

Rocky art of politics could soon lose Barnett



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Colin Barnett will decide on his political future at the end of February and the smart money says he'll pull the pin on an exceptional 16-year parliamentary career.

The Cottesloe MLA spent eight years as Liberal Party deputy while a senior minister in the Court government and followed up with four years as leader of the Opposition.

That means he would make more money from his parliamentary superannuation, possibly as much as \$130,000 a year in retirement, than he does as a humble backbencher.

He's also accomplished much of what he set out to do when relinquishing the Liberal leadership after the last State election. A book on WA's economic life is all but finished and he's used his time in Parliament to raise the debate on issues such as uranium and the rock art on the Burrup Peninsula.

On top of that he's becoming increasingly consumed by the demands of his Toodyay property where he breeds damara sheep.

Mr Barnett has kept even his closest political confidants guessing about his intentions but yesterday was sounding like a man who had made up his mind to go.

"I've been in Parliament for 16 years now, I started in 1990, so I've got to decide whether I want to continue or start a new career," the 56-year-old former academic said.

"Whatever I do I won't be retiring, whether I stay in politics or do something else, I won't be retiring. I've enjoyed pursuing a few issues that matter. If I've done anything worthwhile, it's been raising the profile of the rock art issue on the Burrup Peninsula which may sound unusual for a former Liberal leader and minister but to me it is of immense importance.

"I've done some of the things I said I wanted to do, and I've nearly finished a book . . . I haven't got rid of the crows yet though."

In Parliament, Mr Barnett sits on the Opposition front bench next to Mr Omodei but he does not ask questions and carries no portfolio.

Sounds of goodbyes: Liberal stalwart Colin Barnett is tipped to quit in February.



He has been a sounding board for his leader and mentor for the many new Liberal members from 2005.

There are those in Liberal ranks who still believe Mr Barnett is waiting for a recall to the leadership. They argue that Paul Omodei is unelectable and the two tyros-in-waiting, Matt Birney and Troy Buswell, somewhat tarnished after a bruising year.

They also cite the passing of the deadline for co-ordinating a Cottesloe by-election with that scheduled for Norm Marlborough's seat of Peel on February 3 as a sign that Mr Barnett is leaning towards staying rather than going. But both arguments are given short shrift by Mr Barnett.

"If and when I make a decision, I'll do it for my own reasons and the right reasons and I won't do it because of any other event," he said.

If Mr Barnett decides to go, former public prosecutor Christian Porter, son of Liberal stalwart Chilla Porter, is a solid favourite to get the nod at Liberal preselection for the blue-ribbon seat.