

**Supplementary
Submission
No 148g**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Submission VIII to the Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries in NSW, August 14, 2016.

Submission VIII: The new museum project in Western Australia- a brief comparison with the failed 'Powerhouse Museum move' to Parramatta project in terms of location, planning process, cost and scale

[Relevant terms of reference: (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (h)]

Dr LG Sharp

Founding Director, Powerhouse Museum, 1978-1988.

PLEASE CALL ME AS A WITNESS FOR THIS AND OTHER SUBMISSIONS

Key words:

WA announces redevelopment of original State Museum site in central CBD; cost \$428 million not increased since 2012; costs will grow substantially for completion in 2020; hence new museum smaller than envisaged originally, reduced with approximately 23,000 M2 total space and 7,000 M2 [public available/gallery space]; no large objects such as at Powerhouse Museum; comparative costing of Parramatta project approximately \$1 billion; inequity for rest of museums in NSW; planning process in NSW profoundly sub-optimal even compared with that in WA; other non-CBD sites analysed in WA and eventually discarded; Fremantle Campus critical in the development- parallel with Castle Hill; need for a Committee of Review for whole MAAS/Powerhouse

Museum project and broad policy development in NSW, with access to all relevant project and policy documentation.

Key concepts:

Planning chaos in NSW, inept in comparison to WA and other States; no chance that the Parramatta project will be 'comparable' to existing Powerhouse Museum site and spaces; huge cost blow-out unavoidable or reduction in scope like WA; WA decides to maintain central CBD site; undertaking many reviews and planning exercises to achieve appropriate plan; 'measure three times, cut once'- an old motto applied to Powerhouse Museum development in 1980s and to all other successful museum projects, including that in WA, but not to the present failed Powerhouse Museum demolition project and MAAS 'move' to Parramatta

[Please read this in concert with my submissions I, II, IV, V, VI.](#)

Commentary:

The following article gives a helpful overview with Australia's most comparable current museum project, located in Perth's CBD, which maintains its traditional, central location notwithstanding that city's massive geographical expansion since the 1950s. The later campus in Fremantle has been the modern standard bearer for the museum since the 1970s as the main museum project has matured. A number of different proposals have been tested regarding other more distant sites and this final one in the CBD has been adjudged practical, equitable, affordable and sufficiently challenging architecturally to create impact.

The original buildings will be restored and recycled thus capturing their heritage value and asset value in one fell swoop. Site sale has been deliberately avoided owing to cost-benefit analysis over preceding five years. Cost control

has been exercised to maximise project value predicated on maintaining the existing site and recycling existing buildings. This cost control has, however, shrunk the new museum significantly in scale and scope just as the current project with MAAS/Powerhouse Museum will inevitably do if it proceeds- even at a \$1 billion price tag. In WA the reduction in scope and size is difficult to judge without more detailed figures [1]. The whole Perth museum process has been subject to forensic review as noted by the Premier of WA who said the secret to success lay in that process and the linked tendering approach: "It's all in the budget process." Public opinion strongly supports retention of the existing buildings and much loved site at the centre of the CBD.

This careful, ordered, 'measure three times cut once' approach is strongly contrasted with the *ad hoc*, thought-bubble, rear-end-backwards process (if it can be dignified with that title) adopted in the now failed 'Powerhouse Museum move' to Parramatta. For demonstration of this fact please see, among many, the submissions by Jennifer Sanders, Lionel Glendenning, Kylie Winkworth and my own submissions mentioned above.

As a group of professionals we have established our case and stand ready to challenge any spokesperson of Government or the Trustees of MAAS who may futilely attempt to counter this logic, also including the so-called 'Cultural Ambassador to Western Sydney'.

As a group of professionals we all support the creation of a new museum facility in greater western Sydney based on wide consultation with a Project Review Committee set up to analyse the 'process' to date; and the reinvigoration of the existing Ultimo Campus.

Costing of the two projects can be described thus:

Total gross floor space of existing buildings in Ultimo 30,000 m² plus; total public space of 20,000 m² plus; total exhibit floor area within public space approx. 12,500 m². Floor area is only one measure. VOLUMES are critical for the major exhibition items i.e. massive volumes exist for at least 1/2 of the floor space i.e. 10,000m².'

Estimated replacement value:

- Public cubic volumes for large objects are in excess of 100,000 m³. Replacement value is different to audited, depreciated value of these assets, last stated in the Annual Report Accounts as \$180 million. [In reality the replacement value of these assets is in the region of \$465 million, see below].
- The public, fully fitted out exhibit areas are worth at least 12,000 m² X \$8,000 per m²= \$160 million in respect of exhibit costs, at present 'averaged' per m² for replacement.
- The public building spaces at 20,000 m², especially since the very large display volumes add materially to cost, can be calculated at an average per m² cost of \$10,000 per m², = \$200 million; The balance of the space- mainly back-of-house, is raised beyond regular per m² costs because of the very high specification of Stage 1 facilities- so, 10,000 m² at \$8000 per m² = \$80 million, plus site-wide, non-moveable specialised equipment @ \$20 million = \$100 million total.

Total value of existing facilities which will be unusable in a new site= \$460 million in 2016 dollars.

[This does not comprise the cost of a full collection move, including the large and very sensitive objects. Total number of objects in storage on site= 240,000. The 240,000 items to be moved are the collection in the Harwood Building Collection Store. There are also the objects on display in the PHM many of them very large, extremely fragile and difficult/expensive to move, also with high risk of damage].

If all the more obvious cost headings are added in the likely cost of a comparable new project in Parramatta is in excess of \$865 million in 2016 \$, not including escalation and other site occupation/purchase issues (see Submission I, pages 15 *et seq.*) However, the figure in all likelihood in 2016 \$ is in excess of \$1 billion and that may not include other cost headings such as land – the TAFE site next door to the Castle Hill storage-display facility [which is full] and another new store as well as documentation, packing, moving, unpacking etc. Until the mass of project reports/documentation thus far hidden is released we cannot know if costs such as these have been included or even quantified yet.

The proposed new museum in Perth is far smaller both in square metres and in cubic volumes than the present Powerhouse Museum or a 'comparable' new facility [Trustees' requirement as stated in FOI-released documents]. The WA Museum has no really large objects except the Blue Whale skeleton and their big scale maritime items are presently intended to remain in Fremantle. Certainly it has nothing approaching the scale of the MAAS transport, power and technology collections.

Notwithstanding, the Perth museum project is slated to cost \$428 million. The likelihood, given WA's present fiscal circumstances and an election looming, is that this figure does not include escalation, contingency and perhaps other costs. If it does then the per square metre cost rate for 7000 m² exhibition spaces and the back of house, plus circulation spaces is either heroically low or under calculated. The point is that, based on this recent comparison, the cost of a new museum in Parramatta comparable to the existing Powerhouse Museum site and buildings including wastage of existing assets, is going to be \$1 billion plus or very close. Even then it will not even be remotely 'comparable' with the present Ultimo facilities and exhibits.

Conclusion:

From the taxpayers' perspective the people of WA at least have a moderately robust planning process to rely on with a fixed price design and construction contract. In NSW the failed Powerhouse Museum demolition project, now linked to a MAAS 'move' [what is a MAAS when it is at home and why have the grounds put forward for 'moving' the Powerhouse Museum shifted so dramatically?], has none of this apparent certitude. Instead, it represents one of the most slipshod, chaotic, non-consultative examples of project planning ever concocted in the annals of international museology. All hidden behind a veil of complete secrecy, lacking any transparency whatsoever. Supported by museologically ignorant Government spruikers and stooges. This secrecy can only be explained by a Government and Trustee desire to avoid any meaningful scrutiny. If that is not the case they should reveal the 43 documents listed in my submission II and offer themselves as witnesses to argue their position- a

witness list is documented in my submission II, also, which notes key reasons for document revelation and inquiry.

In terms of State-wide policy and expenditure-equity this project, at \$1 billion over ten years, will completely distort cultural finances. It demonstrates a lack of consultation, policy dereliction, heritage destruction and waste unequalled in the history of museums in Australia.

Recommendation:

That a Project Review Committee is created and resourced tasked with analysing the MAAS/Powerhouse Museum 'move' project planning to date, with access to all named documents and reports. That this Committee is non-partisan staffed and supported by external professionals and chaired by a demonstrably independent, expert Chairperson. That this Committee oversights wide consultation with the Communities in greater western Sydney, seeking options and creative facility concepts, reporting back to Government within five/six months of inception.

Note 1: The WA Government set the budget at \$428m in 2012 and said that was to be the final cost. The size of the museum appears to have shrunk significantly to stay within that budget. This article in April 2016 says the museum will be 23,000 M2.

<http://www.waconference.com.au/news-detail:ec21e608-9778-50b4-fce6-56ba8274f71e.html>

As late as June, 2016 it was still 23,000 M2

<http://architectureau.com/articles/shortlist-announced-new-wa-museum/>

Now, the full size and type of spaces is unclear especially since the apparent per M2 rate is so low.

New WA Museum blends old with new in 'bold, distinctive' design

By [Nicolas Perpetch](#)

Updated 31 Jul 2016, 12:00am

Background <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-31/new-wa-museum-design-unveiled-by-state-government/7675752> article: July 31, 2016



PHOTO: [An artist's impression of the planned new WA Museum.](#) (Supplied: WA Government)

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The design of the new \$428 million Western Australian Museum has been revealed, featuring a "living building" intended as the state's cultural heart where stories of its people and places can be told.

The planned redevelopment links the existing WA Museum heritage building to a much larger, overarching modern structure, with a wide open public plaza in the centre.

The museum is due to be almost four times bigger than its predecessor, with nearly 7,000 square metres of galleries, including a single 1,000sqm space for "blockbuster exhibitions".

Premier Colin Barnett and Culture and Arts Minister John Day unveiled the design in Perth, describing it as a "bold" project.



PHOTO: [The museum will link the existing heritage building to a larger steel and glass structure.](#) (Supplied: WA Government)

Mr Barnett said the project was "very affordable", [despite the state's record debt and deficit levels.](#)

The design for the museum includes education studios, viewing areas and retail outlets.

Room will also be made inside for the museum's much-loved blue whale skeleton.

Meanwhile the exterior of the entire top floor will be used as a vast screen to project images such as Aboriginal art or West Australian landscapes.



PHOTO: [The museum's top floor is set to be used as a large screen to project images.](#) (Supplied: WA Government)

Brookfield Multiplex, with its international architecture partners OMA and Hassell, has been awarded the contract to design and construct the museum.

The Government [named the company as its preferred bidder in April](#), with [the WA Museum closing its doors last month for four years](#) to enable the redevelopment.

Mr Barnett said the design was impressive.

"It is bold and distinctive, from the vast public plaza to spacious galleries that overlook the CBD and link with important heritage buildings," he said

Architects laud 'significant cultural development'

OMA managing partner David Gianotten said the museum would form the cultural heart of a "unique part of the world".



PHOTO: [An artist's impression of the new WA Museum as seen from the Perth Cultural Centre. 31 July 2016](#)(Supplied: WA Government)

"It is the most significant cultural development in the southern hemisphere," he said.

Mr Day said it was a crucial project for WA, creating a visual landmark and a "living building" with interactive exhibits.

"We have an enormous amount of history, both human history, geological history and the history of the world, and also biodiversity in Western Australia which needs to be appropriately interpreted, explained and made available," Mr Day said.

Earlier, Mr Barnett said the cost of the project was "very affordable".

"It's all in the budget process," he told Macquarie Radio.



PHOTO: The design includes broad entry ways in a bid to entice people in. (Supplied: WA Government)

He said he thought the design would prove "controversial", suggesting some people would love it and others would hate it.

Construction of the new museum is slated to begin next year before it reopens in 2020.

Early site works are due to start in the next few months.

The \$428m project budget includes construction and design of the new museum, restoration works to existing heritage buildings, upgrades to [the Harry Butler Research Centre in Welshpool](#), exhibition design and production and public art.

The majority of collections from the WA Museum are set to be re-housed at the Fremantle Maritime Museum during the redevelopment.



PHOTO: [The museum will feature galleries overlooking Perth's CBD.](#) (Supplied: WA Government)

Topics: [library-museum-and-gallery](#), [states-and-territories](#), [history](#), [history-education](#), [perth-6000](#), [wa](#)

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