

SE PrimeSpace
HD **State urged to look local for architecture**
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FINANCIALLY strapped local architects complain too much NSW government work is being awarded to offshore parties — but other industry players say the state is merely reacting to the rapid globalisation of architecture.

The private sector is also turning to international architects. Crown's \$1 billion **hotel** and casino at Sydney's Barangaroo will be designed by British **firm** Wilkinson Eyre, while Barangaroo South, a mix of **residential** units, shops and offices, is being designed by London's Lord Richard Rogers.

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The NSW government recently awarded three multi-million-dollar engineering contracts to European firms, including Italy's Geodata Engineering and Salini Impregilo.

"In these times when firms are clearly under financial stress it's a shame the NSW government is not buying Australian," said the managing director of one large architectural practice yesterday.

"The government is basically trying to drive prices down." Chris Johnson, a former NSW government architect, disagreed. "Clearly there is a global market for the provision of infrastructure projects and also for the consultants that come with the delivery of projects," said Mr Johnson, who is the chief executive of the Urban Taskforce, a **property** industry lobby **group**.

"(Using international firms) is positioning us as a global city — we need to perform on the world stage.

"This is balanced by the fact that many Australian architectural firms are doing work around the world in places like Dubai and Southeast Asia." But the boom in architectural work in the Middle East is long over and Asia is full of consultant architects trying to find work.

"This is because North America and Europe have little work and Australia has little architectural work," one architect said.

Urban Development Institute of Australia chief executive Stephen Albin defended the NSW government's use of outside firms, saying international architects were improving local design.

"The NSW government is trying to create iconic buildings in the city and are going out and seeking worldwide design advice, and what that does is create iconic buildings," Mr Albin said. "The government is giving a lot of work to overseas architects but they are lifting the game in Sydney and what we are seeing is far better development." However, Mr Albin conceded the tough local conditions for architects and consultants.

"If you are at the bottom of the food chain, such as consultants, you can get squeezed on price," he said.

"We are seeking amalgamations and shake-ups — a lot of architects have had to become more efficient or have had to sell their practices." Architectural practice Woodhead was recently bought by GHD, Peddle Thorp was **sold** to **Chinese** interests several years ago and Rice Daubney, another Australian player, was last year acquired by HDR Architecture of the US.

Infrastructure NSW said competition in a global marketplace allowed the state to tap into a broader pool of industry expertise and ensure capital was well spent, and in many cases major tenders were awarded to Australian firms that operate internationally or to consortiums that combined Australian companies with international skills and expertise. "Extensive and robust tender processes are conducted to ensure major infrastructure projects deliver value for money and meet the quality and time frames required," a spokesman for Infrastructure NSW said.

CO cgfr : Salini Impregilo SpA | salcos : Salini Costruttori SpA

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