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Millions of dollars in funding approved for Walsh Bay precinct

By [Kylar Loussikian](#)

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The Berejiklian government has approved millions of dollars of funding for the redevelopment of Pier 2/3 at the Walsh Bay precinct, ending fears from some of the state's largest arts companies that the major project would be delayed indefinitely.

Cabinet's expenditure review committee signed off on the funding for the new arts precinct at the end of last month, according to two government sources familiar with the discussions who spoke to the *Herald* on condition of anonymity.

Those sources said there was around \$100 million earmarked for the project.

[An artist's impression of the Walsh Bay redevelopment with Pier 2/3 in the background.]

The Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bell Shakespeare and the Australian Theatre for Young People have all operated out of Pier 2/3, with the latter moving to Darlinghurst last year ahead of the expected start to the redevelopment of the heritage wharf.

Construction was originally scheduled to be finished next year, but the government had put a pause on any new money being used for the project until the meeting last month.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Arts Minister Don Harwin declined to comment, but an announcement on the plans is expected next week, sources told the *Herald*.

The development will transform the wharf, for decades part of Sydney's working harbour, into a significant cultural space which will also be used for events including the Sydney Writers' Festival, the Biennale of Sydney and commercial functions.

The decision to provide the generous funding at a time of drought and with the state enduring the start of a torrid bushfire season is likely to upset some Coalition MPs, with concerns being raised internally about the difficulty in obtaining more money for regional communities.

Labor's art spokesman Walt Secord said Mr Harwin was treating "the arts like his own personal playground". "Who can forget his blunder where he ripped millions from struggling arts groups and gave to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, who he profoundly embarrassed," he said.

The Australian Chamber Orchestra has, led by its billionaire chairman Guido Belgiorno-Nettis, led the lobbying effort for the funding, including meeting with Mr Harwin in July.

Former Liberal senator Chris Puplick, now the ATYP's chairman, has also publicly warned the theatre company could close if the development was delayed after losing more than \$200,000 in annual revenue due to its relocation.

"It should all be worth it when we get back our Pier 2/3 home as we have been promised by the Berejiklian government," Mr Puplick told the *Herald* in September.
 "If they fail us then I give no guarantee that the company can continue."

The Walsh Bay redevelopment — first announced during the 2015 state election and now forecast to cost \$245 million — also includes work on Pier 4/5, which houses the Sydney Theatre Company, the Sydney Dance Company and the Bangarra Dance Theatre.

That development is expected to be completed next year.

But the completion of the project has been repeatedly delayed, including by a successful 2017 legal challenge brought by restaurateur Brigid Kennedy, the former chairwoman of Walsh Bay Arts and Commerce, over the legality of the government's planning approval.

Kylar Loussikian is The Sydney Morning Herald's CBD columnist.

