

Submission  
No 65

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

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Partially  
Confidential

# INITIAL SUBMISSION FINAL DRAFT TO THE SECOND NSW PARLIAMENTARY UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS

May 14, 2020.

[Written prior to an opportunity to properly study the Environmental Impact Statement [EIS] on the so-called 'Parramatta Powerhouse (Project)' which was put up on line for approximately three hours on 13 May then taken down.

What follows is the opinion of this author and is not stated as fact. It represents no organisation or other person than himself].

Mr Robert Borsak,  
Chairman.

Dear Chairman,

## **Introduction:**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the so-called 'Powerhouse Parramatta (Project)' [PPP] situation prior to the first formal meeting of the new UHI Committee.

As you know I submitted over twenty documents to the first UHI on this issue. Overall that Inquiry had noticeable impacts on the PPP and highlighted the project's many fatal flaws and core failings.

Some of this author's submissions were necessarily lengthy and tedious in response to massive, flaccid documentation in the oxymoronically titled 'Final Extended Business Case' [FEBC 2019] which the first museum UHI managed to extract from a most reluctant and dishonest Government. Hopefully parts of this essay may be more entertaining in a sardonic fashion.

This piece does not have such evidence to analyse but is more a preparatory perspective of what this author sees as the current status. It is therefore a summary based on multiple sources of information, some of which at this stage must remain private.

Some sources have been public, for example the two recent 'Webinars' chaired by the current CEO/Director MAAS, Ms Lisa Havilah [DMLH]. These transcripts were transposed by a court-reporter trained participant so they are verbatim and accurate. I imagine they could be made available to the UHI if you deem that appropriate.

They are scarifying in their acute and sustained rejection of the PPP by participants on a range of reasonable and well founded data.

They embody an attempt to appear to be listening, by DMLH and two other panel members [most particularly including Mr Kirk, Arts Ministry, NSW, not the other consultant poodle], to participants' views but they eventually noted that such views may be safely disregarded [end, Webinar I].

Their attempt to present the selected design option for PPP was demolished by participants and became a resounding embarrassment for the Webinar troika who tried to stop the debate a half

hour early [Webinar II] but were forced into a shamefaced retreat thereby carrying on for the allotted time. It was in this Webinar that DMLH made the smug comment noted below.

Suffice to say that as a form of public 'consultation' in support of the PPP Environmental Impact Statement [EIS] this exercise was cynical in the extreme and does not bode well for either local respondents and public opinion about the merits- or otherwise- of this white elephant or its future operational Business Case/Operating financial viability.

### **Where the project appears to be in May, 2020:**

From a reliable source it became apparent as early as November 2019 that the then Minister, the Hon. Don Harwin, had been effectively cast aside as the senior political agent of Government in taking the lead in the PPP Design Selection Panel's procedures, as had DMLH and the Trustees of MAAS. The effective decision-making appears to have rested with Mr Tim Reardon, Secretary of the Department of Premiers and Cabinet [TRDPC] about whom Ms Berejiklian our current Premier has said:

'A known stickler for policy detail, Berejiklian was just as quick to push the upside of Reardon's appointment from within the machine of government. "I am delighted Tim has accepted the role of Secretary of my Department," the Premier said. "His expertise in strategic infrastructure planning and project delivery has been at the heart of this Government's achievements and I am looking forward to him now bringing this expertise to the centre of government...'

It should be remembered in the context of PPP that its original cost under Premier Baird was claimed to be less than \$200 million [a 'brain-fart' upon the advice of an arts 'expert' in cultural capital cost assessment, 2014-2015] and that under Ms. Berejiklian and Mr. Reardon's management Westconnex appears to have blown out in cost from approximately \$9 billion to over \$16 billion - while running years late -and that figure does not include Sydney Gateway. This does not bode well for PPP's cost or schedule. With 'expertise' and 'achievement' like that who needs incompetence? Arguably, because Mr Reardon now runs the 'Centre of Government' and, given this apparent track record, the NSW Government may be rotten to the core and the centre will not hold.

Only time will tell the truth of this possible notion.

A long list of project cost blow outs could be appended demonstrating this Government's project cost control 'competence' but Westconnex may suffice as accurately indicative here. Mr Reardon appears deeply implicated in this and other transport related cost blow outs. Interestingly, his control of the PPP debacle seems to be based on brute bureaucratic force underpinned by a career which appears to exhibit no museological knowledge and scant, if any cultural expertise. So far his public utterances in various Committees seem, instead, to show exceptional skills in the classic quadrumvirate of: 'deny, distract, obfuscate, attack'. As for Ms Berejiklian she appears [clearly shown by the present CVD 19 arts catastrophe- no support evident] to have a tin ear in respect of this sector.

'The Powerhouse Museum? It's only a brand.' was her comment to a well-informed constituent.

**The massive, central, 'Sydney focused' state cultural capital works program has such further cost failures as the Sydney Theatre Company's Walsh Bay disaster to show and more coming while, as usual, the thousands of rural and regional museums are now back to begging for a few hundred dollars despite having a multitude of shovel ready projects which could disburse post CVD 19 capital works across the state at a micro level with great social and local granularity. The previous tranche of regional capital funding went**

to only a few museums compared with the vast range of need. Some of those were the departed Minister's 'Captain's Picks' like providing \$8 million + capital for the Federally operated Bundanon Art Gallery's new building on a fire threatened site. So much for professional reason and equity state-wide. There is no evidence-based policy detectable underpinning this sad picture of favouritism and pork barrelling which is reminiscent of the Federal 'Sports Rorts' affair.

Transparency?

Fairness?

What do those words mean for this Government?

Instead PPP appears to be 'funded and now [we are] in delivery mode' [DMLH, Webinar II]. This statement was made by DMLH revealing a quietly entitled confidence in the face of sustained and accurate interrogation by participants. From whom had she received this reassurance and under what circumstances one wonders? This was also prior to and preempting the formal appraisal process embodied in the EIS while the faux 'consultation' process embodied in the Webinars and other completely inadequate actions regarding public consultations about PPP, have rolled along as yet more misleading skits of Pythonesque tragi-comedy.

Since the selection of the 'winning' PPP design was adopted [which this author is reliably informed exceeds the maximum allowed construction figure by at least \$100 million even after flood mitigation provisions worth over another \$100 million were removed from the design and cost plan] the building now appears to be shrinking. The much vaunted major ground floor volume shown in that design ['Larger than Tate Modern!'] is now fast reducing in scope/perhaps has disappeared not even leaving a smile, while all car parking was removed and has not been replaced. It is now approximately half the footprint of the original Powerhouse Museum complex at Ultimo and far less in strategic cubic volumes. The claim that the project will be 'five star' in sustainability is puzzling. Revealing, perhaps, that the architects do not understand the full reality of a truly sustainable building? Like a nuclear power station it has to include full lifetime carbon inputs and outputs over its entire existence. So, for example, the massive utilisation of concrete in this milk crate carbuncle needs to be put into the calculations along with the destruction of all the buildings in Ultimo and elsewhere to be constructed such as at Castle Hill as a part of the total project. Even without that total carbon burden the building's claimed 'five star' status is deeply compromised perhaps? Time to see the calculations and the underlying data?

Precise details of comparison between the carbuncle and the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo's scale awaits the reappearance of the EIS full documentation. Still, it remains clear that the 'cargo cult' mentality is not delivering what has been claimed to GWS and Parramatta after all.

**The '*winning*' scheme it is not.**

**The people of Greater Western Sydney have been duded.**

**The Flood Risk- far more threatening '1 in 100 year events' predicted:**

What were '1 in 20 year' inundation and flooding events [*vide* Parramatta River February 09-02-2020] will soon become '1 in 5 year' events exacerbated by rapidly increasing sea level rise. As for the new '1 in 100 year' events? Hard to predict definitively but the graph curve is deeply worrying. In respect of that curve and the exponential rise in climatic and correlated weather risks Mark Lynas' book: Six Degrees, [London, Fourth Estate, 2007] gives ample warning based on sound science [for example see: K. Hennessey, et. al, 'Climate Change in NSW: Part 2- Projected Changes

in Climate Extremes, CSIRO, November 2004]. Not to take that fully into account with a future worst case situation of a massive East Coast Low, King Tide, much increased sea level and extreme flash precipitation in the Parramatta Catchment Zone is exceptional folly.

In addition, after the selection process was long complete- and as part of the EIS- PPP is only now being revisited by engineers [Arup] in respect of the increasing flood risk. The first [and until now only] marginally serious Government report on this site is dated October/November 2016. To make such a design selection without a fully up to date, *design-specific* flood risk assessment is certainly legally questionable and, in event of future disaster, potentially criminally culpable.

Seriously?

With the kind of flash flood increasingly likely due to a massive increase in Parramatta's hard surface catchment areas this concept- risible as it is- does not even begin to deal with the risk at grade. A purported 7.5 metre clearance is an hallucination with grave risks attached.

### **Scale of PPP- highly dubious figures now quoted:**

As for the claims by DMLH that the evolving project will have 18,000 M2 of museum quality public space one can only believe that the designers have achieved a loaves and fishes miracle for her in architectural and cost terms. We await further details with interest. Hopefully this second UHI will obtain all or at least most of the relevant documentation for public scrutiny from its broad call for documents.

From a reliable source this author is informed that DMLH seems to have been near breakdown when her preferred design option was not selected, as was the then Minister. So much so it appears that DMLH made two presentations to the Project Control group/Steering group in October 2019 pointing out the fundamental weaknesses and risks of the selected design and the fact that its annual operational cost would exceed that of the current Ultimo Campus by more than \$10 million- a figure mentioned in the dialogue was \$19 +million additional operational costs- all of which appears to have been glossed over by her and the Government. When taxed with this by Mr Secord at the Upper House 2020-2021 Estimates Committee hearing DMLH demurred that she had not provided two 'memos', probably on advice of TRDPC [lawyer speak?]. This verbal prestidigitation seems in line with TRDPC's apparent *modus operandi*: 'deny, distract etc.'

Notwithstanding, both DMLH and the now departed Minister -cultural hero and heroine the pair- went on to effusive public endorsement of the selected design. So has hypocrisy also had a large part to play in this rolling car crash of a project?

### **Carriageworks West: a massive hoax by Borger and the boosters?**

The first Webinar managed to proceed without hardly a mention of the words 'museum' and 'collections'. This lacuna was pointed out forcefully by participants. It is a powerful indication of the mindset of DMLH and the Government. In the second Webinar the words miraculously reappeared on more than a few occasions. Yet close scrutiny of Design Brief II by Ms Kylie Winkworth has indisputably shown that only **5,200 M 2** of that design is capable of achieving museum quality climate controlled and secure exhibition spaces. During Webinar II a highly

qualified [surveying] 'Save the Powerhouse' colleague challenged DMLH to go through the floor spaces in detail with him to establish/destroy her claim of 18,000 M<sup>2</sup>.

The result?

Nothing to see here, talk to the elbow, we must move on.

So exactly how many objects will be displayed one asks? The larger volumes, as illustrated in Design Brief II cross sections, are unable to achieve museum quality climate control and, in the case of the largest volume, appears open to the ambient external atmosphere. It would be nearly impossible to safely exhibit the large MAAS objects as in the present Ultimo Campus however the  evolves. The idea a 27 tonne locomotive can be wheeled in and out with ease just shows what amateur night thespians are involved in this most serious museum design process. In reality many of the larger objects if they are removable from Ultimo without catastrophic damage [especially the Boulton and Watt Beam Engine and Catalina] will end up in non-Castle Hill storage or, worse, inadequate volunteer museum storage without museum quality controls .

### ***A museum PPP certainly is not.***

Instead it closely resembles the semi-commercial, now failed Carriageworks. Thus it is not the 'Powerhouse Museum Parramatta [no 'Powerhouse' in sight, not moved just an ugly milk crate]' but the 'Powerhouse Parramatta (Project)' [less the word 'museum']. In other words 'Carriageworks West'. And we now know how fragile that model became as a major exogenous financial shock occurred.

Which

also may be why Government partly wants to demolish a great, world-class museum so as to be able to schlep its Consolidated Revenue across to a now failed model of elite cultural colonisation in GWS- but at least one with correct accounting?.

Thus... there we have it: a massive hoax by Borger and the developer elite played on an unwitting or unwilling Greater Western Sydney [GWS] populace.

### **Treasury, Benefit-Cost Ratio [BCR] and the next Business Case [BC]:**

We are now awaiting release of the 'Last Further Final Extended Final Business Case' [LFFEFBC] which had been promised for 28 April. Obviously holding one's breath is not an option. Given the collapse into voluntary administration by Carriageworks within the last two weeks it might be pertinent to point out that this may well show some parallels and concepts based on the Carriageworks model as embodied in the original EFBC.

God speed with those origins and that model.

There are some further mysteries to lightly touch upon.

When constructing a BC to underpin a successful BCR [in Treasury speak] it is essential in such a project to have reliable data regarding wide and deep public response to a potential range of cultural, arts, engagement and physical offers. Comparatively, no commercial entertainment project backed by lending institutions would ever proceed without an overwhelming, positive level of broad and independent market and community research. In one submission to UHI I this author undertook an analysis of the risible and flimsy market research into PPP undertaken by Government and the then Parramatta Council Administrator. It became rapidly and abundantly clear that the facile, minimal and specious 'community consultation/market research'

undertaken by proponents of PPP appeared completely unreliable and amateur.

Unfortunately matters have got progressively worse since then. Distribution of the recent postcard 'survey' undertaken for the EIS was limited to a radius of no more than 1 km from the PPP site and even that was dependent on people who could be bothered to fill one in and return it. Of the 20,000 dropped only a little more than 13% were returned. Clearly demonstrating massive awareness and support for PPP. More on this when the EIS is finally placed up on line without being taken down again three hours later. As for the questions posed and data provided on the postcard? Laughable. Completely inadequate. As any professional researcher would tell you. No bank would ever support the PPP financially on that kind of 'research'. Any internet 'survey' is equally self satirising if it can be manipulated either way [pro/anti] by participants and the organisers. To base a BC and BCR on these initiatives and the utterly rejectional Webinars for a \$ 1.5- 2 billion project is fiscal madness. Of course none of the 'surveys' raw data will be shown to outsiders [as before] and the catastrophic Webinars will be deep-sixed into obscurity.

As the draft EIS temporarily put up on line on 13 May [3 hours? A 'technical issue' it was claimed. Yes, lying and half truths appear just a 'technical issue' for this Government] demonstrated so clearly. A more egregious and misleading pictogram of market and stakeholder 'consultation' is hard to imagine. Which is especially so since one of the 'pretend' purposes of the Webinar 'consultation' was to end 'misinformation' and inaccurate data provision. That the draft EIS triumphantly establishes a new benchmark in these two sectors will be analysed in the next stage of this submission. Then the 'rotten to the core', blingy, cotton-candy EIS is finally put on display for a month. Talk about 'Fake'.

### **Most multi-cultural Communities respond magnificently to sincere consultative programmes.**

Since the enormously variegated population of GWS envelops more than 2.5 million people any project of this magnitude must canvas a significant percentage of members of different socio-economic and culturally defined communities and groups across the whole region. This process must also include many profoundly well constructed and interrogated focus groups. Conceptual development of the themes/narratives as well as event options help determine the building program. Engineers and architects then assist in defining the envelope and spaces. Manifestly this has not happened with PPP.

The elite bureaucrats and *culturati* have decided what is best for GWS communities then, utilising some remarkably inept and irrelevant comparators, have cherry picked the features they want and have subsumed this mess of self contradictory elements into Design Brief II. This then led to a profoundly suboptimal design selection, which seems to have been initially rejected as such by the Minister and DMLH. Subsequently this Frankenstein animal has been reassembled and massaged to try to make it function better [now lacking the essential two back entrances for efficient operation?] but even after putting lipstick on its mouth it still resembles a diminutive panto camel and not even a cart horse.

As for consulting local communities about the designs submitted?

Nyet.

Not interested.

'Let's tell them what they are lucky to get then consult them once all the decisions are taken'.

What a great basis for a BC and the BCR.

Not to mention an incompetent, rushed EIS.

It should be titled 'PPP- the Pravda Edition'.

George Orwell would have used it as an example.

'Four legs good [panto-camel by committee] two legs bad [well informed professional critics who believe in evidence-based analysis]'

Meanwhile the communities who are being forced into a cargo cult submissive position ['shut up or you will get nothing'] are voicing their rejection of the process and the project. As the Webinars so clearly demonstrate. Mr Borger and the elite business owners, begging-bowl consultants and developers/boosters of Parramatta continue to try and frame this as a central Sydney *urbanista* attempt to deny the Westies their cultural due. This is balderdash as the North Parramatta Action Group's [NPRAG] rejection of the entire PPP project demonstrates, along with the **12,000 signatories** of the 'Save Willowgrove' campaign. This author lives in a rural valley on the South Coast. and does not own an Elisabeth Bay *pied-a-terre*. **Mr Borger apparently represents no one but developer and self-interested business groups and himself while his role as a Trustee of MAAS appears so conflicted as to be a satire.** NPRAG has repeatedly put forward rational and far more popular/cost effective cultural proposals for Parramatta [Female Factory/Cumberland Hospital site restoration, interpretation and cultural community supported regeneration of 30 hectares] as have the Powerhouse Museum Alliance and the Save-the-Powerhouse Museum group. However Mr Borger, Mr Lee, Mr Harwin, Professor Glover, DMLH and the Premier seem, repeatedly, to fail to acknowledge this fact as it would make their claims of cultural elitism on the part of critics appear what they are- hollow falsehoods. Whereas *they* are the elitists.

Added to which there has been and will continue to be enormous opposition to the destruction of our heritage on the river bank site of Willowgrove and of the Powerhouse Museum Campus in Ultimo. Government underestimates the impact of this opposition both at its own peril and at the cost to a successful BC, BCR and fund-raising for PPP. See later.

Meanwhile, massive costs not shown in the PPP cost plan have been hived off to try to get the BCR over 1.0. This author has analysed many of these in his submissions to UHI I about the FEBC and will not rehearse them in detail here. Suffice to say when one adds the excised full PPP building costs [including flood mitigation], to the added imposts of the redeveloped Ultimo Campus [Fashion Museum?], the display costs, the additional storage at Castle Hill, the additional commercial storage required for large objects and many other headings it is almost impossible to believe a BCR over 1.0 is achievable. Another miracle? If the true cost is closer to \$1.5- 2 billion then it is frankly impossible for the BC and BCR to be massaged to 1.0. **Mr Secord pointed this out during a previous UHI I session but the media appeared unable to fathom his simple point. The time has come for this core issue to be interrogated again after the appropriate documents including the LFFEFBC have been released under Section 52 provisions.**

#### **More fiscal and financial impacts:**

In addition to the Government's costs both Capital and Con Rev there is the \$75 million MAAS must raise from the private sector for display contents. At that figure for 18,000 M2 of public exhibits and interpreted circulation spaces this is way undercosted. Even with only 5,200 M2 of display space the cost- intensive nature of large suspended objects etc. and high tech STEAM displays means that it is understated. Given the fund raising so far for Sydney Modern which has drained the State's private sources of cultural philanthropy and the devastating economic impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic, achieving this target is highly unlikely. So Government will have to find yet more funds- and whether or no it is willing to do so- whatever amount is spent should be included in the Total Project Cost since at the least it represents an opportunity cost.

This will place the BCR even more under challenge



None of the above acknowledges the opportunity cost overall of the destruction of the Ultimo Campus facilities worth hundreds of millions of dollars and the trashing of a world-class museum which is easily future-proofed despite pathetic claims to the contrary. Just ask some professionals- we can quickly demonstrate how to do this.

If Government claim this analysis is faulted let them publish their BC/BCR/LFFEFBC calculations and base data with supporting market research.

GWS has approximately 2.5 million people within 2 hours' drive of the PPP site but especially after COVID 19 how can they possibly afford the outlined family cost at around \$129 per family visit plus plus the cost of highly inconvenient parking? GWS is a car based society and, given the massive 'investment' of this Government in new roads not public transport, is likely to remain so. But there is no parking on the PPP site. What a commercial FUBAR [fracked up beyond all recognition]. In the EFBC this family cost was deemed in pre-CVD 19 days as a reasonable family median expenditure figure. Families will have been doing it tough for a decade or more after at least ten years of slow wages growth in 2026 and an intervening deep recession which is now certain according to State and Federal figures. Unemployment may well still be around 7 to 8% (real unemployment higher of course) and underemployment/the gig economy at 20% or more. Disposable income is both reduced and hoarded at times like this. Corporate earnings and SME incomes will also have suffered. Does NSW Treasury really believe whatever sugar based cotton-candy is whipped up for the LFFEFBC and BCR calculations are realistic with all this future economic negativity? If they do they should quit the field each carrying their own abacus.

Moreover to even 'make up' spurious numbers showing adequate income half convincingly it is important to have an empty commercial set of spaces which can be flogged to death and filled with endless street/farmers' markets [sic], fashion shows, trade events, authors bloviating about their towering genius, perhaps a massive Ai Weiwei installation 'meditations on a jersey' sponsored by the AFL, simian trapeze artistes in drag, interactive shows like 'Ruritarian Horizontal folk dancing' which will be so successful [there are five emigrants from there in GWS but the Artistic Director for 'community engagement' has a friend among them] and even more tatty commercial presentations such as adult toys and gaming shows for the addled and the addicted. In all this where is the intellectual/ narrational framework and underpinning one might ask?

In this historical factor DMLH was accurate in her referencing the great Sydney International Exhibition of 1879 as a forerunner of MAAS and the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. This facility, which was not unlike the remaining structure in Melbourne, was a Colonial and Imperial trade show. A classic example of local colonials aping Paris and London. A trade shop for upwardly mobile commercial aspirants. Perhaps DMLH wants to create an *even greater* Sydney International Exhibition in the modern mode with about the same level of modified cultural colonialism foisted on the unwitting GWS population?

**Despite these early roots and the infamous fire which may have done Sydney a favour [losing all that mainly commercial tat with some honourable exceptions] only after the MAAS was founded did it become a Museum with legislation which gave it a profound purpose. In other words profound awareness of a deep museological role for MAAS developed as museums themselves developed around the world. For example, in an unique Australian way MAAS is a combination of London's V and A and Science Museum. This author knows that statement to be accurate since he was the Founding Director of the Powerhouse Museum and, later, the Director of his *alma mater* the Science Museum Group as it is now known. But that profound role seems to have been trounced by DMLH, and the present Board of Trustees whose possible conflicted status is only exceeded by their apparent museological ignorance.**

So DMLH is reverting to a much more primitive model than the Powerhouse Museum complex in Ultimo though it appears she has not thought that through. Her claim that the Powerhouse Museum Alliance just wants to return to some imagined golden age of 1988 is remarkably ignorant and deeply patronising. The resulting facility, after ten years of development when the museum opened- massively popular though it proved [20 million visitors in thirty years and over two and a half million in the first two years]- reached only about 65% of its potential as envisaged by the planners owing to budgetary constraints. All who were part of it then have moved light years forward now. A renewed version would be markedly and technologically evolved while still utilising most of the built form and it would be much less expensive than PPP- which seems to be a product of a few stunted imaginations who want a gussied up suite of vacuous spaces. Any restoration and enhancement would be based on sincere, deep and wide consultation. The PPP 'edifice complex' appears alive and well in the mind of Mr Borger and the other boosters. **Yet there is not a published ghost of an intellectual *raison d'etre* for this folly as the Sydney Morning Herald's Leader noted around the time of the publication of the 'successful' PPP design in late 2019.**

Among the comparators quoted in the EFBC no mention was made of the Science Gallery, Dublin. A telling lacuna and one which will put PPP way behind Melbourne and other cities like Mumbai- all part of this growing international group. Equally the destruction of two core heritage buildings/sites- Willowgrove, St George's Terrace and the Ultimo Campus- flag up inexorably that the powers that be involved here have absolutely no interest or sense of the State's core heritage. Never mind the trashing of the Female Factory/Cumberland Hospital potential World Heritage Site which has already begun with destruction wrought in preparation for the Light Rail project. This myopia appears to include DMLH and the Board of Trustees. A ship of fools. A museum 'moved' [sic] destroying two premium NSW heritage sites. What a gruesome paradox. Truly this project is a cultural FUBAR [fracked up beyond all recognition] redolent with outrageous cultural vandalism and elitism. Rather than an 'Iconic Building' it will be a collection of rapidly dating trade show spaces containing an eclectic parade of forgettable events on the intellectual basis of: 'this goes with that at Sussan'.

**So, really Mr. Treasurer?**

**Seriously?**

**\$1.5 billion to be spent under present fiscal circumstances after the bushfires and COVID 19 pandemic impacts?**

**To be spent as the arts industries collapse and innovators of all ages and creative young people starve?**

**How can Treasury possibly permit this?**

**How can you as Treasurer possibly permit this?**

**What a dereliction of your sworn duty?**

**Powerhouse Project Parramatta, the Politics:**

This author was trained as an historian at Oxford.

He knows from detailed and continuing research that history can be understood [in part] as a moving

feast caught in a dynamic between individuals, ideas and massive economic, social and cultural

forces which often are hard to identify, even in hindsight.

Thus it was that, at least as the narrative which was played out over the occasional dinner table, Neville Wran then Premier went to Paris with Jill Hickson, his partner and David Hill his brilliant young factotum, sometime around 1976.

They visited Centre Pompidou and Neville [later, with Gerry Gleeson as State manager, this author's boss] said words to the effect:

'I want one of those'.

Jill and David, then the Public Works Department [PWD] effectively embodied in the persons of Minister Jack Ferguson [a remarkable and sagacious autodidact] and Lionel Glendenning [a brilliant young architect and master of bureaucratic politics] set to work.

MAAS immediately joined the team and a small group clung on for dear life swept up in a torrent of planning, bureaucratic politics, large beasts in the then political jungle and endless variations, detours, plans and ideas.

As the project progressed the understanding of its role and potential deepened from the Premier down.

Despite fiscal challenges, the delays actually benefited the conceptual framework and sophistication among all involved.

There was also another entirely invaluable benefit since open and sincere consultation accompanied by many different kinds of publications and social/community research could be fed into the planning teams.

MAAS and PWD were the clients feeding clear data to the powers that were.

The then twists and turns of the original Powerhouse Museum project were as convoluted, in some ways, as the present benighted PPP.

The differences, of which there are many, was in part that the project was not the product of a deal with developers [please see below] but a genuine attempt to create a new museum doing justice to the State's amazing post-white-land-seizure, socio-cultural past [through saving and interpreting the collections and the ideas and narratives to which they related] and to creating an institution which profoundly responded to public sentiment while also having the capacity to create shared future visions of what might come to pass.

Instead the current PPP appears to be shrinking by the day, while no strong intellectual framework has emerged and derisory 'consultation' has eventuated matched by a loss of scale and grandeur thereby making the likely end result a runt.

Too see how bad it will get just look at the 'Crystal' disaster perpetrated on the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada.

In all this those big beasts of the political jungle in Macquarie Street played a major and often unpredictable, sometimes scarcely rational, part.

**The following is one possible interpretation of the current status and reflects only this author's views:**

Political futurology is a mug's game, admittedly.

Writing about politics in the Bear Pit is always a fraught challenge.

Look at the recent war between Mr Constance and Mr Barilaro.

Now Mr Perrottet faces a huge and growing black hole after the bushfires and the horrific fiscal effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.



If one was in the place of DMLH one would have plans B,C and E in one's back pocket as was the case in 1981-1984 [a sceptical Mr Gleeson doing all he could to destruct-test the project and control its cost at that time- what an irony] since both PPP and DMLH herself may well be thrown under the bus as well.

After all she ran Carriageworks [now failed] and became the CEO/advocate, at direct Ministerial behest, for Carriageworks West at a salary in the region of \$450,000 plus benefits per annum.

Was she fleeing or leaning in?

Or both?

No one but her can possibly say.

Yet the main PPP game is still afoot with all its twists and turns.

Still the above may be unfair: DMLH clearly did all she could to sustain and save Carriageworks, which is a truly innovative institution in its own way, while she was at the helm.

But not being able to acquit Government funding is possibly a challenge.

Needs must when the Devil roars?

Nonetheless remember the Evangelicals' visceral dislike of contemporary culture?

What a juicy target for the *rightistas*!

Unfortunately, DMLH may not fully escape the opprobrium of the previous two years' budgetary deficit at Carriageworks one imagines?

Of that one may be fairly certain.

Her 'managing-up' abilities are legendary and essential.

But for that to be the case DMLH will need to show that she truly understands the long term power of MAAS staff, collections and the Ultimo Campus to tell the stories of NSW in the future.

And to comprehend how damaging the destruction of Willowgrove and St George's Terrace are for GWS and Parramatta locals not to mention the future of Cumberland Hospital's 30 hectares including the unique heritage embodied in the Female Factory site.

A difficult game, that, in present circumstances?

As Judith White notes in today's article, however [please see below], the depth of her

museological expertise and of her large-scale project planning and management skills as PPP CEO might be called into question.  
Making her task doubly difficult?

Still one imagines it would be an act of kindness for UHI II to encourage her to make the case - solo- for PPP on the stand, well supported by enablers on the Committee who represent the Coalition?

That would be a session from which we all would undoubtedly learn a great deal including the CEO/advocate?

The greater irony is that if a new Premier stops PPP there lies a silver lining for the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum's supporters and the defenders of Willowgrove and the Cumberland Hospital site while a terrible storm sweeps through the State's environment, heritage and our rural communities post CVD 19 and the bushfires.  
You have to love those new planning regulations.

Only time will tell.

### **Options and events- peaceful opposition, impact of UHI [substantial] and potential of UHI II [even more so] :**

The blithe statements gleaned briefly from the EIS on 13 May clearly shows that Government has no idea as to the waves of civil disobedience which will crash over this benighted project as, if and when it proceeds.

Demolition issues alone will force peaceful protest and expression of public outrage on a grand scale.

With the passing of the great Jack Munday his Green Ban lessons are well retained as are his successful Street Protests.

The Ultimo Powerhouse Museum Campus and Willowgrove will witness mothers with babes in arms and very angry professional retirees plus thousands of others including building workers demonstrating peacefully in fresh and unexpected ways.

Of course the Government's new rules allow it to immorally imprison such protesters but at what public opinion cost?

Images on TV and viral digital campaigns, print media and shock jocks....and so on.

### **WHAT A FABULOUS BACKGROUND TO THE \$75 MILLION FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN FOR PPP EXHIBITS.**

As Judith White has written in her commentary on the Carriageworks debacle [14 May, 2020,<https://www.cultureheist.com.au/2020/05/13/trainwreck-at-carriageworks/> ]:

"There is an obvious solution: halt the \$1.5 billion Powerhouse plan, and put the money into bailing out crisis-hit arts organisations, including Carriageworks.

Proponents of the idea include Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore, the NSW Greens, Labor's shadow arts minister Walt Secord and the Powerhouse Museum Alliance. Arts consultant Kylie Winkworth has pointed out that the cost of an arts bailout would be a tiny fraction of that being spent on football stadiums or on the Powerhouse plan, which has so far cost the public purse \$40 million in consultancies without creating a single job in Parramatta.

A rescue plan for Carriageworks would require both funding commitment and the appointment of a suitably qualified board. That's a big reach for this State Government. Premier Gladys Berejiklian has retained the arts portfolio, vacated by the forced resignation of Don Harwin, not out of devotion to the arts – no Premier in living memory has shown less interest – but because of the problems she faces in managing her faction-ridden Cabinet.

*Berejiklian remains committed to the Powerhouse plan with a stubbornness inexplicable unless there is a secret deal with developers. Rumours are now swirling that the Ultimo site has already been sold. The Government's asset sales mania bodes ill for Carriageworks, which has only a short-term tenancy on the big Eveleigh site [present author's highlight emphasis].* And it lends added urgency to a fresh examination of the Powerhouse issue by State Parliament's Upper House committee, which is taking submissions [LINK] up until 17 May.'

The evidence and two reports by UHI I have had a profound effect on public views about this debacle. In a recent Sydney Morning Herald casual survey 85% voted against its continuation [obviously not scientific but indicative]. Never underestimate the power of a good Chairman and of an independent Parliamentary Upper House Inquiry.

UHI II could well have even greater impact.

### **Conclusion:**

Stools, of the seating variety, usually perform better with three structural support elements not two. So, with the loss of Mr Harwin from an ill-assorted troika [Ms Berejiklian, Mr Reardon and the dear departed Don] the remaining two legs face an unstable future. Thus, virtually friendless in Cabinet its safe passage under threat, PPP and its other proponents may no longer be secure?

Bogged down in a viscous cycle, in a morass of their own making, the MAAS Trustees, DMLH, Parramatta boosters, Mr Reardon and Ms Berejiklian appear unable to flounder forward without huge cost and risk- not sinking into the Borger/Lee bog- or to stagger in reverse for fear of a developer bite backed by the Daily Telegraph [Murdoch's Pravda] and the *rightistas*. Nonetheless they should listen to and recruit Ray Hadleigh [the last true shock jock now Alan of blessed memory is retiring]. Adopting Ray's five star grovel position towards our Prime Minister they should proceed with a brilliant Plan B.

Ablly assisted by a host of willing recruits selected from among the usual suspects.

Hopefully, then, this helps sum up the current status of PPP, which is so tragic since there are many more creative, cost effective and rational options which should have been canvassed in those grotesque Webinars, if that troika of proponents and DMLH] had bothered to address the real world and sincerely followed their own dictum: 'consult, consult, consult'.

Just ask the other participants.

If this cabal did so they would have community support not anger.

If they did so they would find a myriad of practical steps and landmarks and not be proceeding like dung beetles [*Scarabaeinae* and *Aphodiinae* ] on the road to cultural and fiscal perdition.

Nor will they will have a 'shovel-ready project' any time soon- although that shovel may soon be full of another material entirely- and, anyway, that term is monumentally misleading when PPP is included in the NSW post Covid 19 grab bag of immediate economic stimulus infrastructure works.

Far better to spread the funding- or part of it at least- across the state to regional and rural museums.

And to support innovative companies and individuals in the arts.



Carriageworks, anyone?

[Shame about the short lease and the enormous land value near the CBD and another massive development?]

Nor will they have a completed museum as shown in the EIS [2024] in time for the next State election.

If the Germans can't complete Berlin's 'Humboldt' project on time and on budget these plonkers have no chance.

Think more in terms of 2026 or even 2028?

Instead they will face a barrage of hostility in the media for this developer-driven abortion of cultural elitism and colonialist 'cargo-cult' mentality- the ultimate cultural hoax.

If Ms Berejiklian and Mr Reardon had a sense of what the soon-to-be-destroyed cultural landmarks mean to the people of NSW and actually thought about better options then they would avoid the tsunami of civil disobedience which is swelling up.

But perhaps the agreed purchaser of the Ultimo Campus is getting restless as the deal starts to run out of time?

Remember the new 'small footprint' tower apartment buildings in New York, their huge developer windfall profits, the suspended NSW planning regulations by Minister Stokes, the effective 'no-cost' land banking by our big developers and the 'jobs-for-NSW pollies' after they retire.

What a trough to contemplate!

Cool?

What's not to like?

So let's not fund ICAC independently then, shall we?

Keep watching this space

We need the next Upper House Inquiry into Museums just as soon as Covid 19 allows.

Dr Lindsay Sharp,