

John Barilaro finds Sydney stadiums a tough sell to regional councils

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Acting NSW Premier John Barilaro found himself confronted with a tough crowd as he attempted to spruik the government's controversial \$2.3 billion Sydney stadium policy to a room of mayors and councillors, many from the state's regional areas.



Leader of NSW National party John Barilaro has defended the government's controversial Sydney stadium rebuild policy as not a "city versus country investment".

Photo: Kate Geraghty

Mr Barilaro was booed and heckled as he described the government's decision to knock down and rebuild both the Allianz Stadium at Moore Park and ANZ Stadium at Sydney Olympic Park. Delivering the keynote address to the annual NSW local government conference on Tuesday, he said the decision was not a "country versus city investment".

Mr Barilaro, who is also the minister for regional development, made the remarks as part of a broader speech which endeavoured to sell the government's commitment to the bush.

"We all know the [ANZ] stadium was built for a unique purpose, and that was the Sydney Olympics," Mr Barilaro told the conference.

"What we are seeing now is an investment by the NSW government to build not just a stadium but a venue, to make sure Sydney remains, and NSW remains, a sporting

destination, a venue destination, a tourism destination, which is important for the economy and growing jobs."

But he was momentarily interrupted by booing and heckles of "waste of money" from some members of the audience, which was comprised of representatives from most of NSW's 128 councils, 95 of which are outside of Sydney.

The government has faced considerable backlash over the revised stadium policy since announcing it last month.

The announcement was a departure from the more modest \$1.6 billion commitment made by former premier Mike Baird to upgrade the former Olympic stadium known as ANZ at Olympic Park, and spend leftover funds re-fitting the 30-year-old Allianz Stadium at Moore Park.

Lithgow Mayor Stephen Lesslie, an independent, said Mr Barilaro's remarks were met with "ripples of derisive laughter" at the conference.

Cr Lesslie said in the Lithgow community the stadium policy was being "treated with contempt".

"It's a complete waste of money. We've got rural fire services, dams, water, sewage, forests, all of these matters that city councils don't have to deal with and a small ratepayer base to draw on."

Snowy Monaro Regional Council's mayor John Rooney said the money would be better spent on regional transport infrastructure.

"It's just very unfortunate to be rebuilding relatively modern stadiums in Sydney when the transport needs of regional NSW are being neglected," he said.

However, councillors from the NSW-Victorian border had a different view.

Cr Gail Law said residents who lived inside the Federation Council local government area were "virtually Victorians" and could see the benefits of Melbourne's sporting culture.

"I think if Sydney wants to stay with the game, they need to do that," she said.

Federation council deputy mayor Shaun Whitechurch said "being down near the border we can see Melbourne is really going hard and attracting so much tourism".

Mr Barilaro said the government had committed to investing \$1.3 billion in regional NSW, in addition \$300 million as part of a regional tourism fund.

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