

Submission
No 78

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

Organisation: Sydney City Skywatchers

Date Received: 17 May 2020

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Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Select Committee

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales

Dear Select Committee

In 2020 Sydney City Skywatchers, an affiliated society with the Museum of Applied Art and Sciences (MAAS) celebrates 125 years of amateur astronomy. Past presidents include internationally renowned astronomers such as John Tebbutt and Walter Gale. The Society has a long involvement with Sydney Observatory and meets monthly in the heritage site and Museum (pre-covid-19) and contributes to the collection and Museum public programs. We have a culturally diverse, gender-balanced and active membership, with the majority of members aged between 25 and 45. Our society exists to increase life-long engagement with STEM and provides a forum for Sydney-siders to experience astronomy and related fields, including astronomical heritage.

Our society has welcomed the initiatives by the current MAAS Director, Lisa Havilah, to engage with affiliated societies and her recognition that societies, such as Sydney City Skywatchers, bring expertise and are part of the Museum community. We also acknowledge the contribution by Sydney Observatory staff and education and events management staff based at the MAAS, who are professional and supportive of community activities, such as ours.

Whilst the focus of the Select Committee is around the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum, our society asks that resourcing the Museum to continue and enhance its operation of Sydney Observatory is an important part of long-term planning and requires a financial commitment from government. We are concerned about the resources available to preserve the heritage and adequately fund operational management of Sydney Observatory, a state listed heritage site which is also registered on the UNESCO Portal to Astronomical heritage <https://www3.astronomicalheritage.net/>.

The State Government is concerned about STEM. Even when a new Museum opens Sydney Observatory will remain a perfect site for programs to educate primary and secondary students in STEM. Already there are large numbers who attend such programs in astronomy and the weather. Sydney Observatory also

has a highly active life-long education program, which is well attended, and our society adds to the depth and reach of programming.

Furthermore, as a society we have contributed to and supported the significant heritage generated at Sydney Observatory and held by MAAS for the people of NSW. This includes astronomical heritage from the 1820s, which was vital in mapping the southern skies, and the glass plate negatives and instruments used to map the stars for the international program called the Astrographic Catalogue. This project introduced women into paid roles in astronomy as computers and its results are still used today to position telescopes and satellites in space.

We are concerned that tangible and intangible heritage (including operation of heritage telescopes and the time-ball) continues as fundamental to Sydney Observatory. This will require a strategic vision which includes continued operation of this site for the purpose of astronomy education, because that is critical in maintaining its heritage significance as defined by the Burro Charter, Heritage Council of NSW and National guidelines of significance https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/significance-2.0.pdf?acsf_files_redirect.

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to the Select Committee considerations and future museum planning discussions

Yours sincerely

Dr Toner Stevenson, President Sydney City Skywatchers