

06 NEWS

Crowd lashes AFL 'bullies'

Independent MPs vow to fight demands

Bridget Clarke

Independent upper house MPs have pledged to “do the work” and stand up against the AFL over the proposed Macquarie Point stadium, as parliament inches closer to a crucial upper house vote.

Thousands rallied on Parliament Lawns in Hobart on Sunday to voice their opposition ahead of a pro-stadium rally next week, hearing from a range of speakers including Our Place spokesperson Roland Browne, Palawa elder Jim Everett, lawyer Greg Barns SC, and several Greens and independent MPs.

Appearing before the crowd, Meg Webb MLC described the stadium as a “bitter pill” that was “choking the community”.

She took aim at Premier Jeremy Rockliff over his “utter incompetence in negotiating a deal” to secure a team without the stadium, labelling the AFL a “corporate bully”.

The AFL has remained steadfast on the stadium as a condition of the AFL’s Tasmanian licence.

“It’s unacceptable that we have been put in this position by the so-called leader of the state,” she said.

“We are in this position because (he) signed us up to a stupid contract. Any contract can be renegotiated.

“All it should take is a mature, reasonable and good faith conversation, and if that conversation can’t happen, it will be because Premier Rockliff is too inept to champion our state and our team ... or it will be be-



Protesters at the anti-stadium rally in Hobart. Picture: Bridget Clarke

cause the AFL continues to behave like a corporate bully that never wanted to give us a team in the first place.”

The crucial vote on the stadium order is expected to take place in Legislative Council on December 3 and 4 after it passed through the lower house earlier this month.

With some of the 15 upper house members’ votes still uncertain, Ms Webb hoped it would be a place of “courage and integrity” and “not be bullied like the premier was”.

“The Legislative Council has stood proudly for Tasmanians and in recent years, has been a place where the community’s true voice has been in heard in the face of bad policy and poor governance,” she said.

“It can, I hope ... we will do the right thing.”

In her address, Greens MLC Cassy O’Connor said the upper house must “save us and set a different, bright course for the future”.

“One thing I do know is that the Legislative Council do the work,” she said.

Estimates of Sunday’s crowd size varied, with Tasmania Police putting the number at 1500 while Mr Browne claimed as many as 7000.

Still, Parliament Lawns was covered, with prominent faces — including state MPs Peter George, Rosalie Woodruff, Kristie Johnston, federal MPs Andrew Willkie and Nick McKim and Hobart Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds — among those in the crowd.

Addressing the rally at the Cricket Tasmania announcement, Premier Rockliff said everyone was entitled to their opinion, describing opponents’ concerns — particularly the believed diversion of healthcare funding to the stadium — as “misguided”.

“I’ve always looked glass half full and all the work we’ve done over the course of the last three years is ensuring the stadium is built,” he said. “This is too good an opportunity to refuse.”

The Premier added he would attend the “Yes Team, Yes Stadium” rally on parliament lawns Sunday, November 30.