

Submission
No 127

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I wish to register my strong opposition to the current NSW government's proposal to sell off the Powerhouse Museum site and relocate the exhibits to Parramatta.

The Powerhouse Museum was designed and purpose-built to accommodate a series of major technological devices - some of which are of considerable antiquity and realtive fragility - and form part of an integrated Darling Harbour development.

In particular, exhibits such as the steam engines and rolling stock have a historic linkage with the former railway goods yards of the site.

Conveniently located near accessible public transport and other tourist hubs, there is no clear rationale for relocation other than the short-term prospect of a cash injection into the state budget. However, the proceeds of this asset sale would be unlikely to exceed the cost of building a new exhibition space and paying for the careful and sensitive restoration of the exhibits - the number and size of which exceed the capacity of the proposed new site on the Parramatta River.

Indeed the failed vision of the state government takes no account of the valuable, but nonetheless relatively remote, Castle Hill satellite facility. One has to ask why \$34 million is being spent on upgrading that site in the absence of any substantial public transport interconnection between the sites.

Furthermore, why does the government wish to build yet another football stadium at Parramatta - and in doing so demolish a public swimming facility without a plan to replace it - instead of devoting the funds to the creation of a new cultural facility in the city?

I certainly have no problem with the creation of a completely new museum that would be able to showcase even more of the exhibits held in trust by the Powerhouse Museum. The funds clearly exist to be able to do this; only the political will is lacking to redirect the expenditure to a different cultural demographic.

It is worth adding that the (former) Parramatta Council demonstrated a regrettable indifference to heritage and cultural matters, having closed down its Heritage Centre opposite the Riverside Theatre and laid-off all of the staff a few years ago. The quality of any advice to the NSW government from that quarter is perhaps questionable.

In conclusion, I believe that the proposal has little intrinsic merit and no genuine economic justification; it will merely result in further and excessive residential development and over-crowding in Ultimo, and may or may not result in the creation of a diminished museum in Parramatta.

I urge the Committee to find against the proposal, and to encourage the NSW government to discard it in favour of a comprehensive plan for cultural development in the western suburbs.