

**Submission
No 98**

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

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1(a) Powerhouse Museum

While the government might claim that its vision for the Powerhouse Museum move was to provide a cultural facility in Western Sydney, no credible survey as to the type of facility the residents there might want was carried out before the move was announced. It is now quite clear that the residents do not want a second hand Powerhouse and preference is for a migration and history museum or a facility which can network with other cultural institutions to provide access to a variety of experiences.

The saga of the past few years of this proposal has demonstrated that it is ill considered, poorly planned, inadequately costed on a flood prone site with an unsuitable building which will provide very little actual museum space. There is considerable doubt about what will happen to the " big things" and the likely damage to the collections as a result of the move is incalculable.

The costings present a particular problem as only some \$600 million has been allocated in the budget yet the cost is estimated to be at least \$1.5 billion plus the cost of providing conservation labs etc at the Discovery Centre at Castle Hill. The balance was to be met from the sale of apartments on the Parramatta site (since abandoned) and of the Ultimo site. There is as yet no business case for whatever is to be retained at Ultimo and it is most unlikely that the sale would return the sort of funds needed , particularly in the current climate. So there is a massive shortfall.

The fact that the Parramatta site is flood prone and that the winning design (the others have not been revealed) requires demolition of two of the few remaining heritage buildings in Parramatta demonstrate yet again the unsuitability of this flawed project. The heritage values of the Ultimo site must also be recognised .

The Powerhouse Museum should remain in Ultimo and the funds allocated in the budget should be used to provide Western Sydney with a cultural facility that the residents actually want and not on a flood prone site.

(b) Other museums

There is no doubt that both regional and metropolitan museums are grossly underfunded in NSW. Indeed there is insufficient support for the arts in general. This affects access to collections whether they be small country museums, regional museums and galleries or those in Sydney.

But in some cases, funds have been provided for museum projects to the detriment of existing collections. I refer in particular to the \$50 million provided to the Australian Museum for alterations to enable it to show the Tutankhamen exhibition. This has been at the expense of the museum's world renowned collection of 60,000 items from our Pacific neighbours. Forty thousand of these have been placed in factory storage in Rydalmere where access was promised but has not eventuated, and twenty thousand are in storage at the Discovery Centre at Castle Hill, also not accessible. The Tutankhamen show should never have been at the Australian Museum and the government has demonstrated false priorities in funding it there.