give the government the chance to stand up for Tasmanians' best interests.

"Why should 18 non-Tasmanian football bosses dictate the future of Tasmania's team, iconic Hobart waterfront and financial security?" Ms Webb said. "Two state-funded independent reports have raised serious concerns over the impacts upon the state's finances, with stadium construction associated debt estimated to be over \$1 billion."

"The construction timeframe has been found to be basically impossible, which also presents potential financial penalties to be borne by Tasmanians under the current AFL agreement."

Ms Webb said a responsible government and Labor opposition "worthy of the name" would stand up for Tasmania's best interests and immediately seek to renegotiate with the AFL the location and construction timeframe of any new stadium.

Mr Abetz said the Macquarie Point Development Corporation had "correctly contested numerous aspects of the TPC's draft report are flawed".

"The findings will still inform the work being undertaken to ensure we get the best possible precinct," Mr Abetz said.

"This is a once in a generation project that will set up Tasmania for the future."

"It will drive economic growth, deliver jobs and, of course, mean Tasmania gets the teams that are rightfully ours."

He said it had been one of the most scrutinised projects in the state's history.



Nelson independent MLC Meg Webb. File picture

"Ms Webb cannot pretend to support our team and not the Macquarie Point Stadium," Mr Abetz said. "The two are linked, so she must have the courage to say she really does want the dream ditched."

Ms Webb's motion calls on MLCs to acknowledge "the Gruen Report's four recommendations and six key findings, including the first finding that 'the agreement between the AFL and the Tasmanian government is overspecified and imposes needless costs and restraints on the realisation of a Tasmanian team'". Dr Gruen went on to say, "These costs and restraints are contributing significantly to the poor cost-benefit ratio of the

proposed Macquarie Point stadium."

Ms Webb also wants MLCs to note matters from the planning commission's draft report.

She said they included: "That under its central scenario, construction of the project would require the state to borrow - or otherwise finance at the same or greater cost - approximately \$992 million. At the end of 10 years of operation the additional debt directly associated with the project's construction and operation would be approximately \$1.86 billion."

Premier Jeremy Rockliff has said the state government's capital expenditure on the stadium will be capped at \$375 million.