

**Submission  
No 141**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Mr Trevor Kennedy

**Date received:** 11 August 2016

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*Trevor Kennedy*

August 11, 2016

The Hon. Robert Borsak MLC  
Committee Chair,  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4,  
NSW Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Sydney NSW 2000.

Submission to the Upper House inquiry into Museums and Galleries.

This submission is essentially made as a plea to our legislators to revisit and revise the decision to attempt to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Western Sydney.

I make this submission as a Life Fellow, Life member, former trustee and serious fund raiser and donor to the Powerhouse.

In my view it is outrageous that this decision, apparently a thought bubble between Premier Baird and the redoubtable Elizabeth Ann MacGregor on a camping trip, was made with no thought being given to the costs and consequences that arise from such a decision. This is not something that can just be shifted by putting up a building, sticking a few nails in the wall and hanging a few pictures and calling it a gallery or whatever.

As someone who was there at the beginning when Neville Wran and Laurie Brereton had the vision to transform the western part of the city with Darling Harbour (essentially a forerunner to the brilliant Barangaroo) and the vision to add to the general precinct that constitutes making Sydney such a brilliant place to visit – from overseas, from the north, east, west and south.

We have the NSW Art Gallery, The Australian Museum, The Sydney Museum, The Contemporary Arts Museum, Parliament House, The Observatory, The SH Ervin, The Mint, The Barracks, The Maritime Museum, The Chinese Gardens, The Police Museum, Etc, Etc, etc. The Powerhouse Museum is central to all of this – as well as being central to the educational precinct which make all these places accessible to the schools and universities. While I am sure that it is not the Government's intention to destroy the legacy of these people it is a testament to one of NSW most successful governments (remember it also built the Sydney Harbour Tunnel) and some thought should be given to that legacy.

The transformation of the old power house into the building it is today – award winning no less – the creation of the then NSW Government Architects Office led by Andrew Anderson and so brilliantly executed and designed by Lionel Glendenning was all about expanding the dear old MAAS' then constipated premises in Ultimo. Hundreds of people have put thousands of hours into this institution and so far have been totally ignored. I was also a member of the Darling Harbour Board during its construction and business of revitalizing the area which, in my opinion, has probably been the most transformational event that has occurred in Sydney since the protection of The Rocks and now Barangaroo.

There is no evidence that the government has any idea of the costs associated with this suggested re-location. Everything is conducted in complete secrecy. The costs will be stupendously greater than that so far suggested in government statements. Getting one of the accounting firms to do your bidding is evidence of nothing. Do they even understand what the Boulton and Watt steam engine is about?

One of the most disappointing aspects of this whole affair is the apparent slavish complicity of the current trustees to this proposition. What are trustees for? In my day we were there to safeguard the collections, the building, the history – and then go out and raise money and interest in, and for, the institution. The committee, I respectfully suggest, should call the chairman (and maybe other trustees) to account for how they made this decision. If they are simply a slavish reflection of what the government decides what is the point of having a board of trustees? Might as well avoid the cost and bureaucracy of engaging in such hypocrisy.

Nobody wants to deny Western Sydney the opportunities to have greater and easier access to cultural events and artefacts but this proposed solution is – in one word – silly.

If it is of any interest to the committee, I would be very happy to appear in person to try and further the case against, what I believe, is a totally irrational decision. Let's fix it before it's too late.

Yours Faithfully

Trevor Kennedy AM