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Sydney New Year's Eve saved: Clover Moore agrees to stage 9pm fireworks

By **Andrew Taylor**

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Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore has backflipped and agreed to hold the traditional 9pm New Year's Eve family fireworks after discussions with the NSW government.

The *Herald* revealed last month the City of Sydney had quietly cancelled the family fireworks due to uncertainty about mass public events as the state comes out of lockdown.

The 9pm New Year's Eve fireworks have been saved following an agreement between the City of Sydney and the NSW government. DOMINIC LORRIMER

However, Cr Moore and Jobs and Tourism Minister Stuart Ayres have now agreed the display will go ahead subject to certain conditions, including extra help from Macquarie Street and a guarantee the government would take over the event if health orders change.

In a letter to Mr Ayres on Saturday, seen by *The Sun-Herald*, Cr Moore confirmed the council would hold the event – including the 9pm and midnight fireworks – "in a similar way to prior to the pandemic".

The letter said there would be a memorandum of understanding stipulating the NSW government would "intensify its critical contribution to this hallmark event", especially co-ordinating police and transport support.

"Should there be a significant surge in COVID cases necessitating severe restrictions or lockdown, then the event is able to be cancelled altogether," Cr Moore said in the letter.

She told *The Sun-Herald* that Sydney's NYE celebrations were an important event that showcased the city and supported local businesses and national tourism, "but we must ensure the event is safe".

"We still have concerns about the potential health impact of crowd gatherings at New Year's Eve, but the state government has assured us it will take responsibility for the event or cancel the 9pm fireworks should public health conditions deteriorate," Cr Moore said.

Mr Ayres described negotiations with Cr Moore that saved the 9pm fireworks as "very constructive".

"It's great to see the 9pm fireworks will proceed in line with the road map conditions announced by the NSW government," Mr Ayres said.

The agreement to stage the 9pm fireworks will be put to an extraordinary meeting of the council on Tuesday, and follows fierce criticism from City of Sydney councillors and business groups over the decision to cancel the 9pm display.

Liberal councillor Craig Chung said councillors had not been consulted on the "unilateral decision by the fun police" to take away the first set of fireworks on December 31.

"If she maintains her stance, Clover will be known as Clover the Grinch who stole New Year's Eve from families," he said.

Labor councillor Linda Scott said Cr Moore "broke Sydney's heart" by cancelling the majority of New Year's Eve celebrations.

Cr Moore said concerns about the ongoing Delta COVID-19 outbreak had prompted the council to ask the NSW government to take over New Year's Eve celebrations, as it had in 2020.

The state government had rebuffed that offer, she said, and "we instead agreed to host a midnight-only fireworks display, and began planning for that event".

Cr Moore said the decision to cancel the 9pm fireworks was driven by a concern that it would lead to a COVID-19 outbreak and attract families with younger children, many of whom would most likely still be unvaccinated by New Year's Eve.

"The fireworks always generate very large crowds and the two separate displays result in the crossover of large numbers of people leaving for one show and arriving for the next," she said.

The state government has since unveiled its road map to reopen NSW, including the plan that, from December 1, vaccinated and unvaccinated people would be able to move freely about the state and participate in large public events.

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