

**Submission  
No 144**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Ms Louise Douglas

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## Submission to NSW Upper House Inquiry into NSW museums and galleries

Louise Douglas - Retired museum professional

14 August 2016

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I write as a museum professional who worked at the Powerhouse Museum in a senior management position for 10 years (1984-1994), and then at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra for 20 years. I have an interest both in the history and future of our collecting institutions and support the work of the Inquiry in general terms, and wish to comment in particular on one of the terms of reference:

*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*

I make two points:

(1) the absence of research and strategic analysis in this case

I note that in other aspects of New South Wales life, for example the future of greyhound racing industry, the government spent 18 months and considerable resources on an Inquiry which produced an in depth report based on substantial research, wide-ranging consultation and expert analysis. On the basis of this report, Premier Baird made the unprecedented decision (and in my view the correct one) to close a long standing industry.

In stark contrast, the decision to relocate the Powerhouse to Parramatta appears to have been made in the absence of comprehensive and strategic consideration of the implications. The absence of research and analysis to back up the Premier's decision in this instance is perplexing. I note that in the most recent planning work undertaken to inform the future of cultural facilities in Sydney – the 2011 'Planning Sydney's Cultural Facilities' report prepared by consultants Sweet Reason Pty Ltd and commissioned by Arts NSW, Events NSW, the City of Sydney and the Barangaroo Delivery Authority – the concept of relocating one of the main cultural attractions in the city of Sydney was not canvassed at all. The apparent lack of an overall strategic plan for the cultural facilities of New South Wales provides no context, and makes it difficult for the public to understand why such a move is necessary.

(2) Western Sydney cultural facilities should be enhanced

Without doing extensive research and analysis, it is clear that the cultural facilities of Western Sydney need to be enhanced: the solution surely is create a facility that reflects the population of that community, rather than transplanting an existing institution which has its own history and connection to inner Sydney. In addition, this solution does not seem to make sense from a financial perspective – the costs of moving and rehousing the vast collections of the Powerhouse seem far greater than the

estimates of the revenue gained from selling the Powerhouse land/buildings for redevelopment.

In summary I am not convinced that there is strong enough foundation for moving the Powerhouse to Parramatta, but support different solutions so the cultural facilities of Western Sydney can be enhanced.