

**Submission
No 173**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Robyn Petersen

Date received: 9 February 2017

From: Robyn Peterson
Sent: Thursday, 9 February 2017 5:16 PM
To: GPSC4 GPSC4
Subject: Letter to honorable Robert Borsak with submission attachment
Attachments: Development property and display area issues Powerhouse Museum Ultimo and Parramatta sites.docx

Dear Chairman,

Thank you for your balanced, unbiased and effective role to date.

The recent change in our State Premier and Minister for the Arts has created, potentially, a far more fluid situation with regard to this sub-optimal project and the potential for greater equity in museum expenditures on a regional basis.

The attached document gives a detailed analysis of the perilously inadequate information supplied back to your Committee of Inquiry by the Museum's Director, Ms Merrillees and in other regards by Ms Samantha Torres.

All parties involved with this failed project understand the crucial nature of comparative site details, scale, location, ownership, value and accessibility. This includes staff and volunteers at the museum as well as external supporters. They are worried and disappointed with the museum's so-called 'leadership'.

During December pursuant to the previous Upper House Inquiry session, at which the Chairman requested such comparative details from Ms Merrillees and Prof Glover, relevant information has come to light as to the apparent economy with the truth ('alternative facts') exercised by those two persons in evidence (vs. 'the whole truth'), the complicated Parramatta site consolidation issues and the comparative scale of potential display and public spaces in regards to the present Ultimo display areas. Suffice to say that various sources paint an alarming picture of potentially misleading verbal and written testimony and Machiavellian, underhand dealing by Government. Staff and volunteers are appalled; even, we hear, some Trustees. The Board is reported to be questioning the project's planning process, risks attached to the Collection move (and many others), lack of positive response to their written demand for certain guarantees and other critical matters. The previous Premier, it appears, specifically noted to a senior museum representative that the \$1 billion + cost of the move was immaterial and the project would go ahead. It is to be hoped, again based on reasonable information that the new Minister has agreed to review all major capital arts projects, including this one, within a broader context of appropriate new policy, canvassing popular opinion, enhanced cost effectiveness and improved planning procedures.

Summary of attached document:

- MAAS has supplied confusing, inaccurate and inexact figures and plans to mystify the Inquiry and obviate serious comparison of present and future museum sites
- Critical data such as exact Lot numbers and plans are missing- it is either amateur night or deliberate
- Heritage, ownership and consolidation issues are evaded
- This deeply mauls the museum's credibility reflecting the motivation of Government/senior MAAS managers
- Museums rely on credibility to maintain public confidence
- Land swap deals by Government with developers Ultimo/Parramatta current (page 7)?
- Ms Merrillees and Ms Torres, it is suggested, should be recalled
- The display areas as denoted are imprecise, undocumented and deliberately confusing
- MAAS Trustees 'independence' appears to be manifestly lacking and overborn by a mendacious, secretive and incompetent Government
- The so-called 'final' Business Case (KPMG derived) has not been supplied as promised. Perhaps this and other key documents might be subpoenaed?

It may also be beneficial to a broader understanding of regional issues to recall Ms Kylie Winkworth; to call a senior officer from Tourism NSW; and to ask Mr John Peterson, whose Submission 157 is on the Inquiry's website on the Migration Heritage Centre, in regards to further options in Parramatta which might be canvassed and which might help provide data in your forthcoming report which would assist Government and the new Minister for the Arts in responding positively to that report.

Thank you for your attention,

RC Peterson,

Property and display area issues with the proposed 'move' of the Powerhouse Museum: Ultimo and Parramatta sites:

06 02 2017

A comment from concerned Powerhouse Museum external supporters about this continuing debacle.

Introduction:

All parties involved with this failed project understand the crucial nature of comparative site details, scale, location, ownership, value and accessibility. This includes staff and volunteers at the museum as well as external supporters. We are worried and disappointed with the museum's so-called 'leadership'.

During the last month pursuant to the previous Upper House Inquiry session, at which the Chairman requested such comparative details from Ms Merrillees and Prof Glover, relevant information has come to light as to the apparent economy with the truth exercised by those two persons in evidence (vs. 'the whole truth'), the complicated Parramatta site consolidation issues and the comparative scale of potential display and public spaces in regards to the present Ultimo display areas. Suffice to say that the various sources paint an alarming picture of potentially misleading verbal and written testimony and Machiavellian, underhand dealing by Government. Staff and volunteers are appalled; even, we hear, some Trustees.

Summary:

- **MAAS has supplied confusing, inaccurate and inexact figures and plans to mystify the Inquiry and obviate serious comparison of present and future museum sites**
- **Critical data such as exact Lot numbers and plans are missing- it is either amateur night or deliberate**
- **Heritage, ownership and consolidation issues are evaded**
- **This cuts at the heart of the museum's credibility and reflects the motivation of Government and senior MAAS governance**
- **Museums rely on credibility to maintain public confidence**
- **[Land swap deals by Government with developers Ultimo/Parramatta current \(page 7\)?](#)**
- **Ms Merrillees and Ms Torres, it is suggested, should be recalled**
- **The display areas as denoted are imprecise, undocumented and deliberately confusing**
- **MAAS Trustees 'independence' appears to be manifestly lacking and overborn by a mendacious, secretive and incompetent Government**
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The comparison of the two sites:

It was apparent from inspection by the Upper House Inquiry Chairman that the David Jones car park on Riverbank, Parramatta, was far smaller than the Ultimo site -even after various portions of that were sacrificed to enable the Goods Line walkway to be developed along with the light rail line. It seems the museum received little recognition or compensation for this exceptionally valuable sacrifice which will also frustrate necessary future rolling-stock movement.

Soon after the Inquiry's November session Save the Powerhouse Museum provided the following schematic of necessary consolidation in Parramatta which might permit MAAS' statements that the site there would be close in size to the present Ultimo site to be partly true, subject to acquisition and consolidation. (See next page).

The written response by Ms Merrillees to the Chairman's questions also elicited the following statement:

Proposed Parramatta Site:

Total area of approximately 20,160sqm

⑦ 30B Phillip Street [size? Lot no?]

⑦ 34 Phillip Street [size? Lot no?]

⑦ 38 Phillip Street ""

⑦ 42 Phillip Street ""

⑦ 44 Phillip Street ""

⑦ 46 Phillip Street ""

• 47 Smith Street. ""

• 36 Phillip Street ""

Current Ultimo Site:

Total area of approximately 22,900sqm

• lot 1 DP 770031 [Size?]

• Lot 1 DP 781732 ""

• Lots 1 and 3 DP 631345 ""

• Lot 3 DP 216854 ""

• Lot 37 DP 822345 ""

* Lot 1 DP 801428 ""

[Each Lot size should be stated by MAAS. Lot maps

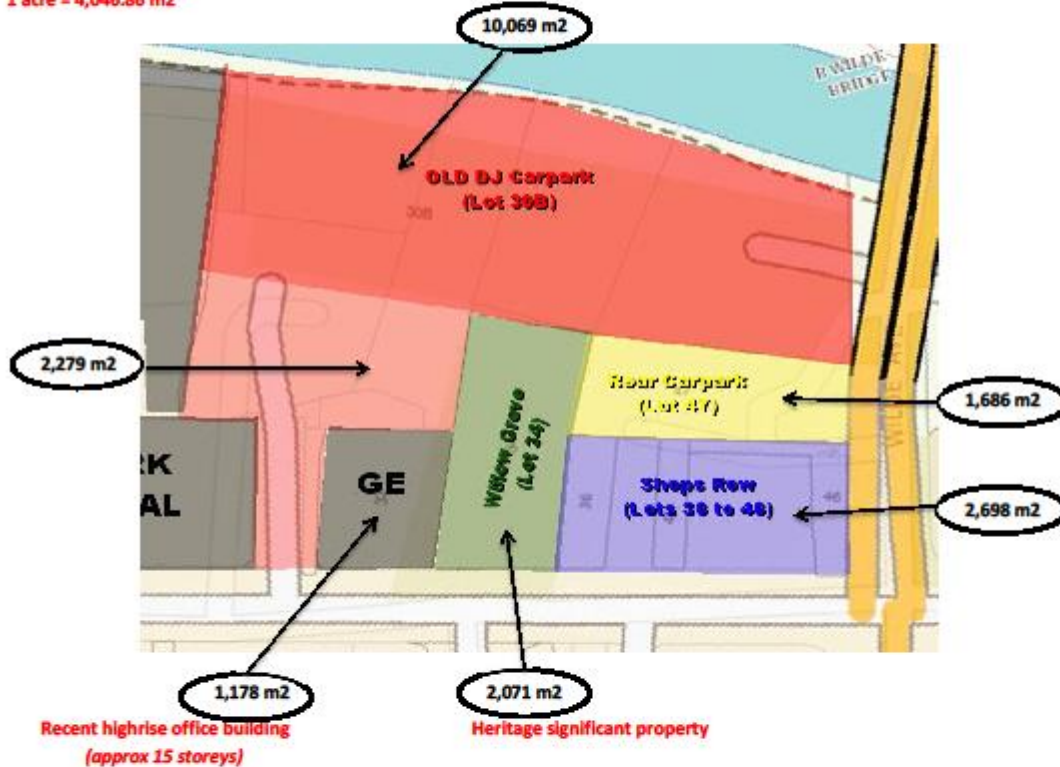
should be provided, imposed on the total curtilage]

[In this column Lot numbers/maps/Lot sizes should be provided by MAAS]

These areas are not mapped in the document on line provided by the Inquiry Secretariat, and as promised by Ms Merrillees. Thus we presently rely on that supplied by Save the Powerhouse:

Powerhouse Museum - Comparative areas					01-Nov-16
	19Oct16 Hearing			Save the Powerhouse estimates	
	R. Borsak		D.Merillees		
Ultimo	8.3 acres	6.3 ?	25,495 m2	22,900 m2	24,779 m2
Parramatta					
Old David Jones Carpark					
Building	2.4 acres		9,712 m2	20,160 m2	10,069 m2
Carpark & Laneway					2,279 m2
Total Lot 30B					12,348 m2
Willow Grove (Lot 34)					2,071 m2
Rear Carpark (Lot 47)					1,686 m2
Row of shops (Lots 36 to 46)					2,698 m2
GE Building (Lot 32)					1,178 m2
Total Phillip St Block					19,981 m2

1 acre = 4,046.86 m2



The Ultimo site at 22,900 M2 is reported as 5.66 acres.

Even though it is impossible to verify this figure because the Lot details have not been supplied in map and number form, it appears somewhat understated.

The original Powerhouse Museum site was approximately 8.2 acres (data supplied by staff from 1988)



Plan of Ultimo Powerhouse Museum site provided by Ms Merrillees, Director, MAAS. Note lack of detailed Lot numbers, curtilage of each and area of each Lot. No historic detail showing shrinkage.

The only visual provided of the Parramatta Lots- on line- by MAAS appears to be as follows- a very poor photograph of some of the Lots (?):



The MAAS response is deeply sub-optimal for several reasons: there is no proper Lot plan for either the Ultimo or the proposed Parramatta sites. In the case of Ultimo a conjoined overall plan is given whose boundaries are not provably correct.

No historical changes are shown to assist the Inquiry.

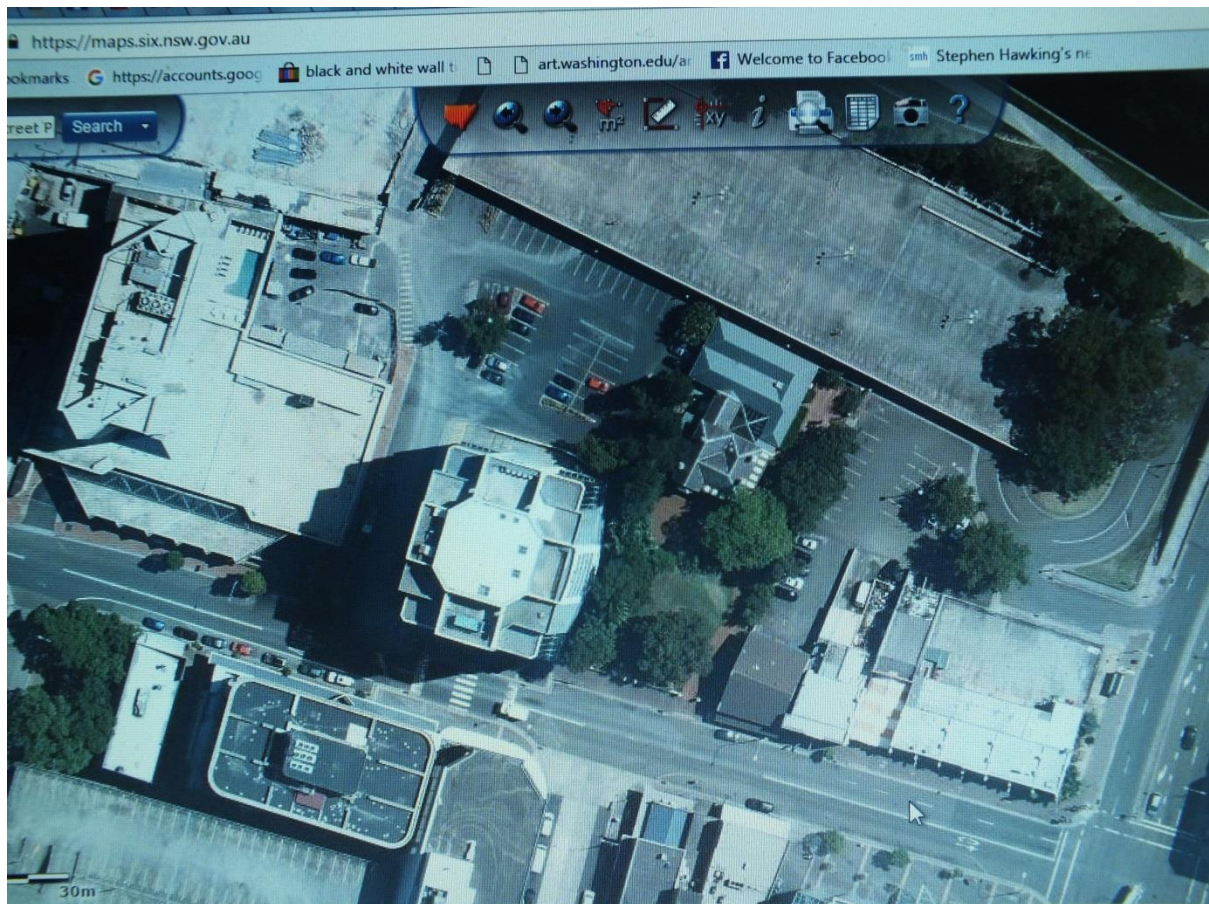
In the case of Parramatta the Lots are not denoted, just the street addresses- no areas given- and the illustration above which is entirely inadequate.

As we shall see in what follows regarding the MAAS statement on display areas inside the present museum curtilage, the imprecision is so severe that it suggests MAAS is deliberately attempting to confuse and mislead the Inquiry- again. It must be noted here that Ms Merrillees at no time prior to being forced to supply details of the Parramatta sites, required to achieve even minimal parity, acknowledged that more than the David Jones site was being considered. Indeed she repeatedly referred to the Parramatta site in the singular. This is hardly the 'whole truth'.

If Save the Powerhouse can construct a reasonable Lot plan for Parramatta why can MAAS not do so for Ultimo and Parramatta, with all the Government's resources?

The following photograph of the overall sites in Parramatta is drawn from freely available Government source data: Six Maps.

Careful analysis shows how complete the extended Willow Grove site with its lovely garden- a classic Victorian space- remains, revealing its deep historic quality. Should this be demolished, destroyed to provide yet more profits for a Government hell bent on just building huge megaplexes of concrete, steel and glass with a museum Directorate asleep at the wheel?



Overall: supposed Parramatta sites to be consolidated. (Courtesy Maps Six, NSW Government)

Parramatta consolidation, acquisition, cost, heritage destruction, Government misdirection:

For the six relevant Parramatta Lots/eight street addresses to be consolidated requires heroic activity on the part of Property NSW, given that all the owners will now realise that Government is desperate to do so which will escalate the prices significantly. Recent articles establish that Parramatta Council are expecting at least \$150 million for its (three?) sites alone. With Government making such concrete statements about where the project will be located, developers/ owners (Endeavour Energy?) will be rubbing their hands and gloating all the way to the bank. There are no guarantees that 'ransom' strips will not develop or that compulsory purchase at real market values can take place. Even worse the possibility of land swaps raises its ugly head- see later. Added to which remains the issue of Parramatta Council's apparent ownership of at least two critical, heritage-listed Lots: Willow Grove and St George's Terrace.

In this fervid climate of property speculation in Parramatta- and across Sydney (also especially in Ultimo adjacent to Darling Harbour) - costs to Government will almost certainly skyrocket. Given Government's propensity to do shady deals- Barangaroo anyone?- with singular identities possessing special access and with a few enormous property development companies, there is no guarantee a sale or sales, swap or barter, will be in the genuine public interest. Based on previous practice all negotiations and contractual details will be suppressed. The likelihood that MAAS will have to share the Parramatta site with a corporate behemoth to begin to cover the real costs of development has

already been established by the Inquiry. How else can Government reduce the plus \$1 billion cost (not including wastage of fit-for-purpose facilities in Ultimo)?

MAAS Trustees and Director would do well to remember two old sayings:

“If you lie down with dogs you get up with fleas”

And:

“When supping with the devil it is wise to use a very long spoon.”

The relevant inexperience of senior figures within MAAS governance is especially pertinent here, notwithstanding the Board presence of a reputedly expert commercial property lawyer, whose expensive time is limited owing to a very busy practice and placating other Partners. The slippery slope beckons to MAAS senior governance personnel.

Meanwhile, through the mouthpiece of a senior public servant at the Inquiry, Government has spouted the cant that it is looking at all uses for Ultimo from preservation as a museum or cultural precinct with full public access, up to the nuclear option of demolishing the heritage buildings (save perhaps their facades) and ensuring full blown mixed use/unit block developments of up to 50 stories. Reliable information indicates a minimum development of approximately 1500 units in the latter option- probably more. The final sale value of units and retail property would be in the \$ billions- with a huge eventual net profit for the developers.

In this light it is argued that both Ms Merrillees and Ms Torres should be recalled by the Inquiry to answer further questions.

More particularly this author has received, from an impeccable source, the following:

“Property NSW has approached a smaller land owner with an offer, proffering the notion that if this person can consolidate the requisite Parramatta Lots this parcel could be swapped for the MAAS/Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo. This information came to light when our source was approached by a corporation who in turn had been approached by this person seeking a joint venture, based on superior resources linked to actual land ownership in Parramatta. Assuming this is correct it suggests that the senior public servant was deliberately misdirecting and misleading to the Inquiry. In addition it appears that the Director of MAAS was deliberately mute and misleading”.

So, there is a callous economy with the truth throughout Government’s evidence to the Inquiry magnified by the failure to acknowledge that the so-called ‘final business case’ (by KPMG and associates), has been lodged with Government, which has undertaken to provide the Inquiry with a synopsis. As the schedule has stretched into February 2017, Government should, by now, have provided that synopsis. The business case will illuminate all such issues. Perhaps it should be subject to subpoena?

There is another aspect of Government’s cynicism- ably supported by a supposedly principled, heritage-sensitive organisation, MAAS- as to the unavoidable demolition of two important heritage sites and building formations on Riverbank- both heritage listed:



Parramatta- Lots 38 to 48; St George's Terrace (courtesy Suzette Meade); early-mid Victorian (Australia) terrace. Phillip Street, Parramatta.

The view most probably taken by Government and MAAS is these are 'just' Victorian buildings; Sydney has lots of those; they have no importance; bulldoze them; who cares?

Given that so much of Parramatta's heritage has been bulldozed, especially in the centre. Given that these are on an historical scale so different to the massive modern carbuncles so beloved of Parramatta's boosters, with a commercial, social and domestic history of great relevance to Parramatta's now denuded architectural and urban past, if that were to be the view of MAAS, particularly, it inescapably demonstrates the apparently thin veneer of museological expertise prevalent in their current governance structure and the political naivety of same.

Willow Grove especially has a rich, complex, fascinating social history. When coupled with Government's proposed commercial rape of the Cumberland Hospital/Female Factory precinct the picture darkens into one of mindless barbarity driven solely by the profit motive and greed.



Willow Grove; Lot 34. Important heritage site and building (courtesy Suzette Meade, President, NPRAG). Phillip Street, Parramatta.

The following photograph also demonstrates that there is another kind of problem: the GEC building is a modern structure worth tens of millions of dollars. Would redevelopment of the whole site include its demolition? How could MAAS/Government justify yet more waste on such scale added to the waste of \$450 million of perfectly functional, fit-for-purpose museum buildings and facilities in Ultimo?

They are not able to do so of course, and simply evade the issue by failing to acknowledge it exists. Most MAAS supporters, staff and volunteers are aware of this inescapable fact. This may be acceptable to a bent Government, focused on development at any cost in pursuit of assisting the big end of town, but MAAS governance figures know this full well and, in the future, will not be able to dodge this and many other inconvenient truths. That is how museological and academic careers are soon terminated especially when a number of astute opponents understand how to prosecute such issues in the public forum. Supporters, staff and volunteers are watching closely. MAAS leadership credibility continues to sink.



St George's Terrace/white commercial building/ modern GEC building (courtesy Suzette Meade). Note huge tower under construction behind.

It is not appropriate here to further illuminate flood mitigation issues- what exactly will be a 100 year flood in 30 years' time and the costs of handling this over a 100 year timeline- or to dwell on the Government's (and that of MAAS senior governance's) obvious apparent practice of misdirection, misleading and evidenced contempt for the Inquiry in regard to site comparison, acquisition and cost issues. These matters speak for themselves. So far the concept of 'the whole truth' has been totally lacking from their testimony and mystification has been the order of the day, so as to evade detailed, forensic scrutiny. Perhaps the Committee can clarify these issues before its sessions close? It will have the support of most external interested parties, and staff and volunteers in MAAS/Powerhouse Museum.

Honey I shrunk the display areas; comparing public and display spaces:

Inevitably, comparison between the existing magnificent buildings and a proposed replacement at Riverbank must dwell on the realisation, if possible, of substitute spaces in the new project. MAAS in its written statement to the Inquiry notes the following statistics:

“The number suggested by the Chair is incorrect.

The table below provides the detail of the Public Space types, areas and volumes (cubic volumes) for the Ultimo site.

Area (Square Metres)

<i>Permanent Display</i>	<i>5,969</i>
<i>Temporary Display</i>	<i>5,462</i>
<i>Total Public Display Spaces</i>	<i>11,431 M2</i>

Volume (Cubic Metres)

Permanent Display: 81,854

Temporary Display: 54,447

Total Public Display Spaces: 136,041 M3

Given that these figures are obviously much smaller than the previously available figures in regard to display and public spaces it is incumbent on the MAAS Director to provide detailed floor/cubic volume plans of the claimed display areas. It is telling that she has not done so. At the opening, display spaces totalled approximately 15,000 M2, including the 1000 M2 in what was then Stage 1 (data supplied by staff present at the opening in 1988). Taking that 1000 M2 from the total leaves 14,000 M2.

In 2010 the Museum reported (still available on the internet):

“How big is the Powerhouse?”

Approx. 20,000 square metres of public space, which is equivalent to three international competition soccer fields.”

<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/about/aboutFacts.php>

The standard ratio of circulation/public functional spaces to display space is about 1 to 3, or 4. Of course it varies according to display type, building realities and pragmatic concerns, but these ratios are traditionally fairly representative of industry norms. Which indicates an area of displays for the present Powerhouse Museum of between 14,000 M2 and 15,000 M2 based on the 2010 public statement quoted above?

So, either the present MAAS Directorate has worked a miracle of miniaturisation or their figures are questionable. Can you see why their credibility is sinking? In addition, the issue of public space in association with display space is critical: where can staff conduct educational engagements; public concerts and debates take place; venue hire be maximised; and the deeply varied, visitor involving life of a museum evolve and emanate if not in public, non-display spaces, along with carefully prepared exhibit areas? This is a false dichotomy (display vs. public spaces, including circulation) about which the public- welcoming staff at the Powerhouse Museum is fully aware. Can you understand why they are so concerned about their leadership? Surely the Trustees can understand their sincere concerns? If not, what are they worth to this beloved institution?

The cubic volumes, however, are also crucial. Many of the most historically significant objects in the museum's collection are huge, even by world standards. To put them into smaller volumes will crush them and the visitors' perceptions. To pay for these soaring spaces in Parramatta will cost hundreds of millions. What a waste of money when smaller volunteer museums in rural NSW are crying out for \$1000. \$1 billion +- for what?

Conclusion:

So, where does that leave MAAS staff and volunteers, not to mention visitors, Sydneysiders, tourists, supporters and, especially, rural museums who are lucky to get a single dollar from Government despite their massive heritage collections- almost all curated by an ageing cohort of wonderful, dedicated volunteers?

Frankly- at sea without a paddle in a rapidly sinking canoe.

How can there be any rational business case for this benighted project- wasting fit-for-purpose facilities worth at least \$450 million, at a cost including that, of now well over \$1 billion, to a site just 23 kilometres away with massive consolidation and acquisition issues attached, flood prone and destined for failure? With additional unavoidable risks to the collections through movement and the new storage areas in a flood prone site? Without any local consultation of the multitude of communities and cultural/ethnic groups of this vibrant, multicultural City? Especially when there are such exciting, creative, cost-effective alternatives suggested for the Cumberland Hospital/Female Factory/Fleet Street site?

The obvious answer is there can be no rational business-case, 'final' or otherwise.

The lie is given to ignorant Parramatta boosters like David Borger, failed ex- Ministers like Troy Grant, pootling Presidents like Professor Glover and apparently inglorious leaders such as Ms Merrillees: if they cannot reveal the basis for their actions in detail (that have cost the Public Purse over \$10 million) then frankly their case is horse manure and without merit. If not, they should present it transparently and let it be debated in the Upper House Inquiry.

If in doubt, why not survey MAAS supporters, staff and volunteers as to what they think- anonymously?

Not to mention the 2.4 million folk who live in Greater Western Sydney.