

Supplementary
Submission
No 142f

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND
GALLERIES**

Name: Ms Jennifer Sanders

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The Hon Robert Borsak MLC

Committee Chair

General Purpose Standing Committee no 4

Legislative Council

Parliament House

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Submission from Jennifer Sanders, May 2018

Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries No 4

Terms of reference: 1d), 1e) and 1f)

ICOM Statement on the Independence of Museums, Paris, 27 March 2018 and its relevance to the current situation of the Powerhouse Museum and the Final Business Case Summary: Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney.

On 27 March 2018, ICOM released a statement on the Independence of Museums which has relevance for the following Term of Reference of the Inquiry:

d) access to the collections of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian Museum and any other state collections held in trust for the people of New South Wales, and programs that promote physical and online access.

e) the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site at Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta, and whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development.

f) the development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries.

Background

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is the only international organisation representing museums and museum professionals. Since 1946, ICOM has assisted members of the museum community in their mission to preserve, conserve and share cultural heritage. ICOM works for society and its development. It is committed to ensuring the conservation, and protection of cultural goods.

ICOM is governed in an inclusive and hierarchical manner, on an international level. The organisation gathers more than 37,000 members and is made up of National Committees, which represent 141 countries and territories, and International Committees, which gather experts in museum specialties worldwide.

ICOM has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council – UNESCO.

ICOM sets standards for museums in design, management and collections organisation. The *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* is a reference in the global museum community. It establishes minimum standards for professional practices and achievements for museums and their employees. By joining ICOM, each member is committed to respecting this code.

<http://icom.museum/>

Statement on the independence of museums

Paris, 27 March 2018

The function of museums is to preserve, interpret and promote the natural and cultural inheritance of humanity. As expressed by the First Principle of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, governing bodies and those concerned with the strategic direction and oversight of museums have a primary responsibility to protect and promote this heritage as well as the human, physical and financial resources made available for that purpose. On this basis, the ICOM Code of Ethics promotes social responsibility, independence and scientific freedom, tolerance and mutual respect without compromising professional museum standards.

As expressed by the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society, museums are spaces for cultural transmission, intercultural dialogue, learning, discussion and training. Therefore, museums play an important role in education, social cohesion and sustainable development and have great potential to raise public awareness of the value of cultural and natural heritage and of the responsibility of all citizens to contribute to their care and transmission.

Regardless of their funding source or governance model, museums should maintain control of the content and integrity of their programs, exhibitions and activities. Income-generating activities should not compromise the standards of the institution or its public (Principle 1.10 of the ICOM Code of Ethics). The high level of professional and institutional integrity and autonomy of museums should not be jeopardised by financial or political interests.

http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Statements/ENG/20180327_Statement_independence_of_museums_Final_EN.pdf

Relevance of ICOM Statement to the Inquiry:

The final paragraph is especially relevant to the considerations of the Inquiry as follows and, in the context of the government's plan to relocate Australia's largest, most complex, site specific, fit for purpose museum 23kms to a flood prone riverside site.

- The continued mismanagement, arbitrariness and secrecy, surrounding the government's plan to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. From the Baird announcement in March 2014, the museum has had over 3 years of uncertainty and lack of control which has resulted in reduced exhibitions, reduced sponsorship and audiences and, reduced donations and benefaction.
- The apparent lack of control by the MAAS Trust and Museum Executive of 'the content and integrity' of all critical components of the government's plan, not only the planned move to Parramatta but also the consequent projects referred to in the Final Business Case Summary: Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney (FBCS) and the Premier's press release 28 April 2018. These are 'a new fashion and design museum' and the removal of the onsite collection storage and facilities at Ultimo to Castle Hill.
- This latter project is of particular concern because the 240,000 objects currently stored at Ultimo in regularly publicly accessible storage will be less accessible at Castle Hill to students, researchers, practitioners etc who study the collections at Ultimo. MAAS' ability to effectively carry out its role as a museum will be compromised if the Collection is rendered less publicly accessible.
- There is also the risk inherent with reference to the ICOM statement that 'Income-generating activities should not compromise the standards of the institution or its public. (Principle 1.10 of the ICOM Code of Ethics). This risk was flagged by the MAAS Board in their mid 2016 letter to the Premier saying that the irreducible requirement for MAAS was that MAAS had complete control of the entire Riverbank site. (Refer to Inquiry transcript Wednesday October 19 pp10,11,12 quoting President Glover).
- There are undoubtedly inherent and unjustifiable risks in the scale and scope of the government's plans for the Powerhouse Museum given that their decision necessitates the closure of the existing fit for purpose Powerhouse Museum and its uprooting from its home since 1893, where it serves established and diverse audiences, to a less accessible flood prone site.

Risks of loss of audiences, loss of income, loss of brand recognition and reputation; loss of sponsors, benefactors, donors; of staff knowledge and expertise, and of volunteers are compounded by the

untenable risks of damage and loss to the Museum's priceless and irreplaceable collection which will be subject to a massive relocation with, according to the plan's unrealistic timelines, a rushed process which may well compromise best practice museological standards.

The Powerhouse Museum (MAAS) has a proud record of high standards of museum practice in its programs, exhibitions and activities as evidenced by its record of industry and peer awards and recognition, as well as public benefaction and support. It is unconscionable that the Museum's world class collection with its objects of international, national and state significance should be put at risk by this peremptory plan. As has been advocated by many, there are several less costly, less risky options for world class iconic cultural development in Parramatta that would not necessitate the dismemberment and destruction of the Powerhouse Museum.

The Museum's ability to sustain and indeed develop its record of professional best practice is under threat, with all the associated costs and risks, because of the government's cabinet-in-confidence 'thought-bubble' plan with its implicit political and financial factors and motivations.

The ICOM Statement highlights the central importance of a museum retaining control and autonomy of its content and functions. However, the independence of the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS) has been put in doubt by the government's plan and the secrecy of its business planning processes. The consequence is that the museum's donors, benefactors and supporters are withdrawing their support for the museum given its uncertain and chaotic future. The Museum is being dismembered.

Benefactors who have supported the museum since the 1980s, inspired by the unique, imaginative reworking of the Ultimo Power House into a contemporary museum with magnificent soaring industrial spaces perfectly suited to display our power, engineering and transport heritage, are changing their wills. Donors are asking for the return of their gifts.

Benefactors give to the 'bricks and mortar' of the museum – they support its purpose and its contribution to our community. The government has fractured these relationships by its plan to remove the Museum from its home – the cultural, education and creative precinct it anchors, and to dismember it and distribute it between three indeterminate sites. Of all the museum's stakeholders, benefactors and donors are the lifeblood of a museum. Yet their voices have been ignored.

Instead, the government is appropriating their legacies without any consultation or consideration. This peremptory action does not bode well for the government's intent to raise significant donations to fund their plans for their Museum. Finally it should be noted that in making cultural gifts, donors are giving to the cultural institution – an institution established for the people of NSW. They are not making gifts to the premier or government of the day.

Jennifer Sanders

ICOM member 7120

I am willing to appear as a witness at the Inquiry