

**Submission  
No 64**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 12 August 2016

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## **Powerhouse Museum support document.**

### **Overview**

There are a wide range of reasons not to move the successful and popular Powerhouse museum from its current site to a different area. These reasons range among economic, social, practical and cultural drivers, however I believe they can be summarized into two broad areas; Economic negatives in the move and whether the move would be an actual replacement of like for like.

This Submission speaks to most of the terms and references of the enquiry but especially a) h) and e) *the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta, and whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development*

### **Relevant experience of contributor**

My position as a commentator is that of a professional museum communicator of 27 years, with a Masters qualification from ANU and 23 years employed at the Powerhouse ending in 2014. I am happy to be considered as a witness to any enquiry or further contribute in any way I can.

### **Reasons**

#### **1) Replacement fit for purpose**

All of the existing plans show a new Western Powerhouse to be on a smaller footprint, with lesser heritage value and further from public transport. The new site is further from tourist and education centres and generally more difficult for the people of Sydney, NSW and tourists to access and enjoy.

The smaller space would make it difficult to house the iconic objects that attract people to the existing museum and tell important stories about Science and Technology to visitors. It would also have less space for temporary exhibitions of things of interest to specialized audiences or to accommodate education groups.

Although visitors close to the Parramatta site would have slightly improved access, any other part of Sydney would have to travel twice ( train/bus into city train out) replacing a single trip to the city where there are existing other attractions complementing the visit.

Replacing an existing cultural institution should only be done if the replacement is better or at least equal to the previous incarnation, There are no signs that this replacement strategy will create something better for the people of NSW or for the important collection the Powerhouse holds.

#### **2) Economic value**

From my knowledge of the Powerhouse collection and of setting up and moving museum items, the cost of moving the collection, both that on display and in accessible and non accessible storage, is more significant than has been fully explored. Additionally some of the major objects especially the Boulton and Watt steam engine, Locomotive No 1, the Apollo V engine and the Catalina flying boat would have a very large cost in uninstalling, moving and putting back on display. It would be a great loss both culturally and in the value they have as an attraction should they not be displayed in a new site.

My estimation would be that to move, display and store the current Powerhouse collection under similar conditions would cost significantly more than the value

achieved in a free market sale of the present site. This does not even account for future earnings of the valuable and flexible site. The end result would be either lessening the quality of the new museum or increasing the cost to NSW. Both would result in a loss for NSW as a whole.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

There can be no doubt that Western Sydney is deserving of more cultural attractions, and a museum of Science Technology and popular culture would be a good choice. A fit for purpose new museum incorporating elements from the collection, skill base and visitor good will of the Existing Powerhouse would be a valuable satellite museum in the model of satellite museums in New York, London and other cultural hubs.

Keeping the Powerhouse and exploiting its strengths of position, tourist awareness and site heritage value would bolster the Western Sydney site. Marinating the iconic objects and collections in Ultimo would also save on new museum costs whilst working with close existing cultural connections in COFA, UTS, University of Sydney, Sydney Observatory and Australian Museum among others.

I suggest that the existing Ultimo site be maintained as the successful museum that it is and it be used as a seed to create new museums to meet the needs of the growth of Sydney areas without disadvantaging those using this fine and useful resource.

Contributor

Science communicator