

**Supplementary
Submission
No 142a**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Jennifer Sanders

Date received: 15 August 2016

The Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Committee Chair,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4,
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries No. 4

Submission from Jennifer Sanders, August 2016

Terms of reference: 1e) and 1f)

Summary:

This paper addresses the order of costs and risks anticipated to be involved in the proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. The author has addressed these based on the limited information publicly available about the possible scale and scope of the move and, drawing from her more than 30 year career at the Powerhouse Museum, 20 of those years at senior executive level with responsibilities for core museum-specific responsibilities.

It is mystifying and disturbing that such major and complex undertaking could be announced as 'a done deal' without a comprehensive business case or transparent evidence convincingly arguing the case for this unprecedented action – a decision that would necessitate the uprooting of New South Wales' major technological, design and history museum, and its on-site collection store and facilities, to an as yet unsecured site or sites at least 23km away from the central Sydney precinct - the Museum's home for 123 years.

Commentary:

Order of Costs: The key points are:

- The KPMG study (not publicly released), which informed the 11 April announcement, was apparently only about one option - the Powerhouse Museum relocated to Parramatta and the Ultimo site and building sold. The focus was to identify a site and, as far as one can surmise, cost a new museum. The scale and type of museum that was costed is unknown as the brief is unknown. Indeed the projected cost is unknown. Whether it is a diminution of the present Powerhouse in terms of size and "museum experience" is unknown without knowing what the brief for the Parramatta museum was.
- Other options proposed by several key players were not costed, let alone properly considered such as: building a satellite museum at Parramatta; building a cultural centre primarily for the Western Sydney/ Parramatta arts and culture community and drawing on collections and expertise of the State's cultural institutions; building a museum that first and foremost develops from Western Sydney community consultation as to what type of museum would best represent, engage and benefit the region would like - with or without the involvement of the State's cultural institutions; etc.

- So no alternatives which may be more cost effective; have less destructive consequences for the Powerhouse at Ultimo; be more in sync with the cultural aspirations of Western Sydney/Parramatta; that do not sell off public land; that do not entail the considerable and as yet uncoded burden of packing up and moving the collection displayed and stored at Ultimo etc were considered.
- To expand on this last point - apparently the KPMG study was not asked to provide detailed costings of the move of the on-site stored collection to new storage - only a ballpark figure. Historically and functionally integral with the Powerhouse Museum, the Ultimo Tram Depot, aka Harwood Building, (6-8,000sqm) has a state of the art collection store in the basement which houses 240,000 individual items. The store has international museum standard climate controlled storage for fragile objects, secure storage for the arms collection, a strong room for high value objects etc.

The Tram Depot also has collection management and conservation facilities; a publicly accessible research library; curatorial offices; exhibition workshops and a range of back of house facilities and staff accommodation. This facility will also be demolished and it is unknown how much of the functions and facilities in this building will be included in any proposed building in Western Sydney. So a whole separate study is apparently yet to be done to detail the not inconsiderable costs for this dislocation if the plan proceeds.

- Regarding collection storage, the Museum opened the Museum Discovery Centre at Castle Hill in 2005 - one of the first publicly accessible collection stores in Australia and a key cultural asset for Western Sydney. Due to reopen this year after the recent addition of another state of the art publicly accessible store for collections from the Australian Museum and Sydney Living Museums, the site is pretty much at capacity so new land will need to be acquired and new collection storage facilities built to accommodate the displaced collection from the Ultimo site.
- If this capital cost is unknown, so too are the staff costs for such a major collection project. These will be additional to the staff required to plan and build the new museum while keeping the existing museum operating successfully. While there will be some points of synergy, in effect there will be 3 separate work forces working for upwards of 10 years: running the Powerhouse museum; planning and developing the proposed new museum; planning for and relocating the stored collection.
- Visitor projections for the proposed museum have not been released. This is an important source of revenue and should include a breakdown of visitor categories to take account of the changed location and, by implication, changed visitor patterns. It is likely that most of the 40% of tourist visits will be lost given the location is distant from Sydney's tourist attractions and, the difficulties of reaching the site if an international, interstate or regional tourist. It is likely that the pattern of Sydney residents' visits will change markedly given the greatly reduced accessibility of the proposed location for visitors from the north and south of Sydney. Sydney's major transport systems are radial, and vehicle access to and parking at the new site will be limited.
- There has apparently been no community consultation seeking the input and involvement of the people of Western Sydney/Parramatta into the type of museum they would like to see developed as a 'cultural beacon' for their region. It is unknown if the population of the region will be a major source of visitors to the relocated museum especially as visitor records show that they have not been avid visitors to the Powerhouse. A museum/cultural attraction informed by the wishes and desires of the people of Western Sydney and, developed cognisant of the region's distinctive history and contemporary cultural diversity would be ahead of the game in terms of community ownership and participation.

Risk Assessment: it is unknown if any risk assessment has been undertaken or is planned as part of this plan – a crucial consideration for such a major project which is characterised by uncertainty, upheaval and destruction.

- A major area where risk will need to be assessed and must be managed is the priceless and world class collection - not only because of its more than half a billion dollars value but also because the cultural significance of its objects ranging from international significance to national, state, regional and local significance. At one end of the spectrum is the priceless and internationally significant 1785 Boulton and Watt steam engine – the ‘Mona Lisa of the Industrial revolution’ - as well as many valuable objects of technological significance such as No 1 Locomotive and the Catalina flying boat. The largest and heaviest aircraft to be hung in any museum in the world, the Catalina was installed plastic wrapped with its wings detached before the building was completed - it is ‘built in’ so to speak so any extraction will be a major, costly and delicate exercise. Then there are several more locomotives and the stationary steam engines installed in the live steam exhibition, all with specially strengthened floor loadings, plus space technology suspended from the purpose-built, strengthened Boiler Hall roof.
- As well, there is the risk of loss and damage inherent in the documentation, packing, moving and unpacking of around 240,000 items stored in the Tram Shed collection store. Time consuming and labour intensive, requiring trained staff, and special treatments and packing processes, this massive task cannot be rushed and must be tailored to safely move a dizzying range of objects and materials. Given the Museum has just completed a series of collection management projects over the last 25 years to ensure the best possible accessible storage for its collections, it beggars belief that it would be directed to embark on such a major, unnecessary, expensive and risky collection relocation.
- A major risk in the selected Parramatta site is the flood risk inherent in the riverside site – well documented as a flood prone site. The recently opened Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, was adversely affected by the flooding of the Brisbane River because the buildings’ air conditioning units were flooded thereby leading to unacceptably high levels of humidity in the exhibition spaces. In May this year, the Louvre and other Seine side museums in Paris had to close and take drastic action to safeguard their treasures as the floodwaters rose. Any flood risks to the building and collection cannot be tolerated and would make the NSW Government a laughing stock internationally.

Lost opportunities: There is a raft of lost opportunities inherent in the implementation of this plan:

- The Museum’s economic contribution to the education and creative industries precinct of Ultimo/Broadway/Chippendale/Surry Hills. The Museum was moved there in 1893 from a temporary building in the Domain to its new home, the Technological Museum adjacent to the then Sydney Technical College in order to develop an education precinct for the people of Sydney. The 1988 move to the renewed Ultimo Powerhouse, (from which it took its new name - Powerhouse Museum) 200m down Harris St, reenergised its role and contribution and has fostered the growth of UTS; the ABC; Sydney TAFE indeed the wider community with Central Square, Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre, Broadway, Haymarket, Chippendale, Surry Hills etc. Indeed the ABC, the pool and UTS Harris Street buildings use the vaulted form derived from the Museum’s Wran building.
- The Museum’s economic and cultural contribution to the tourism sector as a major tourist destination in Darling Harbour. The 2014-2015 Annual Report gives a breakdown of tourist visits to the Museum: 12% regional NSW; 18% interstate; 9% overseas - a total of 39% from outside Sydney and, 61% Sydney residents. When the revitalisation of Darling Harbour is completed, the projected number of visitors is 40 million, up from the present 26 million. The Powerhouse Museum is a major tourist attraction for visitors to Darling Harbour and to the Sydney CBD.

- The economic and cultural loss of benefactors and donors who have been longstanding supporters of the Museum and who have indicated their intention to redirect their donations and bequests to interstate institutions. The Powerhouse Museum's overall success relies on the support of donors and benefactors. Since 1984, objects worth more than \$20 million were sponsored or donated to the Museum. Recurrent funds accounted for just \$6 million worth of acquisitions. If there is not active and generous support by the public of the Museum's collection it will wither and die. Some new collection donors and benefactors may step up from its new audiences but traditionally, the Museum's benefactors are drawn from longstanding supporters from a demographic that the Museum has lost and risks diminishing further if this relocation goes ahead.
- The massive loss of the heritage values of the site and buildings which are significant remnants of New South Wales' industrial heritage and, in the Powerhouse Museum conversion - an award winning architectural masterpiece. The National Trust NSW has proposed the Powerhouse for State Heritage listing. When the Powerhouse was opened in 1988, it was not thought necessary to propose this listing as the building is a Museum and State-owned with an asset life of 100+ years!
- Should the Ultimo site be sold, the government will have disposed of a site it owns outright – a unique 2 hectare inner city site, adjacent to a revitalised Darling Harbour and part of an energised creative precinct, easily accessible by Sydney residents and visitors from NSW, interstate and overseas and which features distinctive architectural landmarks in a sequence of award winning buildings along Harris Street: Cox, Woolley, Gehry, NSW Government's Architect's Office Principal Architect Glendenning, Seidler, Neild.
- The Powerhouse brand is internationally known with extraordinary brand recognition across the cultural, education and design worlds. Estimated to be worth millions, the brand has been steadily developed since 1988 through an international, national and statewide program of touring exhibitions, education programs and loans to other major museums; an outstanding website with worldwide users due to the searchability of its collection data; a record of scholarly and general reader publications; and a series of groundbreaking exhibitions and events at the Powerhouse itself. Many of the world's leading designers are proud to list the Powerhouse Museum as a collector of their work. This unique and hard-won brand will be thrown away if this plan to move the museum proceeds. The Powerhouse Museum will be no more.

Selling the Powerhouse Museum would be a wasteful destruction of high quality museum infrastructure. The Museum's buildings are less than 30 years old and have innovative and environmentally sustainable engineering services to the highest standards still applicable today. They are built for an asset life of 100+ years. Infrastructure NSW's own review of Sydney's cultural infrastructure says the buildings are in good condition. The museum had a \$25m refurbishment in the last five years. The published projected income of \$150 – 200million from selling the Museum's Ultimo site and buildings will not even go close to defraying the full cost of this relocation plan and will be negated by the destruction of the existing Museum buildings and facilities.

The taxpayer will be the loser in the demolition and destruction of valuable cultural assets at Ultimo while paying for a smaller new museum at Parramatta plus paying the associated costs of moving and rehousing at collection of immense value to the people of NSW. There are far better options which would result in the 'cultural beacon' Western Sydney deserves.

Jennifer Sanders
April 2016 updated August 2016

Brief Resume: Jennifer Sanders BA Hons Anthropology, USyd

Jennifer Sanders had a long and distinguished career at the Powerhouse Museum where she was Deputy Director, Collections, Content Development and Outreach from 2001 to February 2009. Appointed to the Powerhouse in 1978, Jennifer was a curator then senior curator, decorative arts and design for a decade.

A key member of the team for the Powerhouse redevelopment, in 1988 Ms Sanders was appointed Assistant Director Collections responsible for the Museum's curatorial, registration, preservation and regional NSW outreach programs and, for several years, exhibitions, education, publications and library services as well. In 2001 Ms Sanders was given responsibility for the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and later also Sydney Observatory and the Powerhouse Discovery Centre. Ms Sanders regularly deputised for the Museum's Director.

From 1999 to 2008 Ms Sanders was a member of the National Cultural Heritage Committee and, in 2001 she was a member of the NSW Centenary of Federation Committee (archiving, cataloguing, and preservation of historical materials). From 2007 to 2012, Ms Sanders was a member of the External Advisory Panel, Design Research Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne and Chair, Design Archives Advisory Panel, RMIT University.

From 2009, Ms Sanders has undertaken range of heritage, museum and curatorial consultancies.

1981 Churchill Fellowship: public access to museum collections, North America and Europe

1987 Museum Management Institute, Berkeley, USA. Getty Leadership Institute.

In 2003 Jennifer was awarded a Centenary of Federation Medal.

Jennifer Sanders

I am willing to appear before the Inquiry

I am happy to have this submission published with my name attached.