

**Submission
No 94**

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

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SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE PROPOSED RELOCATION OF THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM TO PARRAMATTA

Desmond Griffin AM, FRSN

I am the former director of the Australian Museum (1976-1988) and have held leadership positions in the associations and organisations connected with and involving museum people and museum and heritage issues in Australia over the period from 1980 through 2006.

I am currently Gerard Krefft Fellow at the Museum, an honorary position.

I have previously submitted my views on this proposal drawing attention to the total inappropriateness of the proposal. I attended many of the hearings.

The Powerhouse Museum is an essential component of the State's and the Nation's culture and heritage. It has, for most of its life, as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, been grossly under-supported. The major development in Ultimo in the former powerhouse was a major advance and led to important presentations and advances. The assertions about the Museum to justify the relocation to Parramatta were and remain invalid.

There are several fundamentally important issues that must be addressed at the outset.

The proposal to move the Museum has not been justified

Neither in the original proposals, or the modified proposals as published or, as addressed in hearings, has it clearly been established that the move of the Powerhouse museum to Parramatta would be superior in any way to the alternative. Construction of a new museum in Parramatta displaying and interpreting events, issues and objects reflecting the history of the area and surrounds, in cooperation with existing major museums, including art museums and in particular the existing Powerhouse Museum, would be far superior in interest and likely attendance. And it most certainly would cost a great deal less.

The proposed design is too small

Considering the subsequent proposals for the museum in Parramatta it is clear that the proposed design will not house many of the objects in the collection and will not contain space of the extent currently available. In particular large objects, many of great significance to the history of the state since arrival of Europeans, will not be able to be displayed. Many items are to be dispersed to other museums and many are to be stored and rendered inaccessible to the public and very likely to scholars.

The site will flood dangerously

The site proposed for the museum is subject to extreme flooding. Considering the ongoing effects of climate change and instances of extremely high rainfall as experienced in recent times, this is a major issue.

The proposal will destroy local heritage

The expansion of the Parramatta site will require destruction of several smaller buildings of considerable heritage significance.

There is little local support

There is no evidence of overwhelming support by the residents of Parramatta for the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum as opposed to a new museum addressing more local historical and cultural issues.

The cost estimates are unreliable

The costing of the relocation fails to take account of the experience of cost escalation which has occurred in other capital projects over the last five years or so. The estimate of perhaps 1.5 million dollars is misleading in this respect. If the escalation of final costs compared with original estimates of previous projects is factored into the estimates it is clear that the more accurate cost is likely well over two million dollars and could be even \$3 million.

The public subsidy is a subsidy to the Ultimo development

It is interesting that a public appeal is to be made for the raising of \$75 million. The issue is not whether this is likely to be achieved but what in actual fact the sum represents. The total project includes both the move and establishment and whatever works are undertaken at the existing site in Ultimo. It is very widely understood that the proposal for Ultimo is a commercial development. In other words, the sums raised for the move and establishment in Parramatta in fact represents a subsidy to the commercial developer. That is to say, the relocation could not proceed and so vacate the Ultimo site unless these funds are raised.

The proposal lacks context in museums and heritage of the state

Very importantly, this development is not framed in any context addressing the overall development of museums and heritage and art collections in the state. The funding levels and the designated course of funding is inappropriate and unsustainable.

Many of the smaller museums are staffed mostly by volunteers. Several of the museums including the Age of Fishes Museum in Canowindra and Shear Outback at Hay are developments of national significance. There are others which no doubt would be considered in the same category, Yet the funding guidelines require, for the granting of relatively miniscule monies, eventual agreement by local government, whose income sources are significantly influenced by centralised state government dictates, to assume full ongoing financial responsibility for the museum. The mechanism is seriously flawed and discriminates against regional NSW!

Proposals for the redevelopment of the Ultimo site are completely opaque

What is actually to happen on the site presently occupied by the Powerhouse Museum? It is untrue that the existing museum is remote from the rest of the city. The repurposing of parts of the Museum already are very unfortunate. Sydney does not need a Lyric Theatre, or at least no good case has been made.

Identifying the proposal for the move of the Powerhouse Museum as a Covid-19 Infrastructure Recovery Project is a deception.

Construction of a new museum in Parramatta would be equally as important infrastructure project as moving the entire Powerhouse Museum

The Future

- A revised proposal to establish a museum in western Sydney addressing issues of relevance to the communities there should be pursued along with
- Development of a comprehensive policy for museums throughout the state
- Identification of works to achieve any necessary upgrades to the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

- Review of governance and leadership and funding issues in respect of the Powerhouse Museum

Thank you!