

Premier Jeremy Rockliff calls for UTAS to compromise with city move critics



UTAS vice-chancellor Rufus Black in one of the CBD buildings that are part of his plans to move the existing Sandy Bay campus into the city of Hobart. Picture: Nikki Davis-Jones

MATTHEW DENHOLM

TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT

Liberal Premier Jeremy Rockliff is urging the University of Tasmania to find a “sensible compromise” following growing opposition to its plans to shift its main campus into Hobart’s CBD.

Mr Rockliff on Tuesday told state parliament while it was not his government’s responsibility to block the city move, it wanted to see a solution via compromise.

“The government believes a collaborative approach to find a sensible compromise is indeed the best way forward for Hobart, the university and to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and research,” he said.

A recent Hobart City Council elector poll recorded a 74 per cent vote against [plans by UTAS to shift its Sandy Bay campus into CBD buildings](#) to allow the existing site to be developed for housing.

The poll, while not binding, has led vice-chancellor Rufus Black to suspend a bid to rezone the existing campus site – a vital step for the development.

Professor Black appears to be pushing ahead, however, with redevelopment of CBD sites bought by UTAS for relocations.

As reported by The Australian on Tuesday, [the relocation stoush has widened into a push for UTAS governance reform](#), including a more democratic governing council and checks on senior management power.

Mr Rockliff said those wanting the government to stop the UTAS relocation failed to understand it was an independent statutory body, governed by its own council.

He noted Professor Black had committed to working with the HCC on the future of the plans, and an imminent state Legislative Council inquiry would “offer further opportunity for consultation on matters related to the university’s future”.

Professor Black said UTAS “welcomes the government’s statement” but did not elaborate. In comments to *The Australian* before the Premier’s intervention, Professor Black said the future of the city move was “more complex than a simple yes or no”.

“While we have withdrawn the Sandy Bay planning scheme amendment, we have 40 per cent of staff and students already in the city, as well as two approved projects under way – a major new facility that will provide the home for our business, economics and law students in the heart of the city, and the restoration of a significant building which is part of our original city home on the Domain,” he said.

Pam Sharpe, chair of Save UTAS Campus, said the only “sensible compromise” was for the relocation to cease and the developments to be halted.

“The obvious compromise would be to stop where we are and move the business students ... in Vodafone and KPMG rented (city) premises back to the campus,” Professor Sharpe said.

Greens leader Cassy O’Connor said the Premier was still taking a “hands-off” approach.

“UTAS has cut courses, moved lectures almost entirely online, gutted the Law School, failed to negotiate in good faith with staff, and is pursuing an unpopular move into the Hobart CBD,” she said.

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