

**Supplementary
Submission
No 21a**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Save the Powerhouse Campaign

Date received: 21 September 2016

SAVE THE POWERHOUSE CAMPAIGN
additional information for the inquiry into museums and galleries
DUBIOUS "INFORMATION" ON THE MAAS WEBSITE

Following the first two days (September 5 and 6) of the current Inquiry into Museums and Galleries, we'd like to bring to the Committee's attention certain statements published on the MAAS website under

- " **About MAAS Parramatta**" (<https://maas.museum/about/maas-parramatta/> - attached and specifically
- "**MAAS Parramatta FAQ's**" (<https://maas.museum/about/maas-parramatta/faqs/> - attached

Although this information for the general public appears to be presented as "fact", we feel that some of it is misleading and unsubstantiated, at best.

EXAMPLES

[NOTE: *Freedom of Information* (FOI) documents referred to below were obtained by Fairfax Media under the Freedom of Information Act in April/May 2016]

- A- FAQ (1)

FAQ (1) states that "...Government Property NSW has been commissioned by the NSW Government **to review how the Ultimo site could be used in future.**"

This is contradicted later in (5) "How much will the new Museum cost?" by "The Premier has confirmed that the money raised from **the sale of the Ultimo site....**, will be used to pay for the construction of the new museum."

Comment (FAQ 1)

We heard several times during the two days of Inquiry that fears that the Ultimo site will be sold to developers are unfounded but:

(a) The Premier stated on 25 Feb 2015 that: "Every dollar **from the sale** of the site will come towards this new museum. It's a very strategic site right next to the city, with a **good opportunity for renewal**"...Mr Baird said they expected the Pyrmont site to reap between \$150 and \$200 million and that **it would be developed into apartments.** (Sydney Morning Herald: <http://bit.ly/1834nIN>)

(b) Secretary, Trade and Investment, Mark Paterson AO said: "It is anticipated that the **sale** would be managed by Government Property NSW and be determined by the site's highest and best use with **emphasis on maximising the commercial return to the government.** See FOI doc "Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting of 4 March, 2015 <http://bit.ly/1U486R8> -(museumdocs4.pdf, p4/15).

(c)- Finally, on 11 April 2016, when asked "Can you guarantee that it won't be another apartment block?" the Premier answered: "Well, **I can't guarantee anything** about what the site will be at this stage but **my expectation is that it will be *multiuse***" (ABC News 11-04-2016 - <http://bit.ly/2cj4e1L>)

* according to Sydney LEP 2012 "mixed use" "...integrate(s) suitable business, office, residential, retail and other development ..."

This suggests a possible early sale of the Ultimo site, followed by the Museum hiring back its premises from the new owner, in order to create a "fait accompli".

FAQ (1) further states that “The Ultimo site is in the ownership of the MAAS Trustees.” While this may be literally true, we feel it is designed to confuse, as from the outset the Government has implied that it can and will dispose of the Powerhouse site as and when it wishes, without indicating that consultation with the MAAS Trustees would be necessary

Comment (2) FAQ (1)

Refer to Secretary, Trade and Investment, Mark Paterson AO statements to the Board of Trustees (FOI documents - Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting of 4 March, 2015 <http://bit.ly/1U486R8> - museumdocs4.pdf)

“That... assets are owned by Government and, as Secretary, Mark (Paterson) must act at the direction of the elected government” (p 3/15).

And:

“Relating to a question relating to the Museum’s participation in the sale of the Ultimo site and the determination of its future use, the Secretary indicated this was to be determined by the **Government**, and **it was not appropriate for the Museum to have a role**” (p 4/15).

Pressure was also exerted on the Trustees not to discuss the proposed move of the Museum: “The Secretary suggested that, from his perspective, **it would be counterproductive for the Board of Trustees to oppose the proposed relocation**” (FOI documents - Board of Trustees meeting of 4 March 2015- <http://bit.ly/1U486R8> - museumdocs4.pdf, p5/15).

- B- FAQ (2)

FAQ (2) states that the Powerhouse will continue to operate in Ultimo until “*early 2020*”, and that “The new museum is projected to open in 2022 leaving a potential gap of up to three years. This is the first time that a significant non-operational period between the two has been predicted.

- C- FAQ (4)

FAQ(4) asks “Does the new Museum change what happens to your Castle Hill site?”

The answer still offers no explanation about how the Government justifies establishing two MAAS Museums in the Parramatta area, 10 kms apart, thus robbing the capital of a prized cultural asset

- D- FAQ (5) How much will the new Museum cost?

“A detailed business case will determine the cost of building and operating the new museum. The Premier has confirmed that the money raised from the sale of the Ultimo site will be used to pay for the construction of the new museum...”

Cost estimates have been available for over a year. FOI documents show that the Government was advised in mid- 2015 that construction of the new museum would cost **at least \$450M**, but did not make this figure public.

Comment FAQ (5)

See FOI documents - Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting of 22 July, 2015 — <http://bit.ly/1U486R8> – museumdocs5.pdf, p2/17):

“It was NOTED that whilst a funding envelope of **\$450-600 million** has been estimated in **initial quantity surveys** it was not possible to nominate the overall project cost until site selection and a full Business Case have been completed” (p 2/15, text redacted but still readable).

Recent expert estimates indicate that the total project cost could exceed \$1 billion.

- E- FAQ (6)

In FAQ (6) "How big will the new Museum be?" it is stated "MAAS Parramatta will have at least the same amount of public display space as the current site at Ultimo. It will also provide for collection storage, learning facilities and studios".

But as the (measured) area of the David Jones car park is less than one third of that of the Ultimo site, this claim seems unlikely.

Comment FAQ (6)

Despite Minister for the Arts, Troy Grant's, statements on 11 April 2016 that "The new museum will showcase more of the Powerhouse's exhibits – the **size of the collection on display is set to increase by at least 40 per cent**" (NSW Government media release: <http://bit.ly/2cucWte>)

(a) The Ultimo site area is 25,000m² while the Old he David Jones carpark site area is only 7,500m²

(b) The Old David Jones carpark site is regularly flooded, making it unsuitable for basement storage of collections..

The Save the Powerhouse Campaign was advised anonymously on 15 September that "there have been **discussions around the Premier's office of cutting the physical size of MAAS in half, due to the potential costs** of building a building of equivalent size to the Ultimo site!"

Permanent collection display area would be reduced from 13,000m² in Ultimo to 6,000m² in Parramatta.

- F- FAQ (7)

FAQ (7) states "The riverbank site will now **(i)** be subject to a **detailed business case (study?)** **(ii)** which will **offer further detail on** the project timeline and **budget**."

(i)- detailed business case.

On announcing the project in early 2015, the Government highlighted the \$10M a business case study/feasibility study/ that it had commissioned from KPMG. That initial report was suppressed and was followed by 42 other business reports (SEE FOI documents) which were also suppressed.

(ii) ..offer further detail on the budget

See 5 above: costs/ budget estimates are **already** available, as indicated at the hearing.

On announcing the project the Government also stated that the \$150- 200M proceeds from the sale of the Powerhouse site would (partially?) finance creation of the new museum, but did not state where any additional funding would come from.

Comment, FAQ (7) (i) (ii)

See Secretary, Trade and Investment, Mark Paterson AO statements to the Board of Trustees (FOI documents - Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting of 4 March, 2015 - <http://bit.ly/1U486R8> - museumdocs4.pdf):

"The Secretary noted that the only firm commitment from Government was \$10 million in relation to the Feasibility and Business Plan development project." (p 4/15).

And: "Responding to a question relative to the comparative **costs of museum redevelopment** in other states, **there is no commitment beyond sale of the Ultimo site**" (p 5/15).

- G- FAQ (9) Flooding

It is recognised that the site floods regularly. Independent (non- Government) analysis suggests that even with optimal (very costly) anti-flood measures in place, protection could not be guaranteed.

An Inquiry witness cited the multi-storey building being constructed on an adjacent site, in an attempt to show that the new museum could safely be constructed on the old Car Park This example is not relevant because the basement will be used only to store vehicles, which are replaceable and easy to move out when flooding is forecast.

- H- FAQs (10) & (11) “ensuring.... safe care of the MAAS Collection during the move?”

Experts estimate that moving the collection safely would cost at least \$200 M (equal to the Government’s predicted total revenue from the sale of the site). The Government has never indicated that it would be willing to invest that amount of money in just one part of the project. Experts have further advised that some of the largest objects would be almost impossible to move at all.

It is stated that “A move of this scale is a large undertaking, but it isn’t unprecedented” citing as an example the Museum’s first move from The Agricultural Hall in the Botanic Gardens to Harris Street in 1893, when the collection was obviously much smaller, and did not include very large objects such as helicopters (not yet invented) and locomotives (locomotive No1 was still in use).

Comment FAQs (10) & (11)

The only “comparable” contemporary example of moving a museum cited during the Inquiry was that of the Edvard Munch museum in Oslo, provided by the MAAS Director.

This is, in fact, the exact opposite of the proposed Powerhouse move, in all respects

- The Oslo museum is moving from the edge of the capital to its centre, next to the Opera House (cf Powerhouse – moving from the capital to a suburb)
- the distance between the old and the new museum is less than 2km (vs Powerhouse 20+ km)
- the museum collection comprises only 28,000 objects (paintings, sketches, photos, sculptures and notebooks), none of these objects being large or difficult to transport.(vs Powerhouse 500,000 items – some possibly too large to move)

Despite the above, the budget for constructing the new building and moving the collections is NOK 2 Billion/AUD 430 Million.

- I- FAQs (12) “When will the community be consulted? “

The Government has consistently asserted that the Powerhouse move is a “done deal” and will happen whether the broader community likes it or not.

Since zero consultation has taken place to date, the response that “there will be a series of opportunities for the community to contribute to the discussion and planning” is pure cynicism.

- J- FAQs (13)

While the points discussed above give cause for concern, we are particularly disturbed by FAQ (13)

Question: “An inquiry has been launched in the Legislative Council. Does this mean MAAS Parramatta is on hold?”

Response - “The Deputy Premier has stated that, **the Upper House inquiry aside**, the NSW Government is 100 per cent committed to moving the Powerhouse Museum to Western Sydney.

Effectively this means that no matter what the outcomes of the Upper House Inquiry, the Government intends to pursue this project as if it (the Inquiry) had never taken place.

Comment FAQ (13)

The closure of the Ultimo Museum has consistently been justified by false, fabricated or distorted data, particularly alleged declining audiences.

For example, Arts Minister Troy Grant stated on 5 August 2015: "What troubles me is that the patronage, the visitation, the interest of the current site, has been in rapid decline..." (The Australian – 05-08-2015 - <http://bit.ly/2c2Y6bV>)

When he made this statement, the Minister had access to the 2014-2015 MAAS Annual Report which showed an increase of 12% in visitation over the previous year (428,177 visitors in 14/15 vs 381,582 in 13/14:

<https://maas.museum/app/uploads/2015/01/MAAS-Annual-Report-2014-15.pdf> (p13)

https://maas.museum/app/uploads/2015/01/Annual_Report_13-14.pdf (p10)

Since then attendance has risen again by 35% (570,000 visitors in 15/16 according to the **Board of Trustees submission to this Inquiry**).

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquirySubmission/Body/56029/0038%20Museums%20and%20Applied%20Arts%20of%20Sciences%2c%20Board%20of%20Trustees.pdf>

comparing very favourably with the performances of other major cultural institutions in Sydney.

In total Ultimo Powerhouse Museum visitation has increased by 50% in 2 years thanks chiefly:

- to the "2020 vision" of the previous Director, Rose Hiscock
- the opening of the Goods Line walkway followed by the opening of the Museum new entrance on the Goods Line.

Conclusion FAQ (13)

We are, of course, aware that the Committee's recommendations are not legally enforceable, but the attitudes discussed above are fundamentally undemocratic.

Save the Powerhouse

20 Sep 2016