

news

Tripodi pulling strings

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CONTROVERSIAL power-broker Joe Tripodi is back openly wielding policy decisions in government, six months after his banishment from Cabinet.

Mr Tripodi's successor as Ports Minister Paul McLeay last week quietly appointed him as the Government's representative on a taskforce to regulate the transportation of freight to Port Botany.

And *The Daily Telegraph* can also reveal Mr Tripodi has emerged as a key player in the Government's recent deal with the hotels on gaming tax.

The Australian Hotels Association refused to deny yesterday it had been in discussions with Mr Tripodi in the lead-up to the deal that the Government announced in the state Budget.

One Labor source said the AHA had warned that donations would "dry up"

prior to the state election if a deal was not done.

Premier Kristina Keneally yesterday convened her first Cabinet meeting since a trip to China, only to face accusations from Labor sources that there was a 22nd member of Cabinet without a seat at the table.

Ms Keneally has repeatedly denied Mr Tripodi bears influence on her Government but has since revealed to *The Daily Telegraph* that he advised her on her Cabinet when former minister David Campbell quit.

Now it has emerged Mr Tripodi also has been put in charge of some policy in his old portfolio of ports.

Members of the Port Botany Rail Taskforce, including rail companies and stevedores, are said to have been stunned when they met on Friday and Mr Tripodi, rather than Mr McLeay, entered the door.