

**Submission
No 5**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Mr Tor Larsen

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Submission to: the *Standing Committee 4: Inquiry into Museums and Galleries*

Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

10 July 2016

I am writing with respect to two of the terms of reference of Standing Committee No. 4's inquiry into and report on the performance or effectiveness of the NSW Government agencies responsible for the organisation, structure and funding of museums and galleries in New South Wales, in particular:

d. access to the collections of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian Museum and any other state collections held in trust for the people of New South Wales, and programs that promote physical and online access.

I am 51 years old and have been a regular visitor to the Power House museum over many years since it was known as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences on the other side of Harris Street in Ultimo in the late 60's and 70s. This building and its contents was a constant source of interest and inspiration to me as a child as well as an entertaining experience involving its many mechanical and technical displays to its wonderful planetarium featuring the Sydney skyline of that time.

The museum's current unique building (within sight of its original historical location) and its expansion to include the decorative and other arts, continues to justify its place in the hearts and minds of whole new generations of growing children and adults who call NSW home. The museum's site in the centre of Sydney is intrinsic to its cultural, historical and educational value across the state, if not the nation. Moving this institution will damage its iconic status and devalue an incredible state asset without delivering any countervailing value to Parramatta.

The Powerhouse Museum is a part of what makes the city of Sydney great and the city itself is the crucible that makes the museum work so well. The museum and its centrally located site are mutually beneficial and this in turn benefits locals, regional, state, interstate and international visitors. Further more, moving this museum will not result in the proposed benefits to Parramatta because it lacks the historical and cultural connections of the Powerhouse's original roots.

Parramatta will definitely benefit from the development and construction of its own applied arts museum, but it must be one that takes as its starting point its specific relationship to Parramatta in the same way the Powerhouse does to the city of Sydney.

The people of Sydney deserve continuing access to physical sites of cultural, scientific, technical, artistic and social/historical interest. Simply turning the city into one large piece of private property for the benefit of developers is not in the public interest. The NSW state government is to be condemned for presenting the move of this iconic institution as an economic opportunity while ignoring the many, more important opportunities the museum provides to young and old in NSW.

f. the development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries.

I am deeply disturbed at the NSW state government's lack of transparency in terms of the narrow range of interests the advice they have taken represents. The Powerhouse museum is an important state asset with a great deal more value to the people of NSW than simple economic development and growth. Mike Baird in particular has pursued a neoliberal, privatisation agenda in many other areas of government, including electricity delivery, casino licences and construction approval and transport infrastructure that does not bode well for the cultural and social future of the state.

Secrecy and backroom dealing with property development and construction interests is not in the public interest. The NSW government must act in better faith. I question the lack of transparency and depth in the consultation and decision-making processes surrounding the proposed move of the Powerhouse museum. And I am disturbed and the clear lack of understanding of the costs involved in moving the museum, ignorance of audience interests and expectations in different population centers and continuing lack of respect for cultural history.

I urge the Standing committee to reject the proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta and instead to focus on the development of a more equitable museums and galleries policy for NSW so that suburban and regional populations can have the same access to cultural resources as the Sydney city populace without stealing from Peter to pay Paul for the benefit of property developers.

Yours sincerely,

Tor Larsen