

**Submission
No 118**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Mrs Darani Lewers

Date received: 12 August 2016

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
General Purpose Standing Committee No 4

Inquiry into museums and galleries

That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 inquire into and report on the performance or effectiveness of the NSW Government agencies responsible for the organisation, structure and funding of museums and galleries in New South Wales, and in particular:

- a) *NSW government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries, museum and gallery buildings and heritage collections, including volunteer managed museums and museums managed by Councils.*

The low level of state funding for the museums and galleries has meant that qualified positions have been cut, collections are not conserved or accessed by the public, core responsibilities can not be carried out and the institutions are forced to produce populist exhibitions and projects to bring the public through the door. This means that the massive cultural wealth contained in the collections is not accessible.

- c) *Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums and galleries, and their research and collecting priorities.*

To revitalize the sector, the state Government should develop policies and matching funding to ensure museums and galleries, (at a state and regional level), appoint directors with a curatorial background, experience in museum management and a commitment to meet the public's needs and interests. There should also be a strong collection management team to maintain and develop specialist collections, exhibitions and projects supported by acquisitions, education and conservation programs and research policies. The NSW government needs a plan for museums that goes beyond infrastructure to consider gaps and omissions in the profile of NSW museums, and opportunities for collaboration and sharing resources, collections and facilities. Institutions should be encouraged to reach a state wide audience and develop collaborative programs and partnerships with museums and galleries in western Sydney and regional NSW

The state government should also fund special programs to assist regional galleries (the most neglected tier of the sector) to conserve and catalogue their collections, upgrade the curatorial skills of staff, develop public programs, train volunteers and create promotional material.

- e) *The sale of the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta, and whether there are alternate strategies to support the museum development.*

The sale of the Powerhouse Museum site at Ultimo and its move to Parramatta is a deeply flawed decision for the following reasons.

- 1) Unique Site

Established in Ultimo 130 years ago the Powerhouse is the only museum in Australia that specialises in Science, Technology and the Decorative Arts. A museum of international standing the Powerhouse is well placed to become part of the new "silicon valley" in Ultimo which has the highest density of technology start-ups in Australia. This area is the centre of design industries in NSW. In addition it is the site for some of the country's major cultural institutions including the ABC, the University of Technology, University of Sydney and TAFE. This hub of diverse interests is ideally placed to foster cultural exchanges with the Powerhouse Museum.

These synergies will not be possible in Parramatta which has a different history, geographical layout and development.

2) Lack of space and funds

The mooted \$150 - 200 M that may be realized from the sale of the Ultimo site will result in a museum in Parramatta one quarter of the size of the current Ultimo museum. The Powerhouse has 20,000 sqm of public space and about 15,000 sqm of workshops, offices and purposed designed storage. The Art Gallery of NSW has estimated the cost of their proposed new extension of 10,000 sqm at \$450m. The Powerhouse is double that in its current form, so the scale of the shortfall is large given the only money pledged is from the privatisation of the public land. This also means that contrary to the NSW Government's statement concerning increased museum space, at Parramatta much of the present collection on public display at Ultimo, must go into storage. Already more than 98% of the PHM's collection is in storage.

3) Audience

Re established at Parramatta, the museum is unlikely to attract more than a small number of international tourists who visit Sydney. Many interstate and regional visitors who holiday in Sydney have stated they will not be interested in taking a day's trip to Parramatta to visit a museum. Given that nearly 40% of the museums

current visitors are from overseas, interstate or regional NSW, the museums move

risks losing an important section of its audiences, which will in turn have grave consequences for the museums' revenue.

4) Collection

The scope and size of the Powerhouse collection - Science, Technology and Decorative Arts (valued at half a billion), is enormous. Museum experts estimate that the costs of preparing new storage and display facilities as well as resourcing the packing and transfer of the collection will involve huge additional costs, particularly the dismantling of the parts, the transport and reconstruction to Parramatta of the Boulton and Watt steam engine, No 1 Locomotive and the Catalina flying boat (the largest and heaviest to be hung in a museum in the world). Apparently the State Government has made no detailed costings of packing and moving the collection displayed and stored at Ultimo, raising questions about the economical viability of transporting the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta.

5) The Decorative Arts (Applied Arts)

The Decorative Arts collection forms a major part of the Powerhouse Museum collection. It is connected to Science and Technology through design. Decorative Arts practitioners known as crafts people or designers work in one or several materials and processes. They develop new technologies in their chosen material such as glass, clay, metal and fibre to create innovative objects in a production series or as one off pieces.

The Decorative Arts collection is a national collection unique in the state. It has both a strong historical and contemporary focus spanning over 100 years. It includes Asian, European, Colonial, Aboriginal and contemporary Australian artefacts. The State Government has made almost no mention of plans for the public display of the Decorative Arts collection. It is essential that Decorative Arts maintains a public profile to provide a reference for future generations. Particularly as the on going demise of tertiary decorative arts education in NSW will mean these rich art forms will no longer be available as a major form of creative expression.

The Decorative Arts Collections displayed in international museums throughout the world, are sustained and celebrated with support from the state, private patronage and cultural tourism. Given the major reduction of space at the Parramatta site there is public fear that the collection will be sold or placed in storage. The State Government needs to reassure the public that the Decorative Arts collection remains as a core part of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.

6) Alternative strategies

The NSW Government should consider establishing a Powerhouse Branch museum in Parramatta The Museum's collection could fill 2 or 3 new museums. Successful overseas models include the Tate with 4 sites and the Smithsonian with 19 museums and galleries. While in Australia the National Gallery of Victoria has two Melbourne CBD sites.

7) The NSW Government should provide incentives to encourage shared and touring exhibitions and programs between the Powerhouse museum and other galleries and museums.

8) Entry to the Powerhouse should be free while a charge made for temporary exhibitions, following the successful practice at the Art Gallery of NSW. Current costs are particularly high for families.

9) A shuttle bus should be organised return from Parramatta to the Powerhouse and other Sydney museums and galleries.

Darani Lewers AM Hon D Vis Syd
43 Seaforth Crescent, Seaforth 2092, NSW

Darani Lewers, in partnership with Helge Larsen, has exhibited as a jeweller, silversmith and designer, nationally and internationally since 1961. Darani and Helge are represented in all public collections throughout Australia and in major

international state collections. In 1986 The National Gallery of Victoria organised a national and international Retrospective exhibition of their work. This was later followed by a Survey exhibition 1988 – 2002 organised by the Manly Art Gallery and Museum. Darani was appointed to a number of boards and councils including Chair of the Crafts Board, Australia Council 1976 –1980 and a Trustee for the Powerhouse Museum 1981 – 1990. During this period a Contemporary Australian Craft collection (Decorative Arts) was acquired and Darani was appointed Chair of a Decorative Arts Review. The recommendations were implemented as part of the restructure of the museum.