Push to sell Snowy asset powered up

Fleur Anderson

Power company Snowy Hydro should be the next big public asset prepared for sale or Australia may risk seeing a nationally important piece of infrastructure fall into disrepair, an independent infrastructure adviser to the NSW government says.

Infrastructure expert Garry Bowditch and former Howard government finance minister Nick Minchin, the leading advocate of the failed 2006 plan to sell Snowy Hydro, say it is time the Commonwealth and state governments restarted the privatisation.

Mr Bowditch is an adviser to the NSW government’s Infrastructure NSW and chief executive of the University of Wollongong’s SMART Infrastructure Facility, funded by Commonwealth and NSW governments. He said on Thursday the hydro scheme in Australia’s south-east was growing too expensive for governments to maintain.

Mr Minchin said: “I have been a very strong advocate for the privatisation of Snowy Hydro and it’s a tragedy that it did not proceed. It’s a nonsense that an electricity business is owned by three governments [including Victoria’s] and it should be sold, and the sooner the better.”

The chairman of Infrastructure NSW, former NSW Liberal premier Nick Greiner, is in Brussels on a Business Council of Australia mission speaking to big institutions interested in investing in NSW’s mature state-owned infrastructure.

He declined to comment on specific assets but said there was huge international demand for established assets and the NSW government would put the proceeds into the Restart NSW fund to build new infrastructure. Arguments by unions and Labor that privatisations pushed up prices and slashed jobs were “nonsensical”.

*The Australian Financial Review* has reported federal that Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese is considering a blueprint for the sale of ports, water, and roads to raise cash for