Labor backs away on $300m rail vow

By CAMDEN SMITH

The Federal Labor Party has distanced itself from a pre-1998 election promise it would commit up to $300 million to the Alice Springs to Darwin railway.

The announcement caught senior Labor politicians by surprise.

A spokesman for Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley said late yesterday a “precise figure” on railway funding would no longer be provided.

Chief Minister Denis Burke accused Labor of “walking away” from the $300 million pledge.

Earlier, NT Opposition Leader Clare Martin said Federal Labor backed the railway and had committed up to $300 million.

She said: “Let’s be very certain of what Labor’s commitment was. It was a commitment to the railway and a commitment of up to $300 million... and that’s still a Binding commitment.”

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Ms Martin said Mr Burke had not revealed exactly how much money was required to secure the project.

She described him as a “total mug” and “loser” and said: “This is a project we want to go ahead. We can’t afford to wait until we’ve got a Beazley Government in Canberra.”

Federal Labor frontbencher Martin Ferguson said a report in the Northern Territory News yesterday the $300 million pledge was an “old promise” was inaccurate.

The announcement from Mr Beazley’s office followed shortly after.