

**Supplementary
Submission
No 159a**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

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The Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Committee Chair,
General Purpose Standing Committee No 4
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

Be email: gpscno4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (the Powerhouse Museum) – Proposal for Relocation to Parramatta

ICOMOS – the International Council for Monuments and Sites – is a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOMOS is also an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee under the World Heritage Convention. Australia ICOMOS, formed in 1976, has nearly 700 members in a range of heritage professions and is amongst the largest of the over 100 national committees of ICOMOS.

The Powerhouse Museum is an iconic historical and cultural institution which has become one of the major drawcards for tourists and Sydney residents since its completion in 1988 as an award winning adaptive reuse redevelopment of the old Ultimo Power Station

The NSW Government appears to be committed to the proposal to relocate the museum to Parramatta and redevelop the Ultimo site. Many heritage and environmental groups and respected authorities have raised concerns about the proposal and the basis for the Government's decision for relocation. The decision-making process has been clouded in secrecy, a business case has been carried out after the decision was made, and consultation with experts and the public was also carried out after the event. The spiralling costs and the approvals process have been criticised by a Legislative Council committee in December 2017 which concluded that ... *'spending up to \$1.5 billion to destroy a cultural icon is an act of vandalism by this government'* .

Australia ICOMOS is concerned that the process of reaching this decision will impact on the heritage values of the former powerhouse structure and its collection which is unique in Australia. It may also result in diminishing the role of the Powerhouse as a world class Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. The site is accessible and centrally located near other related sites such as the Maritime Museum, the Aquarium and is adjacent to Darling Harbour and Chinatown. Sydney is considered have a shortage of world class museums and the Government's response is to relocate one of the few remaining world class museums out of the Sydney CBD altogether. Upgrading and expanding the Powerhouse Museum should be the utmost priority of the NSW Government, not relocation.

We note that the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has a long history with the Sydney TAFE Ultimo Campus; which now also includes the head office of TAFE NSW. It is appropriate that a cultural and geographical relationship remain and be strengthened between the MAAS collection and the Sydney TAFE campus at Ultimo.

The protection of priceless and irreplaceable large and fragile items in the Powerhouse collection that may be jeopardised in any relocation proposal needs careful consideration. The aircraft collection, Locomotive No 1 and the 18th century Boulton and Watt beam engine cannot be relocated without dismantling and consequent irreversible damage. The ambient character of the original powerhouse

provides a totally appropriate setting for the display of industrial heritage items such as these. The majority of the Museum's collection is stored in a warehouse in Castle Hill, and much of it has never been accessible to the public.

Sydney is the centre for tourism in NSW and the Powerhouse Museum is an established attraction for international visitors. Parramatta is fully justified in benefitting from improved cultural institutions, and a purpose designed facility on the Parramatta River is a creditable response which could accommodate an expansion of the Powerhouse collection. This however should not be at the expense of losing the existing facility at Ultimo. An entirely new facility could be achieved at far less cost than the relocation proposal, and the outcome would be two purpose designed institutions which would avoid the potential for damage to exhibits and expand the public's viewing access to the warehoused collection.

It is of great concern to Australia ICOMOS that an iconic institution of such cultural and historical significance to Sydney may be subjected to a relocation that has not been fully resolved, and that the wider cost implications have not been disclosed for public scrutiny. There is no evidence that alternative proposals have been investigated by the government, nor has the basis for the relocation decision ever been made public since the announcement for the project by former Premier Mike Baird in 2016.

MP Matthew Mason-Cox has articulated the issue in the Sydney Morning Herald (13 April 2018) where he stated...*Good process is characterised by wide consultation, the preparation of a strong business case, and finally a decision informed by these facts.....the key problem with the Powerhouse decision is that the decision came first, followed by the business case and a pretend consultation process.*

Australia ICOMOS shares the concerns of much of the community that the Government's actions with respect to this proposal have been seriously flawed, and that the proposal itself may be based on flawed assumptions and reasoning.

Yours faithfully


Ian Travers
President, Australia ICOMOS

CC/other recipients:

Hon Gladys Berejiklian, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Premier
Hon Donald Harwin MLC, Minister for Resources, Minister for Energy and Utilities, and Minister for the Arts
Mr Luke Foley, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Leader of the Opposition
Hon Matthew Mason-Cox, Member of the Legislative Council
Hon Walter Secord, Member of the Legislative Council
Mr Graham Quint, National Trust Advocacy Director