

Gravity Discovery Centre in Peril: WA Educationalists Up-in-Arms.

The WA Government is cutting funding to the Gravity Discovery Centre.

The Gravity Discovery Centre in Gingin Shire has provided science experiences for almost 100,000 West Australians since it opened in 2004.

It was set up at State Government request. Hundreds of schools have used its programmes designed to directly enhance science education. It hosts the biggest public observatory in the southern hemisphere. With the Polly Farmer Foundation the GDC is providing specialist science programs for indigenous students and students from remote areas.

A charitable Foundation led by business leaders and top WA Scientists raised \$8M funds from business, industry, federal and state agencies to create the centre which climaxed with the opening of the 13 storey Leaning Tower of Gingin just over one year ago.

On Wednesday Premier Colin Barnett was asked about the threat of closure of the Gravity Discovery Centre on ABC talkback. He stated:

"The Gravity Centre does get quite significant government funding and I am not aware that they are facing closure at all: there is a fair public investment in that facility."

In fact GDC supporter MLA Bill Marmion received a letter from Troy Buswell last week stating there would be no more funding for the GDC.

Numerous members of parliament have been supporting the GDC. We understand that supporters have been told that the GDC has no Strategic Plan. In fact the GDC created a Business Plan and Marketing Plan which was approved by the State Government in mid- 2009.

The GDC is the public outreach centre for the Gravitational wave Observatory Project which will be part of the first direct observations of black holes in the Universe. Currently major international funding for this \$200M project is being established with major international partners. Closure of the GDC would compromise this major science investment in Western Australia.

Closure of the GDC will also risk five postgraduate research projects funded under a \$1M federally supported research grant that will allow students to interact with top professionals in science education.

The GDC is the chief tourist attraction in the Gingin region. It is widely known internationally and won the Prime Minister's Eureka Prize for Promoting Science. It employs 25 staff. The GDC cost per visitor is less than half of all comparable operations in Australia.

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