



Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024–2025

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Jo Clay MLA

Addressed to: Chief Minister

In relation to: Economic Development and Lyric Theatre cost and specifications

Hearing: 18 November 2025

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Transcript provided: 25 November 2025

Answer Due: 2 December 2025

MS CLAY: Thank you. On the Lyric Theatre, ACM has already committed \$89.1 million to that, and I have seen ballpark figures that it might be half a billion or so to build.

Mr Barr: Sorry, half a?

MS CLAY: 500 million. I have seen—

Mr Barr: No.

MS CLAY: No; okay, that is right. So what we know is 89.1 million. Do we have a ballpark figure for the total cost?

Mr Barr: We do, and we are in the final stages of the contract negotiations, so that once the contract is agreed, then it will be made public.

MS CLAY: That is great. The most similar project that we can see to our Lyric Theatre is the Sydney Colosseum, so that was a 2,200 seat capacity. It was designed by Cox Architects, so the same architects. Have you had a little look at that one?

Ms Geraghty: This is at Rooty Hill?

MS CLAY: Sorry?

Ms Geraghty: At Rooty Hill?

MS CLAY: Yes, the Sydney Colosseum Theatre, yes.

Ms Geraghty: Yes, we have.

MS CLAY: So they built theirs - theirs cost \$100 million to build. I am wondering are we expecting sort of similar results, and if not are there major differences between our Lyric and the Sydney Colosseum?

Mr Barr: There are, and we will take on notice and give a more substantive list of those, but yes, I think there is more comparable projects that would include ones in Queensland at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, but we can give you, perhaps on notice. It would be easier, frankly, rather than verbally running through a list of everything that is different in relation to the projects, but we will release the contract which will outline the scope of the project including its gross floor area and all of the features of the project in the not too distant future.

MS CLAY: So ours is bigger?

Mr Barr: Again, I think it is easier to take the question on notice in relation to the technical specifications of that project versus the one that we are pursuing.

MS CLAY: Okay. What federal funding have we got for the Lyric?

Mr Barr: At this point there is no federal funding for the Lyric.

MS CLAY: Why is that?

Mr Barr: We have put the project forward. The Commonwealth have chosen instead to invest in other projects in the ACT, including light rail and the aquatic centre, and convention facilities.

MS CLAY: Sure. I am interested, and it is hard to get an answer from the outside of the system looking in, you consistently, particularly with Ms Carrick, sort of badged this as one of our key facilities and it is for the whole of Canberra, and Canberra is going to become the arts capital of Australia. It does look like a really—like if we are going ahead with it, it does look like a really strategic ACT facility. Did you have any further negotiations?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS CLAY: When you put up a 50/50 budget bid, did you get given a reason as to why they were not funded?

Mr Barr: Well certainly, the commonwealth do not have a strong history of partnering with state and territory governments on arts facilities. They have their own investment in national facilities.

MS CLAY: Yes. Mr Barr: Principally in order to get through the first hurdle, Infrastructure Australia need to declare a project to be of national significance. We have been unsuccessful in having the Canberra Lyric Theatre designated as a project of national significance.

MS CLAY: Okay. Have there been any—has the budget for the Lyric changed during the course of this project so far?

Mr Barr: Not at this point. There will be a final determination once a final offer comes through, and that will go to the Expenditure Review Committee, and then we will make a determination, and then make a public announcement in that regard.

MS CLAY: I wonder, given that you have taken on notice the differences between the Colosseum and the Lyric, that you mentioned another theatre that you think is a much closer match, can you come back with the same details of how that other, that one is a closer match, and perhaps what that one cost?

Andrew Barr MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

The Sydney Coliseum Theatre is a 2,000 seat theatre of comparable gross floor area, but there are numerous factors that differentiate it from the new Canberra Theatre project:

- The Sydney Coliseum opened in 2019 and was contracted before the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent years of substantial construction cost escalation.
- The Sydney Coliseum was designed to connect with and complement West HQ (the former Rooty Hill RSL Club). By contrast, the new Canberra Theatre is a major cultural infrastructure development designed to meet the urban design objectives and planning requirements as a centrepiece of the Canberra Civic and Cultural District and a gateway to the Parliamentary Triangle, as required by the National Capital Authority.
- The new Canberra Theatre will include state of the art stage machinery designed to meet the functional requirements of Broadway musicals and other major productions. For example, the Lyric Theatre has an automated flying system whereas the Coliseum has a manually operated flying system.

Recent projects of a more comparable scope include the New Performing Arts Venue (NPAV) at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) which is currently in delivery, and the proposed new

Riverside Theatre Redevelopment in Parramatta, noting both venues have lyric theatres of 1,500 seats.

In addition to general construction cost escalation of greater than 50 per cent since 2017 (the contracting dates of NPAV and Sydney Coliseum Theatre), there is also significant change in industry risk appetite for projects tendered pre-COVID relative to post-COVID, which is contributing to higher costs.

This is highlighted by a recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald (15 November 2025) relating to the Riverside Theatre Redevelopment (a 1500 seat lyric theatre (with manual flying system), black box and cinema), which reports that original cost estimates have doubled, with tender pricing now at \$355 million.

Neither of these comparable projects has Commonwealth funding, with NPAV funded by a grant from the Queensland Government, supported by a contribution from QPAC. The Riverside Theatre project is planned to be funded by the City of Parramatta and the City is seeking other funding partnerships to support delivery.

The pricing for the new Canberra Theatre has been aggressively value-managed to minimise costs, market-tested through a competitive tender processes and represents value in the current market.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation

Signature: 

Date: **2.12.25**

By the Chief Minister, Mr Andrew Barr MLA