

Qld offer for NBN home raises ire

Mark Ludlow

The Bligh government has upped the ante in the bidding war for the national broadband network headquarters by offering a business incentive package to lure the company north to Queensland.

A lucrative incentive package — which in the past has included payroll tax exemptions and possibly a cash payment — would increase the pressure on the NSW and Victorian governments, which are also chasing the headquarters for their state.

Premier Anna Bligh last night defended the incentive package, saying her government was prepared to do everything it could to bring the headquarters of the \$43 billion project to Queensland.

She acknowledged that Melbourne (home to Telstra's head office) and Sydney (where Optus is based) would sell

themselves as the natural home of the bid.

But she said Queensland's rapid growth in IT skills and large infrastructure program would make it a promising contender to be the home for hosting the country's national broadband network.

"My government is prepared to do everything it can to ensure NBN makes its home here, and that includes putting incentives on the table," she said. "We need to be competitive and look beyond a standard sales pitch to secure deals like this."

In the past, Queensland has raised the ire of its southern counterparts by refusing to sign the non-competition pact in its aggressive pitch for companies to move their headquarters to Brisbane.

But apart from Virgin Blue, which established its headquarters in Brisbane in 1999 after receiving an incentive

package worth in excess of \$10 million, the success of the business incentive program in luring big companies to Queensland has been mixed.

In the executive summary of Queensland's bid for the national broadband head office, obtained by *The Australian Financial Review*, the

Virgin Blue chose Brisbane for a \$10m incentive package.

government said it could tailor its incentive package through discussions with the NBN board.

"This Queensland proposition advances the argument that locating the NBN company head office in Brisbane is in the national interest," it said.

National broadband network chief executive Mike Quigley was recently presented with the

state's submission. Ms Bligh is expected to meet him to sell the merits of Queensland's bid.

Last month, Victorian Premier John Brumby announced its bid to host the national broadband network with a \$2 million contribution towards a broadband research centre, the Institute for a Broadband Enabled Society, in Melbourne.

NSW Premier Nathan Rees has enlisted Sydney Chamber of Commerce executive director Patricia Forsythe and the state's first chief scientist, Mary O'Kane, to bump up the state's bid team.

In a sign of the chest-thumping that naturally arises in the competitive bids between the big three states, Mr Rees said NSW, home to 43 per cent of telecommunications research and development, had a more compelling case than other states "by a country mile".

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Rees takes the high road

NSW Premier Nathan Rees said he would not reshuffle his cabinet to punish those plotting against him.

Mr Rees yesterday threw his support behind all his ministers, including Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald and Police Minister Tony Kelly.

Both men are believed to be plotting against the Premier to install Health Minister John Della Bosca as leader.

"I won't be reshuffling to punish anyone," Mr Rees told Fairfax Radio Network.

"All ministers have my support. They'll continue to do so and that will remain the case as long as they continue to work hard in their respective portfolios on behalf of the people of NSW."

He said his support applied to all ministers, including Mr Macdonald.

"My comments are applicable to him or anyone else in the cabinet and in fact they apply to anyone in the parliament, whether they are on my side or the other," Mr Rees said.

"The fact is the people elect us to be 100 per cent focused on improving services and delivering for our communities and that should be everyone's focus."

Speculation about a reshuffle surfaced over the weekend after talk late last week of a possible push to have Mr Della Bosca move into the lower house and challenge for the leadership.

Mr Rees said he knows the MPs who are plotting within Labor's ranks to



Two key ALP powerbrokers oppose NSW Health Minister John Della Bosca becoming premier. Photo: BEN RUSHTON

KEY POINTS

- Nathan Rees says he knows which MPs are plotting to destabilise his leadership.
- His statement follows talk of a leadership bid by Health Minister John Della Bosca.

destabilise his leadership. But yesterday Mr Della Bosca said he did not know of anyone within Labor's parliamentary team working to unsettle the

premier. "I know of nobody who is doing anything but focusing on their job," he told reporters.

If a reshuffle is imminent it's likely to take place before state parliament resumes next month — the same month Mr Rees will mark his first year in office.

He came into the position after then premier Morris Iemma attempted to overhaul his front bench, only to be dumped by his party.

Opposition Leader Barry O'Farrell said Mr Rees was

probably waiting for instructions on the reshuffle from Right faction powerbrokers Joe Tripodi and Eddie Obeid.

Both men back Mr Rees and oppose Mr Della Bosca becoming premier.

"We know that Mr Rees was put there by head office, by the union movement, by the faction warlords," Mr O'Farrell said.

"Mr Rees doesn't call the shots, he's the puppet and he's waiting for the puppet master to make the next move."

AAP

Supporting democracy at any cost

Mathew Dunckley

Victoria's Water Minister, Tim Holding, has defended his presence at a \$5000-a-head Labor Party fund-raiser in Melbourne last week, arguing such events are part of the democratic process.

Organised by the party's fund-raising arm, Progressive Business, the event promised boardroom talks and one-on-

one private meetings with Victorian ministers.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh has vowed to ban members of her government from attending such events but Mr Holding insisted there was no payment-for-access system in Victoria.

"There has always been a culture in this state — an appropriate one — where those who choose to make donations

to political parties... are able to do so," he said.

"The important thing is that if people need to put a view to a minister they do not need to pay to do so."

Asked why anyone would pay to meet ministers, Mr Holding said people wanted to support the democratic process.

Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu said he did not have a problem with political fund-

raising there needed to be greater transparency in government dealings.

"The key to this is to have a full disclosure regime, to have a full register of lobbyists, to have a ban on [lobbyist] success fees so that mates aren't used in this process and... to have all of this testable and examinable with an independent, broad-based anti-corruption commission," Mr Baillieu said.

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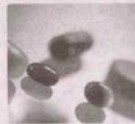
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