

**Submission
No 103**

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

Name: Mr John Williams

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I wish to lodge my objection to the current proposal to relocate the Powerhouse Museum collection from its present site at Ultimo, to the intended site at Parramatta. I wish also to register my opposition to the proposed demolition of the two locally listed heritage items, 'Willow Grove' and 'St George's Terrace'.

Given the current circumstances we all find ourselves facing at present, I also question the profligate spending that this project is likely to give rise to.

At a time, when many have been faced with unemployment, and prior to the Covid-19 crisis, when many living in former bushfire ravaged rural and regional communities are yet to see much needed financial support, a projected price tag for the project towards two billion dollars appears to be exorbitant and anachronistic.

It should be remembered that this museum was created for the people of New South Wales, and as such should be accessible to those from all corners of the state both in Sydney and all regional/rural areas of the state.

Aside from the historical development of the museum in Sydney, the site in central Sydney was seen to be advantageous to public accessibility due to its proximity to public transport for those from travelling from across the state. This is also a site accessible to those living in western Sydney, as well as, those also living in outlying suburbs in other parts of Sydney, and to people living in heavily populated regional areas in the Hunter and the Illawarra.

This is not to negate the notion of a science based cultural facility in Sydney's west, and the sharing out of our institutions across Sydney and the state. Unfortunately, this proposal is not an adequate response to this concept.

The proposal fails on the following points

*The site is located in a flood zone, and whatever disputes arise about the frequency, or degree of flooding, the mitigation measures will add considerable cost to the overall project. In essence, the site is not suitable to store and display valuable cultural artefacts and is not fit for purpose.

*The destruction of valuable social capital in the form of two heritage buildings in Parramatta is not necessary.

For a project that is supposed to be a means to contain and promote our state's cultural heritage it beggars belief that the proposal is willing to destroy valuable Victorian era buildings ('Willow Grove' and 'St George's Terrace') so readily. For a new institution, a building to be built from scratch, it would seem that the heritage value of both heritage buildings has been completely ignored. It is telling that a report commissioned by the State Government reports negative economic and social impacts to Parramatta with the proposed demolition of both buildings.

Surely the design for the new museum buildings could have maintained functional goals whilst retaining heritage buildings on the site. This was achieved with the recently revamped Museum of Western Australia. There are also sensible, thoughtful local proposals incorporating Parramatta heritage with museum options.

**No transparency for public review of the designs for the proposed new building at Parramatta. There has been no public exhibition of the runner up designs and no indication as to whether other museum design proposals retained the heritage buildings in their designs.

****Costs.**

With close to two billion dollars being reported as being the cost for the project, it should be weighed up as to whether the cost of this project and the relatively meagre money gained from the sale of the Ultimo site is worth pursuing. 600,000 jobs lost across the country, hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in NSW. There are identified projects across the state that have merit, but this project is exorbitant in the extreme, especially with rural and regional communities that understandably feel ignored and abandoned with the government focussing on high profile Sydney-centric projects that will suck money from State coffers. Roads, hospitals, schools, mental health services, and connecting people across the whole state should be paramount, not a high cost vanity project.

****Heritage items that are already on display at the current Ultimo site are a mix of nationally and internationally importance. Some of the items are of importance to the Sydney area and there have only been vague press releases of a Sydney city focussed museum in the former Registrar-General[s] building, but nothing actually confirmed. What of large exhibits that are of importance to the Sydney LGA such as the former Central Station indicator board, former electric trams, remnants of the former King's Cinema, the Catalina flying boat? The idea of relocating these items to an area largely unconnected to them appears to contravene/contradict advice from the Heritage office.**

The proposal to move the Powerhouse Museum is not satisfactory, the cost that will disadvantage regional areas in terms of financial assistance, the disrespect for Parramatta's built heritage, there is a lack of adequate planning for the project (from the poor site selection, to the question marks related to the future of significant items on display at Ultimo),

This proposal has been justifiably opposed by the National Trust of NSW amongst many others. Former Trustee of the Powerhouse Museum, Kylie Winworth is correct by positing the statement that the current Ultimo Powerhouse Museum buildings as being "indivisible" from much of the MAAS collection.

I ask that this proposal be halted and for a comprehensive and thoughtful proposal be considered, A proposal that does not rely on questionable future attendance figures, or incrementally adds retail/commercial imperatives, Rather, we need a proposal respects the heritage of this state, the people of Sydney's west and also the people of NSW overall.

We also need to give thought to the financial costs in committing billions of dollars to an increasingly unpopular and arguably unnecessary project.

Thank you.