

**Submission
No 155**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Mr Lionel Glendenning

Date received: 29 August 2016

The Hon Robert Borsak MLC

Committee Chair

General Purpose Standing Committee no 4

Legislative Council

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into museums and galleries

The Submission addresses Terms of reference 1(e) and 1a)

Synopsis:

- Extremely poor, short term – long term Government cultural planning
- Arbitrary nature of limited Government spending
- Regional cultural development ‘neutered’ by massive over-investment in politically driven major projects
- Poor integration and interaction between major state institutions for joint regional programs
- Few initiatives from major state institutions for joint regional programs
- Limited funding models for regional collections, exhibitions and public programs
- Unnecessary politically driven, unrepresentative, poorly-developed initiatives for major institutions – Sydney Opera House, Sydney Modern, Powerhouse Museum
- Government initiatives to encourage and facilitate cultural investment: for example, the development of cultural facilities by promoting to benefactors the benefit of shareholdings in the corporate sense in regional cultural facilities; dollar for dollar regional cultural collections and building programs; bring back the Opera House lottery as per Heritage Lottery UK.

Commentary:

The various Acts governing our major cultural institutions are long overdue for review, updating and change. Government investment in cultural institutions is falling for both federal and state per capita, particularly at a regional level.

New models are required for major institutions that require broader reach and collaboration across the state, developing ‘centres of excellence’ satellites rather than endlessly expanding central core facilities.

Amalgamation of existing institutions would create new institutions which better define and exhibit collections ie MCA and Sydney Modern combined and relocated to Western Sydney. A new Decorative Arts and Design Museum could be developed in the Registrar General's site, Macquarie Street, Queens Square. The Powerhouse Museum should consolidate on its Ultimo site and include a 300 seat Planetarium (similar to the Rose Centre for Earth and Space, American Museum of Natural History, New York) as an income producing cultural/science/education project within the creative and tourism precinct.

The combination of reduced funding, poor management, poor leadership, 'efficiency' dividends, staff redundancies, loss of corporate memory and professional competence, mediocre and inexperienced senior appointments and tragic oversighting by Trustees and political advisors have decimated the collective capacity of the cultural and heritage sectors.

Trustees must cease to be political appointments but should be drawn from a pool of successful philanthropists, professionals, community leaders and specialists with cultural and business experience at the highest levels. They must perform: attend regular meetings, be committed to the institution not government, fundraise as a primary goal, avoid micro-managing and not be status seeking prima donnas.

The current government obsession with 'asset sales' is more a case of 'asset stripping' – a once only 'steal' that ignores long term investment and land banking, public good, intrinsic worth and future needs and priorities. A cabal of merchant bankers, lawyers and developers benefits from extreme fees and yields for overpriced projects while taxpayers continue to pay (tolls and user pays).

The process should only ever lease key sites for limited time frames after careful parliamentary scrutiny, debate and agreement. Particularly with reference to the Premier's attempt to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta and sell the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum to private developers - "a done deal" Premier Baird.

Ultimately we have the 'privatisation' of high value government sites – with cultural and educational institutions emasculated – directed to 'sell' sites and 'move' – in the case of the Powerhouse, a gargantuan and hugely expensive task – to benefit very few and indeed of no appreciable benefit for the citizens of New South Wales.

Do our most sacred of sites now only have an economic value trumping society's long term cultural investments? The Powerhouse Museum has been an anchor in Ultimo for over 120 years and should be there for 100 plus years and beyond.

Where is this government's 'social license' to trash more than a century of careful long term government investment in our society's cultural assets for short term gratification and current fashionable causes – infrastructure – code for big expensive mega roads – that invariably lead to cost overruns and unsustainable outcomes.

The context/atmosphere in response to any questioning or request for review or debate is one characterised by:

- A non-consultative, blinkered, asset stripping Premier with political advisors deploying 'evangelical capitalism.'

- Thought bubbles – one line sentences in obscure infrastructure reports – no consultation – politburo directives.
- ‘It’s a done deal!’ statement made by both Premier and Deputy Premier BUT who has done the deal – when, with whom and with what probity?
- Default position to informed criticism is to construct an imagined east versus west divide – non-existent class warfare and paint a false picture of nimby-elitism.
- Cultural ambassador – unknowing, inexperienced in terms of museums and collections – yet opinionated and non consultative.
- A Deputy Premier, ex Dubbo policeman with very limited experience of Arts or City portfolio – dismissive of feasible options and poorly advised.
- The proposed Parramatta museum brief – “cabinet in confidence.” How can a Museum Brief be considered ‘cabinet in confidence?’

Summary:

Perhaps in summary the most serious incompetence is the massive impact an expenditure of \$600 - \$1 billion for the Powerhouse relocation will have on the struggling existing regional museums and the deferment, truncation or cancelling of much needed resourcing of regional museums, community collections, Aboriginal keeping places and galleries.

This is the ‘elephant in the room’ – culture in New South Wales extends beyond Greater Sydney to the far borders of this state.

It should not be the plaything of a Premier using ‘Cabinet in confidence’ to shield a ‘deal already done’ – an existing, perfectly suitable cultural institution should not be trashed. The state collections, held in trust for the people of NSW, could easily be exhibited in collaborative ways so that a new constellation of regional museums and galleries can reach a broader public, and cultural tourists are encouraged to explore New South Wales beyond the city limits.

Lionel Glendenning AA STC Hons, B,Arch Hons 1 UNSW, M.Arch. Harvard, Dip. Environ St. Macq. Life Fellow, Powerhouse Museum.

Architect (retd), Design tutor: UNSW, Syd U, UTS.

Design Director HBO+EMTB 1988 - 2012

Principal Architect Public Buildings, NSW Government Architect’s Office 1984 - 1988

RAIA NSW Merit Awards: Claymore Public School

IMAX Theatre, Darling Harbour Bicentennial Park, Homebush Bay;

Powerhouse Museum: Sulman Medal (RAIA NSW),

National Awards: Powerhouse Museum: Belle Interiors; Presidents Award; Finalist Sir Zelman Cowen Award.

Architect of record: Powerhouse Museum

NSW Tourism Awards