

**Submission
No 122**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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As a former volunteer worker at the Powerhouse Museum several aspects of the government's proposal to move the museum to Parramatta concern me.

First is the lack of any overall policy on museums in this state to provide a framework for such decisions. The government's proposal thus appears arbitrary, lacks context, appears to be policy making on the run, politically motivated rather than a considered response to process and fails to respond to identified needs of the community. Alternative appear not to have been considered such as: Is there a case for splitting off some of the PHM functions and relocation into separate institutions such as a museum of decorative arts, social, history or an interactive science centre? Development of the existing site? What examples of international best-practice in museum management suggest such a move? Second is the lack of consultation among the public, museum experts, the Museum itself and other stakeholders which can be seen in the strong reaction against the move among informed sources. The lack extends to the people of Parramatta itself: have they been consulted at all on what are the cultural gaps in the city that deserve priority; do they want the PHM; would they prefer another sort of institution such as a dedicated Science Centre; what costs will they be asked to bear either directly or in associated services?

Third, what are the costs and benefits of such a move, including access for visitors both local and foreign and for school children. Sydney's centralised public transport system does not readily lend itself to access to Parramatta comparable to the city for the southern, northern and eastern demographics. What alternative strategies and cost benefit studies have been considered for improving access to the PHM such as free entry, which as I estimated in a paper prepared when I worked as a volunteer of less than \$2 million. Successive governments have imposed arbitrary and substantial cost cuts on the PHM that have compromised its operations at miniscule savings in terms of overall government expenditure. Has the cost/benefit of a major injection of capital and recurrent costs for the existing Museum and the storage site at Castle Hill been considered as an alternative?

Fourth, no consideration appears to have been given to heritage issues. The PHM from its inception has ahead a strong association with the city and, following the destruction of the original home in the Crystal Palace, with Ultimo. The former powerhouse that provided power for the Sydney tram network is on considerable heritage value and its adaptive reuse as the home of the PHM has its own heritage value.

It is absurd to ride roughshod over such considerations as the government seems intent on doing in proceeding with its plan. It would be like the UK government arbitrarily deciding to move the V&A museum from Kenington to Stratford to bolster the credentials of the post-Olympic site, or the US government moving bits of the Smithsonian to Baltimore. The genesis of this idea, it's arbitrariness, the lack of proper consideration, policy framework, motivation and disdain for opposition to the move need to be fully investigated by the Committee.