

Barnett facing fresh interest conflict claim

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Premier Colin Barnett was facing fresh conflict of interest claims in his State Development portfolio last night after it was revealed that his daughter-in-law Sasha Pental works as a senior executive with gas giant Woodside.

Mr Barnett has insisted that Environment Minister Donna Faragher refer issues concerning Woodside to Planning Minister John Day because her husband Scott Faragher works for Woodside in government relations.

Ms Pental, who is married to Mr Barnett's son Russell, is Mr Faragher's boss in her position as Director of Government Relations and Sustainability on Woodside's Sunrise LNG project in the Timor Sea.

Although Mr Faragher transferred to the Sunrise project when his wife became Environment Minister in order to avoid any conflict of interest concerns, Mr Barnett told The West Australian this week that, on the advice of the Crown Solicitor, he had put in place a procedure for the Planning Minister to deal with any issues related to Woodside and the environment in Mrs Faragher's place.

A Woodside spokesman said yesterday that Ms Pental, the daughter of late Liberal and Independent South Perth MP Phil Pental, dealt with the Australian, East Timorese and Northern Territory governments in her position but not the WA Government, although she is based at the company's Perth headquarters.

Mr Barnett issued a one-line statement yesterday claiming that his situation was materially different to that of Ms Faragher's and her husband.

"The situation outlined does not involve a spouse or a direct dependant," the statement said. "There is, therefore, no conflict that would prevent the Premier dealing with Woodside."

But Opposition Leader Eric Ripper said while he agreed the relationship did not have the same direct prospect of a conflict of interest, Mr Barnett had to demonstrate how he was going to manage the situation.

"It's not quite the same as a marriage where there are shared finances, I wouldn't imagine that Mr Barnett and his daughter-in-law have financial interests in common, nevertheless I think Mr Barnett is going to have to carefully manage separation between family and business activities," Mr Ripper said.

The Opposition kept up the attack on Ms Faragher's position in Cabinet, pointing out that ban on her dealing with Woodside on environment matters did not preclude her staying in Cabinet while other issues to do with Woodside were discussed.

"And how does Ms Faragher propose to deal with Woodside's partners?" shadow

environment minister Sally Talbot said. "That list includes BHP Billiton, Shell, Chevron and BP. What about Woodside's competitors and customers?"

Ms Faragher has said she would only disqualify herself from issues "that specifically related to Woodside".

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