

Submission  
No 139

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

**Organisation:** Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites  
(ICOMOS)

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25 May 2020

Director  
Select Committees  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

**Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry – Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales**

On behalf of Australia ICOMOS I write to provide a submission regarding this inquiry, focused on the future of the Powerhouse Museum. I apologise that this is provided after the extended deadline for submissions, and hope it might still be considered.

ICOMOS – the International Council for Monuments and Sites – is a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOMOS is also an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee under the World Heritage Convention. Australia ICOMOS, formed in 1976, is one of over 100 national committees throughout the world. Australia ICOMOS has over 700 members in a range of heritage professions. We have expert members on a large number of ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, as well as on expert committees and boards in Australia.

Australia ICOMOS made a submission to the NSW Government in April 2018 regarding the proposed relocation of the existing Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo to Parramatta. The steps towards the relocation have now progressed further, in spite of objections raised by a Legislative Council inquiry and the advice from a range of experts including Australia ICOMOS. A convincing rationale for this relocation has not yet been provided by the State Government. Alternatives should be investigated which allow for upgrading the existing Museum at Ultimo and construction of a cultural centre in Parramatta, purpose built for the community in western Sydney. Regrettably, it is understood no such alternatives have yet been considered.

The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is an iconic historical and cultural institution which has become one of the major attractions for tourists and Sydney residents since its completion in 1988 as an award winning adaptive reuse redevelopment of the old Ultimo Power Station. It is accessible and is centrally located near other related sites such as the Maritime Museum and the Aquarium. It is adjacent to Darling Harbour and Chinatown. The relocation of this world-class museum is not supported. We note the conclusions of the Legislative Council Committee in December 2017 that the proposal would *'destroy a cultural icon'*. Upgrading, sustaining and expanding the Powerhouse Museum should be of the utmost priority for the NSW Government, not relocation.

The museum collection includes many large items including the Boulton and Watt beam engine, locomotives and aircraft which will involve substantial costs for relocation and for the supporting infrastructure for their installation, all of which must be replicated if relocation proceeds. These are movable items of exceptional significance, they are extremely fragile and at risk from damage resulting from the inevitable dismantling process and relocation to Parramatta.

One element of the Powerhouse Museum, the Ultimo Tramway Power House has recently been listed on the State Heritage Register. It is noted the entire complex, including the Wran Building, the tram depot and the Harwood Building was not included in the listing. Australia ICOMOS supports deeper consideration of registration of the entire Powerhouse Museum site.

Australia ICOMOS is also concerned about the loss of two important riverfront local heritage listed places, the 1870s Victorian villa, Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace. Their demolition would be a loss to the dwindling heritage fabric of Parramatta. Australia ICOMOS also disagrees with the draft Environmental Impact Statement which states that the *'public benefits of western Sydney's cultural institution outweighed heritage concerns and the loss of the local communities sense of place'*. In the case of just these local heritage places, the government should investigate alternative options which would sympathetically incorporate them in Parramatta's future planning.

It is suggested that a purpose designed facility on the Parramatta River could accommodate part of the Powerhouse collection which cannot be displayed at Ultimo, and/or provide a cultural facility for Western Sydney. We note that the majority of the Museum's collection is warehoused in Castle Hill, much of which has never been accessible to the public. It may be possible to have a purpose designed facility to display the Powerhouse collection at Parramatta in conjunction with the Ultimo collection.

Australia ICOMOS remains concerned that the proposed relocation does not fully appreciate and respect the heritage values of the existing Powerhouse Museum, and the relocation to Parramatta will also result in the loss of two local heritage places. Sympathetic alternatives should be fully explored for both situations with a view to achieving beneficial outcomes for New South Wales' heritage.

Australia ICOMOS agrees that this submission be published in full on the inquiry website including the organisation's name.

Please contact me if Australia ICOMOS can advise further.

Yours sincerely

**Helen Lardner**  
**President**