

CPAC gets green light

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'I don't want to start another fight': mayor

MAYOR Bob Manning is pushing one of the toughest dogfights of his political career to the side to focus energy on the Cairns Performing Arts Centre's opening night.

Cairns Regional Council has received a certificate of classification permitting it to open the facility on December 15 after months of wrestling over the fire safety of its external cladding.

The gala launch will go

ahead – albeit with additional fire wardens, security guards keeping smoke-watch over the building, CCTV monitoring and the creation of new emergency exit pathways.

Cr Manning was adamant the building would not have received the permits if it was not safe, but did not want to “create another gulf” by talking about union meddling or seeking legal recourse.

“I have strong feelings

about what may have happened,” he said.

“But sometimes it's better to keep your mouth closed and be thought a fool rather than to open it and remove all doubt.

“I don't want to start another fight.”

Extra surveillance, staffing and exits will remain in place until new smoke detectors and sprinkler systems are installed in March and replacement panels are erected in late-2019.

Council infrastructure services general manager Bruce Gardiner estimated the work would cost “a bit over a million” in the context of a building that already has a price tag of about \$71.5 million.

Vertical strips of cladding will be replaced with fire-safe panels imported from Japan to stop horizontal spread if a blaze were to break out.

Council chief executive John Andrejic said the building was

approved and cladding ordered in 2016, with panel installation beginning in July 2017.

“So this building was well under construction before the building code changed (in March 2018),” he said.

However, further panels were erected after the new rules came into play.

Existing tiles were custom-built in Japan by Mitsubishi.

“It's not removing cladding just for the sake of removing

it,” Cr Manning said. “It's about creating little fire breaks in case something was to happen, that would make it safer and reduce the risk.”

He said an internal debrief would be conducted to ensure “all elements of the project were managed appropriately” but the building was safe and legally allowed to be used.

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