

## Billion-dollar convention centre 'must be finished' by December 2008

## State to press down hard on Yarra's 'final missing tooth'

By RACHEL KLEINMAN  
CITY REPORTER

HOW many pylons does it take to prop up a \$1 billion project?

More than 1000, bored 24 metres into the ground, which will support the state convention centre — described as the Yarra River's "final missing tooth".

The winning tender was announced as recently as March but work has already begun on the centre's skeleton, which will slot in between the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre on Southbank and Yarra's Edge in Docklands.

The Plenary Group's principal John O'Rourke is watching the clock, for the developer will pay multimillion-dollar penalties if the public-private partnership runs over time. Mr O'Rourke said the consortium had learned from "some good experiences and some bad ones . . . on recent PPP projects".

Burned by delays and cost blow-outs on other major projects such as Southern Cross railway station and Federation Square, the State Government has imposed strict conditions to ensure the convention centre is finished promptly.

"This deal has financial penalties from the state but also has commercial revenues we expect to earn from the hotel, so there is both a carrot and a stick," Mr O'Rourke said.

The first crane will be on site next February and construction is due to finish in December 2008. Thousands of biochemists, botanists and psychologists from around the world are already booked into the centre from 2010. The 5000-seat venue will

be accompanied by a 13-storey Hilton hotel, a 12-storey office and apartment tower, car park, retail centre, a cafe/lifestyle precinct, new maritime museum and pedestrian footbridge.

The State Government is contributing \$370 million, Melbourne City Council \$43 million, and the Multiplex Plenary Consortium \$570 million. But the design has been criticised by some, given the project's expense.

Architecture professor Kim Dovey said it was good to provide the Yarra's "missing tooth". But the centre itself butted up against the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre rather than integrating with it.

Professor Dovey also labelled the hotel and office/residential towers "extremely boring".

But Major Projects Minister John Lenders said the economic benefits were more important than a dazzling design. "I think we have picked a great design and functional centre which will bring jobs to the whole of Victoria," he said.

The State Government was three months late announcing the winning bidder — a drawn-out battle between the consortium and Bovis Lend Lease.

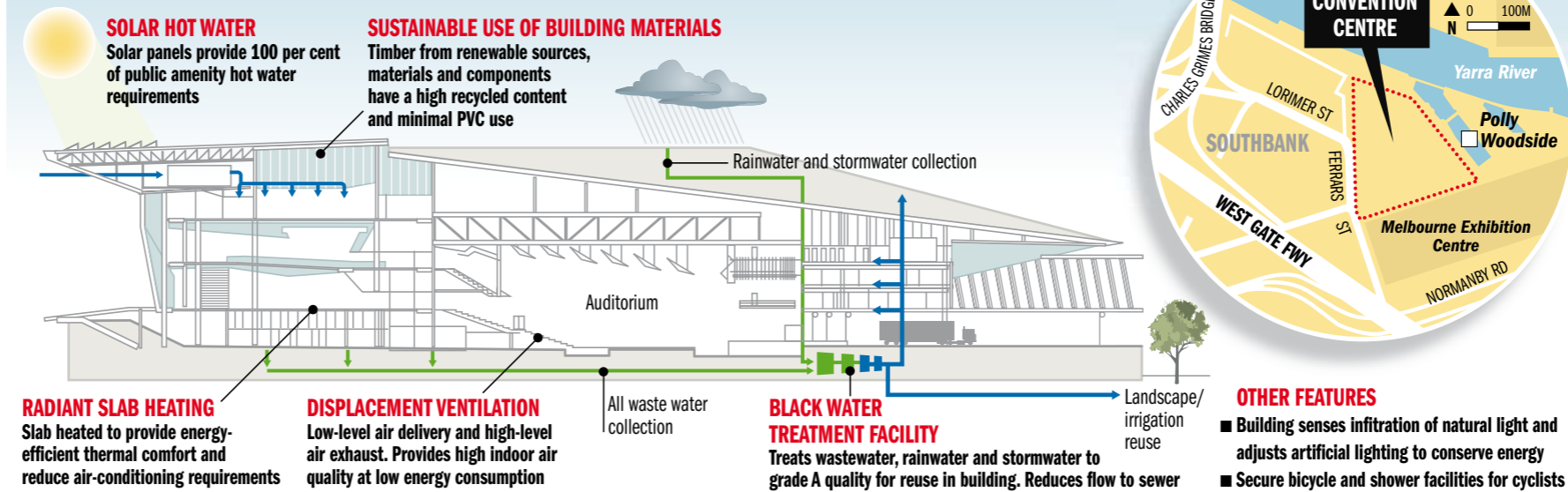
And it attracted criticism for picking a \$1 billion project, double that of Bovis' bid.

But business groups such as the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry believe the international conference market will deliver long-term financial benefits.

## LINKS

- ▶ [www.mcvb.com.au](http://www.mcvb.com.au)
- ▶ [www.plenarygroup.com.au](http://www.plenarygroup.com.au)

## THE GREEN CONVENTION



## Reborn plan means Docklands may see the light

By RACHEL KLEINMAN  
CITY REPORTER

AN AMBITIOUS proposal to create an ultra-modern lighthouse on a landmark Docklands site could be revived.

The multi-faceted glass tower would incorporate lights to create a spectacular show at Central Pier, Victorian architect Jon McGregor said.

It would consist of 272 panes of glass and would be visible to incoming ships as "the welcoming icon of Melbourne".

Mr McGregor first discussed

the proposal with developer Lend Lease in 2003. "The initial response was very good, (then project architect) David McCracken liked it very much," he said.

At the time, Lend Lease said it would spend \$600 million to create an icon for Melbourne on a par with the Sydney Opera House. Financial difficulties forced Lend Lease to give up the prime site last year.

It was taken over by government agency VicUrban, which is managing Docklands development.

"I had put a lot of work into it



and was quite disappointed," Mr McGregor said.

But he said he would resurrect the proposal and present it to VicUrban in light of recent

publicity about Central Pier. Mr McGregor's plan includes an auditorium for light shows inside the tower, with a cafe, restaurant and some exhibition space on the 2500-square metre site.

An Age campaign for debate on a Central Pier icon has provoked some architects to call for an innovative design.

Others have focused on what a building should house, such as community space, a national Aboriginal arts gallery or scientific institute.

VicUrban chief executive Pru Sanderson has said that the

agency would not rush to commission an icon for the heritage-listed pier. She was backed yesterday by Major Projects Minister John Lenders.

"It is my very old fashioned view that (VicUrban) needs to have a strong business case," he said. "We are not about building icons for the sake of it."

VicUrban is yet to award a tender for the lease of Central Pier for up to five years as a cafe, bar and entertainment location.

Spokeswoman Rose Gigliotti said the matter was not yet resolved.

## THE AGE

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## LOTTERIES

**Powerball** (draw 535): Division 1, no winner; division 2, \$48,696.45; division 3, \$4983.85; division 4, \$98.10; division 5, \$46.10; division 6, \$21.25; division 7, \$10.20.

**Tatts 2** (draw 7685): 58 and 24. Both correct: \$1000.

**Keno** (draw 6446): 6, 26, 30, 32, 35, 36, 40, 44, 46, 48, 50, 51, 52, 57, 59, 65, 67, 73, 75 and 77. Estimated jackpot: \$1,164,000.

## WE WERE WRONG

The Age (6/8) reported that the State shadow cabinet had pledged its support for the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act. Although shadow Attorney-General Andrew McIntosh said the Liberals had no intention to repeal the act, that comment did not reflect any shadow cabinet decision. The error was made by a reporter.

It is the policy of The Age to correct all significant errors as soon as possible. The Age is committed to presenting information fairly and accurately.

## FAITH

## MUSLIM PRAYER TIMES

F: 5.32 S: 7.00 D: 12.24 A: 3.24 M: 5.48 I: 7.12

## TEXT FOR TODAY

Too much pride can put you to shame. It's wiser to be humble. **Proverbs 11:2**

## THE SHIPPING NEWS

## EXPECTED ARRIVALS

**STOLT AYAME (CT)** Holden Dock, 3am.  
**VICTORIAN RELIANCE** Webb Dock 1 east, 6am. **SPIRIT OF TASMANIA 1** Station Pier Inner E, 6.30am. **SEAROAD TAMAR** Webb Dock 2 east, 7.15am. **EUFONIA** Webb Dock 5 east, 8.30am. **ROTOITI** Webb Dock 4 east, 10.30am. **MAERSK TOBAS** Swanson Dock 2 west, 1.30pm. **PACIFIC EXPLORER EXPRESS** Webb Dock 5 east, 8pm. **CAPITAINE TASMAN** Anchorage-Inner, 8.30pm. **OOCL FAIR** Swanson Dock 4 west, 9pm. **WANA BHUM** Swanson Dock 3 west, 11pm. **CAPE DONINGTON** Appleton Dock B, 11.30pm.

## EXPECTED DEPARTURES

**GOLIATH** South Wharf 26, 12.01 am. **EVER POWER** Swanson Dock 2 west, 6.30am. **TAIKO** Webb Dock 4 east, 7am. **FAR GRIP** South Wharf 28, 9am. **LEDA TRADER** Swanson Dock 4 west, 9am. **MSC CLORINDA** Swanson Dock 1 east, 3pm. **VLADIVOSTOK** Swanson Dock 2 east, 4.30pm. **VICTORIAN RELIANCE** Webb Dock 1 east, 4.45pm. **HONG KONG STAR** Swanson Dock 2 east, 7pm. **SPIRIT OF TASMANIA 1** Station Pier Inner E, 8pm. **EUFONIA** Webb Dock 5 east, 10pm.

LINK [www.portofmelbourne.com.au/shipping](http://www.portofmelbourne.com.au/shipping)