



Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd

ABN: 53624690277

The Secretary

PO Box 3042

Blaxland East NSW 2774

admin@dsmg.org.au



SUBMISSION FROM DHARUG STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP LTD

Response to Comments by Mr Collins, Ms Havilah and Mr Brown to the Select Committee on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales, Monday 15 February 2021 (Transcript p.26ff)

Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd (DSMG) previously made a presentation to the Select Committee (8 October 2020) in which it was made clear that DSMG opposes the proposed development of the Powerhouse at Parramatta and is deeply concerned

- by its impacts,
- by the proposal to remove Willow Grove from its context,
- by the proposal to reinforce the erasure of Dharug people from the landscape by relocating Willow Grove to a precinct where it will be controlled by Deerubbin LALC, an organisation that has directly and consistently refused to acknowledge Dharug people and misrepresented Dharug people, Country and history, and
- by the proposed development which is simply inappropriate for the site.

In this submission, we seek to address comments presented to the Select Committee on 15 February 2021 by Mr Collins, Ms Havilah and Mr Chris Brown, which directly refers to DSMG in ways that misrepresent our position and have misled the Select Committee and therefore the NSW Parliament.

First, we note that no legally binding commitment regarding the future of Willow Grove has been discussed with DSMG personnel. The only binding agreement that we know of that is directly relevant is the agreement between MAAS and DSMG, which we referred to in our original evidence and which MAAS staff, trustees and supporters seem incapable of acknowledging or adhering to.

Second, we reject the suggestion that the concerns already raised by DSMG (amongst others) can be adequately addressed by Mr Collins' *"intention, once we have full access to the site and what is beneath it, to conduct an archaeological dig to see whether there are artefacts other than those that have already been pointed out"*.

Third, we totally reject the implication of Mr Collins' incomplete comment that he is capable of representing how the site and its treatment in this process might be understood *"if you look at it from an Indigenous point of view"*. He, and the organisation for which he is speaking in the comments, has demonstrated that he is incapable of looking at the issues from an Indigenous standpoint and should not be listened to as if he has any such understanding. He states that he *"did hear in the last session that there are several sites available; some of them are owned by the traditional owners, some owned by Parramatta council and some owned by the State Government. So, there are a lot of options."* Mr Collins simply does not understand that Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council not only does not represent Dharug people but has actively opposed recognition of Dharug people as custodians. The Dharug community owns nothing except the site of the Blacktown Native Institution that was returned to Dharug care in 2018 after 7 years of negotiation, and even that was opposed by Deerubbin LALC. Mr Collins amplifies his offence against Dharug interests by saying that *"I have yet to meet with the Dharug people, but I certainly will. Tomorrow we will be meeting with the North Parramatta action group and after that we will be*



meeting with the Deerubbin land council in Parramatta". Once again, it is offensive to hear that Mr Collins relegates Dharug custodians to last on his list of people to be consulted – and that he thinks the Deerubbin LALC are appropriate cultural authorities on Dharug Country. THEY ARE NOT! It is now one full month since Mr Collins' appearance before the Select Committee and DSMG has not heard from him.

His failure to act on undertakings such as this undermine his credibility completely.

Fourth, Mr Collins' interruption before Ms Havilah was able to respond to a direct question from the Chair, reflects the same sort of paternalistic and offensive "we-know-best" attitude that has imposed immense misery on First Nations across the state and the nation, by concluding that destruction imposed on Dharug Nura in previous moments of developmentalist madness (in this case and in his view "*a pretty miserable-looking car park and a whole lot of annexes that have been tacked on out the back of Willow Grove*") justifies an even more monstrous, disrespectful and destructive imposition on Nura. This arrogant, disrespectful interruption does nothing to provide us with confidence that Dharug concerns about the process – even if they are heard – will be understood.

Fifth, when Mr Collins goes on to acknowledge that he is "*yet to meet with the Dharug people*", he reveals that he is keen to explore the feelings of Deerubbin Land Council and to work out what progress he and the Land Council can make – apparently regardless of Dharug expressions of concern. This is possibly an accurate representation of the way the Museum is approaching the matter, but it is offensive and inadequate as a public process.

Sixth, when Mr Collins finally allows Ms Havilah to speak, she states that she has "*met with Dharug's Strategic Management Group [sic] on multiple occasions, and they are also representative of our community reference group, and I met with them onsite a couple of weeks ago as part of that ongoing process of the management of archaeology on the site, which is being led by Infrastructure NSW*".

She adds that the engagements she identifies are part of ongoing work with "*a number of First Nations stakeholders as part of that that have been consulted and are leading that process*". This is simply not accurate. The onsite meeting was a discussion of proposed methodology for the archaeological work on the site, led by Curio as the consultants managing the CRG and DSMG representative Dr Michelle Locke was the only participant who attended that particular meeting. That meeting was never identified as a formal consultative meeting between Ms Havilah, MAAS and DSMG and it is inappropriate for Ms Havilah to suggest that this was a formal consultation of any sort. Neither DSMG nor any Dharug or First Nation group is leading anything to do with the Powerhouse at Parramatta except sadness and protest at the inadequate process and insulting outcomes being produced. DSMG and Dharug individuals have persisted in attending the Community Reference Group, a statutory process being led by Curio Projects, despite the disrespect they have experienced, despite marginalisation of their contributions in the Museum's and the State's processes, and despite misrepresentation of the nature of their involvement by Ms Havilah. When Ms Havilah says, "*I have open conversations with Dharug's Strategic Management Group, which I did just two weeks ago*", we do not know what "open conversation" she is referring to. We have received invitations to continue participation in the CRG from Ms Havilah in an email that expressed acknowledgement and appreciation of our continued willingness to contribute, but to refer to these as "open conversation" stretches English expression well past its credible breaking point. We note that since DSMG presented to the Select Committee in October 2020, neither Ms Havilah or any



MAAS representative or member of the Western Sydney Powerhouse Alliance (which was coincidentally launched as DSMG were giving evidence to the Inquiry on 8th October 2020), has

spoken with DSMG or responded to our public position and evidence. We note that Ms Havilah seems to think that DSMG's participation in the CRG is sufficient as a basis for what she considers to be appropriate consultation. We completely reject that the CRG is a forum for community consultation and we have expressed these concerns on the CRG meetings. We have faced offensive and reprehensible language in those forums, and we persist in participating as one of our only opportunities to be heard at all and to try to increase the transparency and accountability of something we are experiencing as a very poor public process.

Finally, we note that in his evidence (Transcript p39), Mr Chris Brown responds to the question *"Have you spoken to the Dharug people about the Indigenous heritage there?"* by saying *"I have actually engaged with my Indigenous advisers—sorry, my trusted Indigenous advisers. The Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council are the owners, proudly under New South Wales legislation, and currently the guardians of Indigenous people in western Sydney."* Mr Brown seems to be implying that Indigenous people other than Deerubbin LALC, including DSMG, are not to be trusted. **This is offensive and we expect an apology and withdrawal of this offensive comment.** He goes on to suggest that the current process that DSMG experiences as deeply flawed is capable of resulting in *"the world's greatest Indigenous gallery and cultural centre in that Parramatta jail that is on Deerubbin land."* This cannot be allowed to stand without challenge. The land continues to be Dharug Land, even if the Land Council has been given statutory rights that are denied to custodians. Deerubbin LALC has no cultural authority, whatever statutory rights have been granted under legislation that continues and amplifies the colonial power structures that have so marginalised Dharug custodians on our own Country. We note that the NSW Land Rights Act made no provision for recognition of customary relationships to Country as a basis for transferring land to the Land Council structure it created. It is beyond the scope of this response to provide a detailed documentation of the ways in which the statutory processes associated with an inadequate Land Rights Act in the 1980s further marginalised, erased and traumatised Dharug people –

This language reads like the old Aboriginal Protection Board and Welfare Board language in which the state stood in as guardian of Aboriginal people in order to dispossess us and remove children from their families. This is unacceptable and offensive in the 21st Century – as it was in the 20th and 19th Centuries! We simply reject Mr Brown's comments to the Select Committee as ignorant, misguided and misleading, and we trust that the Select Committee will acknowledge this and simply ignore them and completely reject their implications.

We trust that our concerns with the accuracy and adequacy of the representations to the Select Committee by Mr Collins, Ms Havilah and also by Mr Brown will be noted and taken into consideration when addressing the issues addressed in those presentations and submissions.

To reinforce our earlier submission to your committee, DSMG opposes the transfer of Dharug Nura to Deerubbin LALC; we oppose the proposed demolition and reconstruction of Willow Grove; we reject the notion that repositioning the remnants of the building to a hostile colonial precinct that is imbued with the violence of the military occupation of the district is appropriate; we continue to reject the cultural credibility of experts who continue to suggest that this is an "excellent", "world class" or "iconic" cultural institution, simply because, as Mr Collins notes in his evidence, it is *"the*



Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd
The Secretary, PO Box 3042, Blaxland East, NSW 2774
admin@dsmg.org.au



second largest cultural spend in this State's history since the Opera House". DSMG suggests that respectful, informed and sustainable relationships are the foundation of world class cultural institutions, not money, and that the process pursued by the proponents of the Powerhouse at

Parramatta have long been more interested in money than culture, relationships, sustainability or respect.

If required, DSMG would be happy to reappear before your committee to clarify our comments.

Julie Jones
(Chair)

Michelle Locke
(Secretary)

Richard Howitt
(Director-Finance)

For Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd.