

**Submission
No 33**

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

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TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

— FEDERAL MEMBER FOR SYDNEY —

Hon Robert Borsak MLC

Chair

Select Committee on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Borsak

I write with regard to your inquiry into the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales.

As I have made very clear in the past, the Powerhouse should remain at its Ultimo location.

The Powerhouse Museum has a 124-year history in Ultimo, the heart of my electorate. It was originally founded in 1880 as a legacy of the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition. The Technological Museum opened in 1893. It was inspired by and endeavoured to replicate London's South Kensington museum and education precinct.

The Powerhouse has one of the leading applied science and technology collections in the world. It is also acknowledged for the calibre of its scholarships and exhibitions. This museum is not redundant. It is well loved and regularly visited by its community.

The Powerhouse Museum as part of the broader Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) has seen a huge increase in visitors and activity over the last three years. Yearly visits to the Powerhouse have increased by 35 per cent which has also seen an 11 per cent year on year increase in educational visits. The museum regularly supports and sponsors international and travelling exhibitions.

Cultural and Historical Significance

The Powerhouse Museum is intrinsically connected to our Sydney community. Indeed, the Ultimo site of the Powerhouse Museum was listed on the National Trust Registry in 2015. I supported the submission by the National Trust to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museum and Galleries. Its submission noted deep historical ties between the site and the history of our city. It showcased this connection with reference to the six out of seven criteria for Trust registry being met.

It is fitting that the science and technology museum should be housed in one of the only remaining major city-based electrical generating stations of the twentieth century. Upon its opening in 1988, the iconic repurposing of this building won the prestigious Sulman Prize for architecture. The museum's contents and its locations offer a glimpse into relics of our local industrial past. The collection lists 474 objects relating to Pyrmont and 3,496 related to Ultimo.

Sydney Museum Tourism

The Powerhouse is at the heart of a thriving design economy and is indispensable to the Sydney tourist economy. Tourism is growing in Sydney and this museum is a key tourist destination. Over 40 per cent of domestic visitors annually are from regional NSW and in recent years international visitors have increased by over ten per cent.

This trend is set to continue with domestic visitor over nights stays expected to increase from over 24.9 million per annum in 2014/15 to nearly 31 million in 2024/25. This is mirrored by international overnight travel numbers, which are expected to increase to over 115.1 million in the next decade. In light of Covid-19 it is probably not a good time to try and re-establish a museum away from its original location. The travel and tourism sectors will have enough to deal with post Covid-19 as it will take probably years for the industry to recover.

There is no doubt that the current location gives visitors more opportunity to access the Powerhouse and the industrial past of Sydney. Should the museum be moved from this site, access will be more limited, not only to the residents of my electorate but to millions of international visitors.

Emerging Design Precinct

The museum has significant connections with the Sydney and Australian design community. It is located within close reach to several arts hubs around Sydney, providing accessibility to artists and curators. The Design Institute of Australia and other artists work closely with the Powerhouse. Joint projects include Sydney Design Week, one of the longest running design festivals in the world.

We know the creative arts sector is important to the Sydney economy. It directly employs over 147,000 people and as noted by NSW Government figures accounts for over \$1.4 billion in annual exports. Removing artists' link to the museum will have detrimental impacts on the sector.

Access to Museum

The Powerhouse is located easy walking distance from Central Station, the biggest transport hub in NSW. Regional trains, busses and the airport line all meet within 900 metres of the Powerhouse. This site can easily be accessed by foot and by bike lanes, including the Goods Line.

Parramatta Deserves a First Class Museum

Sydney is a growing city, with millions of visitors, and hopefully many millions more. We as a State and a city can sustain two independent world class museums. It is inconceivable that a city like Paris would close the Louvre to open the Pompidou Centre or that a city like New York would close the Metropolitan Museum of Art to open the Guggenheim. Global cities like Sydney can certainly sustain more than one cultural institution.

Those who support the museum do not think that its existence should be at the detriment of Western Sydney. Western Sydney deserves a world class museum of its own. To merely transport a pared back version of the Powerhouse would be a mistake. The people of Western Sydney deserve a "cultural beacon" that would reflect their vibrant history and community, just as the Powerhouse reflects inner Sydney's industrial past.

Community Campaigns

Part of what makes Sydney a great city is having facilities like this that its people can visit them easily. We should not sacrifice culture for a new skyscraper on every spare foot of available land.

The proposed move of the Powerhouse from its home in Ultimo has caused significant distress and anxiety to the communities of Ultimo and Pyrmont. Thousands of residents and community members have raised their concerns through submissions, letters, petitions and actions. I commend work done by these residents and groups such as Ultimo Village Voice, Save the Powerhouse Museum Campaign, The Pyrmont History Group and Powerhouse Museum Alliance.

The love and connection that our community has to the Powerhouse Museum is evident from the actions and commitment of these groups. We believe that culture and preservation of our local history is vital for this to remain an international city.

Sydney is a growing and thriving city. Both Sydney city and Parramatta deserve a cultural institution that reflects their needs and expresses their desires.

Culture is not a zero sum game.

Yours sincerely

The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Shadow Minister for Education and Training
Federal Member for Sydney

1 May 2020