

**Submission
No 109**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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**SUBMISSION TO THE GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO.4,
INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

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Introduction

I am writing as a private citizen who visits Sydney regularly. I grew up in Granville before moving to Wagga Wagga forty years ago. So I don't understand the nonsense, concocted I believe by politicians, that there is a cultural divide between Parramatta and the inner city of Sydney. These politicians seem to be saying that the inner city has too much culture at the expense of the west, which presumably has none. Nothing could be further from the truth. I love to visit the cultural and heritage attractions of Parramatta - Old Government House, Experiment Farm Cottage, Elizabeth Farm, among others. I also love to visit the Powerhouse Museum, Art Gallery of NSW and other cultural attractions in the city. Of course there are more of these attractions in the inner city because the population is bigger and also for historical reasons. The heritage/cultural institutions of the west and the inner city are complementary and give each area its own distinctive character. There is no need to pit them against each other and this is the basis for my opposition to the proposed sale and relocation of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta. I also oppose the proposed demolition of the Powerhouse Museum building. My reasons are presented below.

Term of Reference 1e

In the light of the above introduction, I see no positives in the proposed sale and relocation of the Powerhouse Museum nor in the demolition of the museum building. After all, the power house was re-designed for the express purpose of housing huge permanent exhibits such as steam engines, locomotives and aircraft. Moving these massive exhibits to a new multi-storey building would cost many millions more than would be generated from the sale of the Powerhouse Museum. The possible damage to these massive irreplaceable icons would be a tragedy.

Another reason I oppose the sale and relocation of the Powerhouse Museum is that its present location is ideal because it's so accessible for visitors like myself who come from interstate. The recent opening of the Goods Line Pathway makes access so easy from Central Station. As well, there is a light rail station located nearby not to mention the buses that run along Harris and George streets. This makes the Powerhouse so accessible for people from all over Sydney. Relocation to Parramatta is not a viable option transport-wise because it would not be accessed easily by rail.

It has been stated by politicians in media releases that one reason for the proposed sale and relocation of the Powerhouse Museum is that it "underperforms" in terms of patronage. I disagree strongly and I base my opinion on an article by Kirsty Needham in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (22nd November 2015) which stated that "... the Powerhouse Museum saw a 12% leap in visitors this year, contradicting Deputy Premier Troy Grant's claim the museum must be moved west because fewer Sydneysiders are using it." And, "... the annual report lodged in the NSW Parliament a day later showed strong attendance...". The Deputy Premier's claim is spurious and a desperate attempt to shore up his flawed arguments for moving the museum. The museum is doing an excellent job in attracting visitors in its present location.

A further reason for my opposition to the proposed demolition of the museum site and its replacement by blocks of apartments is that the building is one of great historical and architectural significance for Sydney. It was awarded the 1988 Sulman award for architectural merit. The appalling proposal to demolish this gem is reminiscent of the call many years ago to demolish the Queen Victoria Building to enable "... the release of valuable land for redevelopment – the exact same argument that was advanced for the destruction of the QVB." (Trevor Kennedy in *The Australian*, 15th June 2015). Now the QVB is a tremendous asset to Sydney for tourism, retail and because it is just so beautiful to look at. In much the same way, it would be extremely short-sighted to destroy the magnificent Powerhouse Museum, presumably for the benefit of a few over that of the many. The long-term gains of retaining the museum as it is far outweigh its destruction.

Section 1e asks whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development. Of course there are! My suggestion is to build a new museum in Parramatta which highlights and celebrates the history and heritage of the city and its surrounds. At the same time I strongly oppose the sale and relocation of the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. Indeed the state government should be making the most of the Powerhouse collections by lending its vast collection now in storage to the new museum in Parramatta. Indeed, why not give the regional areas such as Wagga Wagga a chance to appreciate these treasures by making regional loans. Why should Parramatta be the only place under consideration?

Term of Reference 1f

There has been no transparency by the state government in its proposals regarding the fate of the Powerhouse Museum. Where was the community consultation, both with inner city residents and the residents of Parramatta? Why haven't regional visitors been asked for their opinions? Who has been asked? Presumably the stakeholders, namely the developer mates of the politicians. This is not an anti-Liberal/National comment. It applies to Labor as well. Where is the feasibility study for the proposal? Has the government considered alternatives and costed them? Well, who knows? Certainly not the voters of New South Wales. We deserve better.

Conclusion

The proposal to sell and relocate the Powerhouse Museum and then destroy the building is an ill-thought out one which insults the intelligence of all voters in New South Wales. I sincerely hope that the committee seriously considers, and rejects, the false arguments for the proposal, i.e., the supposed inaccessibility of the museum; the concocted "us" vs "them"; the underperformance of the museum; the lie that Parramatta has no culture; that heritage means nothing and that there is no alternative to destroying the museum.

Wendy McLean