

**Submission
No 153**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Rosalind Ward

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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.

The Powerhouse Museum had a superb reputation and won numerous prestigious awards for publications and exhibitions (see attached list 2012/13). These projects were developed prior to Rose Hiscock's appointment as Director.

\$10 million had only just been spent on extensive renovations by the Capital Works Department to transform the forecourt of the Museum.

It is hard to imagine why the Powerhouse Museum was targeted for relocation in preference to other Sydney institutions by the Baird government. It is perfectly located in the arts and academic hub of Ultimo with superb public transport.

If the decision was based on visitor numbers, the 2014 State Infrastructure Strategy Update (chapter 9 page 119), made a serious error. It compared Sydney cultural institutions but failed to include (intentionally or otherwise) 3 million Powerhouse web visitors, hence giving an unfair and inaccurate representation of the Powerhouse's popularity. The statistics were also assessed during the renovation period, when several galleries were closed. The numbers were considerably inaccurate.

Where is the documentation to justify the decision to choose the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS) for relocation by arts minister, Troy Grant?

An alternative strategy

A spectacular new exhibition gallery building in Parramatta could draw on the MAAS collections, import high profile exhibitions from other countries and Australia-wide and also focus on issues relevant to Parramatta. Under this proposal the Government would not have to bear the huge costs associated with the safe conservation storage of 500,000 objects.

Attached: Extract from Powerhouse Museum Annual Report 2012/3

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.

Expert advice and teamwork is needed to relocate a large institution with 500,000 objects.

The movement of objects – trains, planes and steam engines - and the choice of a suitable site are an integral part of the decision.

- **Why were curators and conservators at the Museum, who knew the nature and needs of the collection, and hence the cost of a move, not consulted before the decision was made?**

Mr Paterson, Secretary of Trade and Investment, in his submission to the MAAS board, proposed that funds from the sale of the Ultimo site (\$130-200 million) were destined to pay for the relocation of the Museum and the new building.

- **How could he think this sum would cover the relocation and building of a prestigious new museum, which would cost closer to \$900 million?**
- **Did Minister Grant ever intend to build a new museum of the same size as MAAS, incorporating its collections of National importance?**
- **Was it because the proposal had little substance that employees of MAAS, UTS, TAFE and Sydney University were put under pressure not to discuss or comment on this decision in public?**

I request that the paperwork leading to this decision be made public.

h) The impact of the efficiency dividend on the budgets of museums and galleries over the last 10 years, and funding levels compared to other states.

The Regional Services Department at the Powerhouse Museum was summarily dismissed in 2014 by incoming Director, Michael Parry.

This was a false economy. The department was highly organized and included extensive liaison, exhibition planning, internships and mentoring workshops designed to bring regional galleries into focus. It offered professional assistance for regional collections, while keeping those collections in the area where their history was relevant.

The department encouraged many museum studies students and volunteers from distant regional galleries to come to the Museum as interns. This was of great economic and social benefit to the regional sector.

An important project, the award-winning Australian Dress Register was designed to assist regional galleries to assess and document their collections and enable them to have a presence on the web. In turn this benefited NSW tourism allowing travelers to preview NSW collections before their travels. These objects would not have otherwise been available in a readable format for historians and family members to enjoy.

The dismissal of the department contradicted the stated aims of the NSW Government. Regional museums, often volunteer run, were cut off without warning. They lost valuable contact and mentorship with the Museum and help that was sorely needed.

They lost the exposure to tourism that regional areas are craving.

Added to this, Arts Minister Troy Grant has stated that the NSW Government will not spend money on regional galleries - local councils will have to foot the bills.

I question whether this is the way to increase/enhance tourism in NSW.

Rosalind Ward

Former Decorative Arts Curator of the Powerhouse Museum for over 20 years