

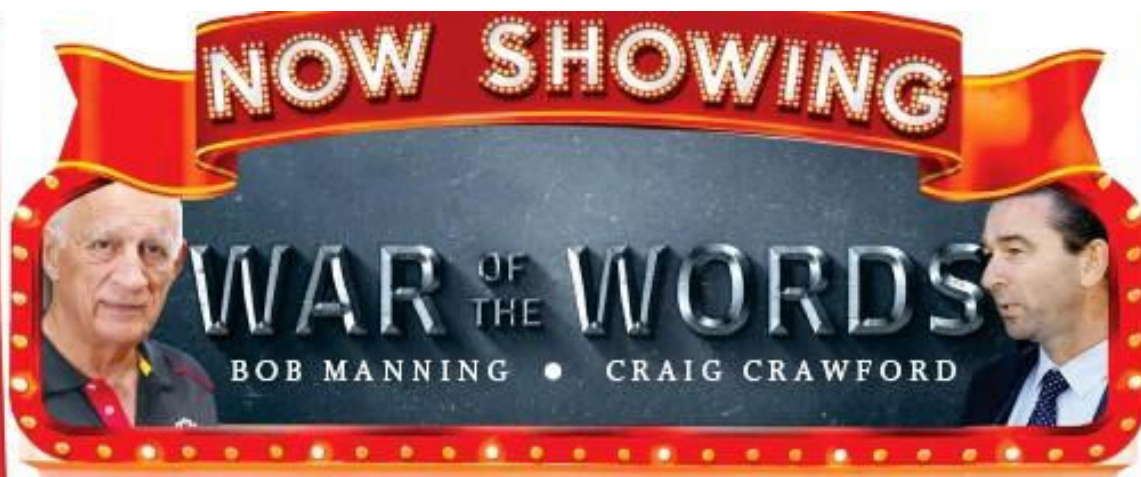
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# UNIONS REJECT RANSOM CLAIMS

## ETU denies links between wage negotiations and last-minute efforts to shut down CPAC

UNIONS have denied using fire safety fears at one of the city's most important pieces of new infrastructure to hold Cairns Regional Council to ransom.



## Players take centre stage in CPAC drama

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UNIONS have denied using fire safety fears at one of the city's most important pieces of new infrastructure to hold Cairns Regional Council to ransom.

The Cairns Performing Arts Centre is expected to gain temporary approvals from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services this week to allow it to open on December 15 under a suite of strict controls.

It comes as the Electrical Trades Union makes an 11th-hour play to have the site shut down under the Work Health and Safety Act unless the council provides documentation proving it is safe for workers.

ETU organiser Rob Hill rejected the suggestion the effort had any relation to wage negotiations, which have dragged on for a year and a half.

"The two items are distinctly separate," he said. "I'm not going to confuse the two."

Mr Hill said the ETU wanted a copy of the council's agreement with QFES on temporary control measures to allow the building to open,

including extra smoke detectors, sprinklers and having security guards posted on smoke-watch.

"If they're supposed to have five security guards patrolling the joint and they've only got three, they haven't met their quota," he said. "But we don't know and we have no way of judging whether they are meeting their obligations or not."

Sources within the council feel they are being held over the barrel for political reasons, but have no option but to grin and bear it.

Large sections of external cladding imported from China will have to be replaced once new panels can be manufactured and imported from Japan.

However, the intense scrutiny of this particular building - which has a void between the panels and the 30cm-thick concrete walls, and can be evacuated within four minutes - has raised eyebrows.

The Cairns Post understands the council considered appealing the decision in court but decided there would be no net benefit.

The building would end up closed for another year or more while the court case dragged on, and legal costs would likely rival the estimated \$1 million once

tag for the panel replacements.

Insiders have questioned why the CPAC has copped so much attention when it was one of 735 buildings in the Cairns region identified as having dubious cladding.

The new D Block at the Cairns Hospital also has flammable cladding, but has largely escaped public scrutiny.

Schools, public buildings and even the Cairns Regional Council chambers themselves all have potentially flammable cladding.

A Department of Housing and Public Works spokesman said a fire engineer was conducting a detailed assessment of the new hospital block to determine the type of cladding that has been used.

"Pending the outcome, visitors and staff can be reassured that the hospital has excellent firefighting and evacuation procedures in place," he said.

Mayor Bob Manning has previously suggested one of CPAC's most outspoken critics, Emergency Services Minister and Labor Left faction stalwart Craig Crawford, was causing mischief on behalf of the unions. With the finish line in sight, he is now being more quailed with his words.

"If this is so serious, why aren't the others serious?" he asked.

"Somebody is going to raise that at some point."

Mr Crawford said the idea he might influence QFES operations for political gain was ridiculous.

"Existing buildings already opened prior to the Grenfell Towers incident are required to have work done on a retrofit basis," he said.

"If you're building something now, you must comply with the new rules."

"They knew this when they were doing the building they would have known it when they were buying the cladding."

"They would certainly have known when they were screwing it on, yet they didn't do anything about it."

"It's baffling."

Whether the unions are weaponising the CPAC cladding issue or not, Mr Crawford said it would have no effect on his department.

"Any allegation that I'm having anything to do with this or weighed into it, I'd say prove it," he said.

"There's no evidence out there."

**BOB MANNING CRAIG CRAWFORD**

The Cairns Performing Arts Centre (left) is expected to gain temporary approvals from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services this week to allow it to open on December 15 under a suite of strict controls.

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The intense scrutiny on CPAC has raised eyebrows among stakeholders. UNIONS have denied using fire safety fears at one of the city's most important pieces of new infrastructure to hold Cairns Regional Council to ransom. The Cairns Performing Arts Centre is expected to gain temporary approvals from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services this week to allow it to open on December 15 under a suite of strict controls. It comes as the Electrical Trades Union makes an 11th-hour play to have the site shut down under the Work Health and Safety Act unless the council provides documentation proving it is safe for workers. ETU organiser Rob Hill rejected the suggestion the effort had any relation to wage negotiations, which have dragged on for a year and a half. "The two items are distinctly separate," he said. "I'm not going to confuse the two." Mr Hill said the ETU wanted a copy of the council's agreement with QFES on temporary control measures to allow the building to open,

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