

**Supplementary
Submission
No 148j**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Dr Lindsay Sharp
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Dr Lindsay Sharp,

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[Founding Director, Powerhouse Museum, (1978-1988) Director, Science Museum Group, London, (2000-2005) - including the National Railway Museum]

Dear Chairman Borsak,

1 Comparability: ‘Moving’ the Powerhouse Museum from CBD Sydney, (Ultimo), approximately 25 kilometres to Parramatta; and International ‘comparables’ quoted by the Department of Arts/MAAS to support their case that ‘moving’ the Powerhouse Museum is not an unusual or exceptional cultural measure:

I have just seen the transcript of Monday’s Inquiry session. The contention of those who oppose the move of MAAS to Parramatta is that **closing down a major international museum**, in the historic centre of a world city, and moving it to a suburb no matter how densely developed it may be, without community consultation in either place, has no precedent for good reasons which I briefly outline below. The counter contention by Government and senior staff at MAAS is that there are three examples: the National Railway Museum at York, England. The National Armouries at Leeds, England. The new National Arts Museum in Oslo. It is our contention that ‘merely’ moving collections around a particular jurisdiction is not, per se, unusual although it can be very expensive and requires extraordinary care and logistical provisioning.

The unique and essential characteristics of their proposed project ‘plan’ are ***CLOSING the parent museum and moving it without community consultation to a new location many kilometres distant from its historic roots and urban/heritage context.*** I can factually state that these criteria are not met by any of the three so-called examples quoted by Arts NSW/MAAS not least because I was the Director of one, for five years (York, NRM) and was explicitly advised about the origins and structure of another (Leeds, NA) by the Warden of the Tower of London in c.2004- the parent institution.

In my professional opinion these comparators are deliberately misleading and are designed to create a false professional basis for the disastrous ‘move’ of the Powerhouse Museum/MAAS illuminating the jejune leadership of the museum at present. In my view, these irreducible weaknesses illuminate how shallow, facile and without professional museological understanding this entire enterprise continues to be. Their inability to understand the difference is both shocking and deeply revealing. It is amateur-night for happy hands at home making macramé museums for locals as a cargo cult, without compelling intellectual and historic foundations. There is no need to hide the so-called ‘Vision’ of the new museum behind Cabinet-in-confidence if you have a compelling professional case- is there? We certainly did not think so even as early as the 1980s.

I would welcome being recalled to explain this in person. Indeed, it is our contention that two of these museums are actually examples of the OPPOSITE of the Government’s claims: the creation of world class National Museums in non-capital, regional cities which start out expressly desired by local populations, are the fruits of partnership between the remaining National Institution and local communities and become fiercely defended local museums with a National remit yet still part of the central organisation with all the benefits of that relationship in terms of funding and professional

assistance. The third is a consolidation of various collections back in an absolutely central part of a Capital city as part of a cultural destination plan which is centripetal not centrifugal.

The following extract sums up this Alice-through-the-looking-glass world of Government and MAAS:

“Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, one that is comparable to what is happening with the Powerhouse; closing it down in the centre of the CBD and moving it kilometres inland to Parramatta away from the main city centre. You gave three examples, none of which are comparable. Do you not accept that?”

Ms TORRES: In the view of Arts NSW and in my view they are comparable.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What, if you stand on your head, put a blindfold on, stick broccoli in your ears and hum while you are looking at them? How are they comparable?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Point of order: The question has been answered.

Ms TORRES: In our view they are comparable in that they are relocations of existing collections into a new location.

The CHAIR: We will call that a wrap now. I note you have taken some questions on notice...”

One wonders in which way, exactly, Mr Shoebridge’s question had been ‘answered’

Facts:

[a] The National Railway Museum at York was based on a museum devoted to railway history commenced in 1927 located in a major marshalling yard which became fully surplus to requirements in the 1970s. It is the largest and most prestigious Railway Museum in the world. After nationalisation of various Railway Companies the Science Museum was given ownership and control of the amalgamated collections, almost all of which had **never** been based in London at the Science Museum, but which were obtained from all over UK. The Science Museum collections in London mainly comprised an enormous trove of images, engineering drawings and the like- plus the famous Rocket- which remains in London. Far from moving these related collections from London, the Science Museum Group set up the first National Museum then seen in UK in a region using mainly non-London based collections (about 98%, especially the rolling stock which could never have fitted into the Kensington complex).

Dame Margaret Weston, the then Science Museum Director who I know exceptionally well, continued this initiative into practical implementation in 1975 by brilliantly involving local and national interests to combine these collections as a National Museum of international standing in a Regional Capital. The museum is proudly defended by York and its inhabitants and while a ‘branch’ of the Science Museum Group is internationally recognised as a stand-alone facility in a Regional capital. This is a great example of what we propose as part of a possible model for Parramatta- subject to community consultation and direction- and diametrically opposite the Government’s facile so-called ‘comparator’ status. Dame Margaret Weston then went on to repeat the magic by helping create the National Museum of Film, Photography and Television, in Bradford, Yorkshire, now renamed the National Media Museum. It too is an example of a ‘branch’ museum of the Science Museum Group in London which is fiercely defended by local citizenry and which is of International

standing located in a Regional capital. Again diametrically opposite to Government's claim- there were no closures involved and certainly not of the Science Museum in London.

In 2003, working with local citizens and organisations, as another example of massive regional re-development, under my Directorship NRM created the new railway museum at Shildon, to house more of the enormous collection of rolling stock, in the site of UK's first railroad and stations. This daughter of an international yet regionally located museum is now immensely successful and deeply emblematic of local pride and local ownership. York's NRM is seen as the parent museum and proudly continues on its way as does the Science Museum in London. Thus York and Shildon actually demonstrate conclusively that National Museums in the regions can be remarkably successful and are much loved by local taxpayers in their host cities. No closure was involved in their creation and local communities are deeply committed to their success and have been since their inception after wide consultation. I curated the vast pictorial collection at the Science Museum between 1976 and 1978 which did not move to NRM York and was the Director ultimately responsible for this new Shildon railway museum entitled 'Locomotion' which was opened by the Prime Minister in 2004. The Science Museum Group also runs another example: the Science Museum/Museum of Technology in Manchester.

[b]Royal Armouries, Leeds. Created in 1983 this Non Departmental Public Body is part of a group comprised of The Tower of London; the Royal Armouries; and the National Firearms Collection. In addition to the 2.7 million visitors to the Tower, the other two facilities receive around 2 million visitors. The Royal Armouries hold the numeric bulk of the Tower's arms and armour- approximately 78,000 items - but not the core 'jewels' of the royal armour collection and was created as a National Regional Museum, a direct offshoot of the Tower. The Tower remains the flagship and globally significant element of the three institutions and is located in the heart of historic London. Since inception in the C 11 it has never ceased operating or been closed as a Royal Institution and to argue that it has (like closing the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo) is nothing short of idiotic. Involved in a complex but highly functional relationship spanning the UK these organisations are a remarkable model for what MAAS/Powerhouse museum could do if a site in the west of Sydney was developed utilising collections from MAAS and other great State institutions . Far from moving the collections and closing down the Tower (what a fatuous 'example' to quote) the Royal Armouries/Tower relationship is precisely what the Alliance and Save the Powerhouse Museum are proposing for western Sydney. The success of this relationship was evidenced in every possible way by the then Constable of the Tower to Dr Sharp and his wife over dinner in the Tower in 2004.

[c] The National Arts Museum in Oslo, Norway: once again this is a thoroughly misleading 'example'. The Museum proposed is consolidating a number of collections, on a brown-field site, much closer to the heart of Oslo in a destination which resonates with the Opera House and other cultural/tourism facilities to provide a critical mass of facilities by the side of a harbour. Diametrically opposite to the failed concept now being proposed to 'move' the Powerhouse Museum after closing it in Ultimo to a flood prone site, with significantly less of a footprint than the existing majestic buildings and Ultimo site, which itself is adjacent to a reinvigorated Darling Harbour/ critical mass tourism destination which includes the National Maritime Museum, the Aquarium, the Imax facility, a new Entertainment Centre, new Convention and Exhibition Centres and the Chinese Garden – with a planned annual visitation of 40 million.

This obvious ignorance and confusion by Arts NSW and MAAS senior management, based on my personal knowledge and professional experience, demonstrates in my opinion their absolute incapacity to plan in an appropriate museological way. As Ms Kylie Winkworth said on Monday last their process to date has broken all the established, well proven museological planning procedures as even students at the 101 level will know. Even now, having started with the answer to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta- have you noticed they have quietly dropped this phrase substituting MAAS for Powerhouse Museum since it is both impossible and asinine-they have failed to ask the question of communities in both Ultimo/Inner City and Greater Western Sydney? Ms Torres noted they are now going to do so- nearly two years after deciding what they intend as a *fait accompli*. Cart/horse? As I said above: "It is amateur-night for happy hands at home making macramé museums for locals as a cargo cult, without compelling intellectual and historic foundations". The continued defence by Presidents present and past, and by Ms Torres, of current MAAS senior management merely demonstrates that they realise the inherent weaknesses at the top.

Throughout the Committee has been trying to establish the facts of the project as well as the competence of the management and at every turn you have been met by jargon, boilerplate, persiflage, evasion, misleading statements, economies with the truth, irregularities and – potentially- outright falsehoods. For example you as Chair have rightly called for demonstrated clarification of the comparison between the present Ultimo and the future Parramatta project site [much consolidated at great cost?]. The Government has left provision of same to the last minute presumably because they are trying to hide things or outlast the active life of your Committee.

The points clarified above are merely symptomatic of a larger truth: surely the time has come for the Inquiry to call consultants who will have to report facts relating to the so-called 'Final Business Case' [they never are final until at least a year after completion, by the way] and who are not covered by 'Cabinet in Confidence' since their work has been paid for by the public purse? And to recall museologists like myself who may forensically analyse whatever 'facts' somehow emerge from consultants and whatever 'summary' the Government finally provides to your Committee of that Business Case?

My apologies for taking up this issue at such great length- but god and the devil lie in the details.

I look forward to assisting the Committee in the future in whatever way may help clarify and support your terms of reference.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lindsay Sharp.

Foxground, Wednesday 16, November, 2016.