

Supplementary
Submission
No 67b

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND
GALLERIES**

Name: Ms Judith White

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REQUEST

To the Legislative Council's Inquiry into Museums and Galleries

31 May 2018

Dear Mr Borsak and Committee,

I note that the Inquiry into Museums and Galleries is no longer receiving submissions. However, in the light of your recent hearings, I should like to ask that the Inquiry consider the Sydney Modern development in conjunction with its investigation into the proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum, prior to finalising its report.

There are a number of pressing reasons for this request:

- The two projects are by far the State's biggest expenditure on cultural infrastructure.
- Both are shrouded in secrecy. Despite the best endeavours of your committee, the full business plan for the Powerhouse move has not been released. The business plan for Sydney Modern has also been deemed Cabinet confidential – an entirely inappropriate use of the confidentiality provision.
- Since the 2013 announcement by the AGNSW of the Sydney Modern plan, some of the State's most distinguished arts and museum specialists have recommended that it be built not in The Domain, but in Parramatta, the only major NSW city without a public art gallery. Others have suggested that instead of moving the Powerhouse from Ultimo, a new facility should be built in Parramatta to which all the central Sydney museums and galleries could send exhibitions. It has also been proposed that Parramatta would be a good location for the State's first museum of indigenous culture, of the kind recommended by Infrastructure NSW in 2012. None of these alternatives appears to have been given serious consideration.
- The secret business cases, so far as we have been told, meet the infrastructure criterion of a Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR) of more than 1. No museum specialist, to my knowledge, considers this a serious possibility. Either the visitor projections may be flawed – it will be

difficult to maintain the initial increase in visitation without great improvements to the collections and the exhibition programs – or the business cases involve commercial plans unbefitting great public institutions: turning them into corporate function centres, and/or imposing entrance fees at the AGNSW.

- Both projects are certain to face major problems with ongoing funding. Arts Minister Don Harwin told Parliament that a Parramatta MAAS will require no increase in recurrent funding. This is a delusion. To launch a new museum without adequate finance for experienced curators, conservationists and other professionals will result in poor quality and an eventual loss of visitation. The same applies to Sydney Modern where the focus on the building project has already led to a decline in the quality of programs, as documented in my book *Culture Heist* of which copies have previously been sent to your committee.
- The loss of green space involved in building Sydney Modern in the location presently proposed has been extensively documented in the 173 objections to the Development Application (DA) lodged with the Department of Planning, notably the submissions by the Chesterman-Andrews-Donald-Appleton group, the Total Environment Centre, the National Parks Association, National Trust and Friends of the RBG. Again, no serious alternative sites appear to have been considered.
- The AGNSW response to the DA objections to Sydney Modern revealed a serious disconnect with the case for moving the Powerhouse. A remote satellite, argued the AGNSW, would be “inefficient”. How does this not apply to the Powerhouse, which has a far more substantial collection, and one very difficult to move? The response also ignores international best practice which, as with the Tate in Britain and the Louvre in France, is precisely to locate extensions in provincial areas.
- Access to both proposed new developments for the people of NSW appears to have been given little consideration. Visitors to Sydney from regional areas of the State are less likely to venture out to Parramatta than they currently are to visit Ultimo. At the AGNSW, parking is already

stretched and inconveniently located, especially at night, and public transport is minimal. These are major flaws.

- The attraction of both projects for international tourism may have been overestimated. Europe and America have destination museums and galleries because of the quality and extent of their collections which few Australian institutions can match. No consideration appears to have been given in either the Powerhouse or the Sydney Modern proposal to the care and building of the collections.
- The huge sums of cultural infrastructure funds allocated to the two projects leave regional NSW museums and galleries seriously underfunded. The \$100 million allocated to the regions - \$25 million a year for four years – does not stretch far. Recent announcements in Lismore and Grafton suggest that the biggest allocations will be to National Party marginal electorates.

Thank you for considering this request. I do not believe that the committee's report, diligent as I am sure it will be, can be complete without some consideration of the issues outlined above.

Yours sincerely,

Judith White