

OPINION 27

Sydney, it's time to put a lid on it

**Paul
Nicolaou**



It is astonishing to think that tiny Hobart, population 190,000, is likely to have a roofed stadium long before Sydney, population five million.

But that's the way it is shaping up now that Labor in Tasmania has done a backflip to support construction of a roofed 23,000-capacity stadium.

It is a rolling tragedy that Sydney still can only dream of joining Melbourne and other state capitals in having a roofed stadium.

NSW Minister for Sport Steve Kamper was won over to the idea of retrofitting a roof to Accor Stadium at Homebush after his NRL experience in Las Vegas.

Seeing Rugby League at its finest in a roofed stadium while a Las Vegas wind howled outside was evidence enough Sydney needed a roofed stadium too.

One was obviously needed even when Allianz Stadium at Moore Park was in the design stage. The fact that it could be built minus a roof is a blot on our city's infrastructure planning.

It was also obvious the night Elton John's concert was all but rained out in one of those legendary summer downpours.

And it's similarly apparent now that the commendable decision has been made to lift the crazy six-concert cap that previously existed at Moore Park.

At Business Sydney, we are not taking sides whether a roof is retrofitted to Accor Stadium or Allianz. We just take the simple view that one is needed. Having seen the whirlwind of economic activity that surrounded Taylor Swift's time in Sydney, it shows the potential extra oomph a roofed stadium could deliver.

Let's not forget, the start of one of Taylor's concerts was delayed by half an hour because of the threat of a thunderstorm. A roofed stadium would have eliminated that uncertainty.

For one brief moment after the NRL Las Vegas experience, the thought of Sydney's first roofed stadium seemed to come tantalisingly close.

But it was soon shot down amid concerns about funding a roof for Homebush at a time when NSW's finances are stretched super thin.

And the rough deal handed to NSW with the carve-up of GST revenue hasn't helped one bit.

There are opportunities that justify sensible spending, and a roofed stadium for Sydney is an infrastructure project that most are calling a "no brainer".

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney.