

Supplementary
Submission
No 79a

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

Organisation: Australian Museums and Galleries Association

Date Received: 23 September 2020

The Harwood Building as a vital element of the Powerhouse Museum

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- Ultimo is a vibrant educational, tourism, retail, convention and cultural hub served by excellent public transport. The condition of the buildings is good, and they have been assessed as being able to be brought back to best environmental standards with modest investment.
- The Ultimo site provides best practice, easily accessible storage in the Harwood basement for more than half the Museum collection, including high security, high value collections and an extensive firearms collection. There is a highly secure large bank vault utilised for high value gold, silver, jewellery, prohibited substances and prohibited weapons.
- I was directed to provide false information to government and consultants when I worked at the Powerhouse under Rose Hiscock. I was told to emphasise the age of the stores and the air conditioning malfunctions. This view was repeated in the business case she provided to government, yet it was false.
- Visiting experts have been extremely impressed with the Ultimo store, with its important accessibility to the Powerhouse Museum, its best practice standards and the focus on accessibility for curators, visitors, researchers, staff, student groups and VIPS.
- If the Powerhouse is to focus on design and innovation, it is bizarre to move all of the small to medium design objects to Castle Hill. In 2017, we undertook a project to ensure the basement store was to retain all of the important fashion, textiles, glass, ceramics, metal and glasswork, that were deemed by curators to be essential to stay in Ultimo as part of our partnership with UTS and other design schools.
- The importance of hosting tours of VIPS, donors, political VIPS and international researchers is vital to an international museum. The fact is that many of these people and groups will not make the trip to Castle Hill. I was fortunate to host Bill Gates and his family and representatives from many international museums and the Royal Collection. Due to short stays in Sydney, they are extremely unlikely to make the 50-minute trip to Castle Hill.
- It is absolutely best practice to have fragile and important collections close to museum display areas. The initial plans for Parramatta included a floor of storage. When this was abandoned, senior executives at the Museum called this a crappy decision.
- The Harwood Basement store has been assessed by international experts as best practice and has performed remarkably well for over forty years. The basement is surrounded by passageways with drainage, that completely protect the collection from penetrating moisture, flooding and temperature changes.
- The collection remains in excellent condition in the Harwood store. Over my working career at the museum over thirty years caring for the collection, there have been minimal incidents in the basement store. Even on the odd occasion where aircon had to be turned off for repairs or blackouts, the environmental conditions remained remarkably stable.

- There has only been one major leak, where a basin overflowed in the Conservation lab upstairs. There was minimal damage. Other museums and stores have more leaks and robberies than the Powerhouse Harwood basement experienced over forty years.
- The upgrade of the store would only require new air conditioning and a program overtime to replace some storage units that show some damage.
- The new stores at Castle Hill operate exactly in the same way as the Harwood Basement, the only difference being new storage units.
- Located in a secure basement with a single-entry point within a secure building means there has never been a robbery or incursion. There has only been one theft in the 1980's by a security guard.
- Current plans to move all of this to warehousing in Castle Hill is expensive, inaccessible and far away from other relevant cultural and educational institutions. The major project to document and digitise the collection can continue in storage.
- The heritage value of the Powerhouse precinct is accepted by the majority of heritage and museum experts. This includes the presence of the 130 year old collection and the original format of the Tram Shed, now known as the Harwood Building.

23 September, 2020