

**SUBMISSION RE: POWERHOUSE (ULTIMO) RENEWAL**

**SSD: 32927319**

**THIS SUBMISSION IS AN OBJECTION.**

SUBMITTED BY: JACOB GROSSBARD.

Date: 27 May 2024.

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**SUMMARY:**

1. This plan is one of the most bizarre decisions of Government in NSW history. An almost brand new award winning museum, popular and well located for transport hub in a major, cosmopolitan city, right next to three universities at the beginning of a technological age, close to dense population centres, with some of the best collections in the world is destroyed for petty political gain of votes in the Western Suburbs of Sydney.  
It does not make sense! It is also against elections commitments and the public good.
2. The Minister responsible (Arts Minister, the Hon. Mr Graham) is requested to order the cancellation of this project in its current form. To order a new expert and public inquiry and return this museum to its original purpose: A Technological and Applied Arts Museum. This will involve some structural repairs as required, etc. But will retain the building essentially in its current form and purpose: one of the great museums in this country and amongst the finest museum of its type in the world with a collection of over 400,000 items.
3. The Minister is asked to remove the current director, Ms Havila and the current board as unfit to lead any of the current MAAS sites and appoint an executive with the vision, knowledge and ability to return this museum and the Observatory to their role in education, display, exhibition, conservations and promotion of Science and the applied arts. This is urgent!

## PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT:

I have a lifelong interest in the arts, decorative and applied arts and science. I am a member of the Art Gallery Society of NSW, Museum of contemporary Art at Circular Quay, Australian Museum and many other such organisations. I regularly attend exhibitions, donate within my capacity.

I spent my working life in the engineering side of heavy manufacturing such as mining, plastic, paper making and newspaper printing. I have extensive qualifications in the electrical field.

Since my arrival in Sydney in 1971, I visited the original museum in Harris Street and the current site countless times.

I am a member of the Astronomical Society of NSW and am deeply disappointed with the effective closure of Sydney observatory (except expensive night tours) when it was such a popular tourist attraction and educational venue of historical significance.

## OBJECTIONS:

1. I rely on research by Powerhouse Alliance experts such as Ms Kyle Winkworth, the Powerhouse Alliance (<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>) and others, renowned critics as John McDonald ( see articles relating to this matter: <https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/?s=powerhouse+museum> ) and my own research in writing these submissions.
2. The SSD states that the Minister already approved the plan. There was effectively little public input and the process is a mockery of genuine inquiry. That alone is enough to reopen the process. This inquiry is an insult to the rights of the people of NSW.
3. The plan to remove most of the special exhibition spaces and objects, and amalgamate a huge building to effectively have only four spaces. This contradict every other museum or gallery in this county, and general museum display practice internationally:
  - a. The Art Gallery of NSW has two separate buildings. The original one spread over 4 levels and has more than 10 exhibition galleries, some spacious and some smaller which can be combined or modified for larger or smaller exhibition spaces. The new Sydney Modern has multiple gallery space, at least six I can think of.

- b. The MCA at Circular Quay, a much smaller building than the AGNSW has at least six galleries spread over three floors.
  - c. The Australian Museum has countless galleries and spaces, e.g. Indigenous gallery, The refurbished Minerals Gallery, The temporary exhibition space spread over two levels, the Species Gallery with taxidermied animals, etc. etc.
  - d. The National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, the largest and most successful in the country, has two buildings (St Kilda's Road and Federation Square) with at least 20 large exhibition spaces, and dozens of rooms.
  - e. And for contradiction: The National Gallery of Australia, designed by Mr. Maddigan is an example of poor layout with the enormous caverns difficult to light, and difficult to air condition. The new extension of Indigenous Art is normal size galleries with multiple rooms.
4. Conclusion for (3) above: The museum must retain its various levels and flexibility in presenting exhibitions. It is obvious that the current plan is not for a museum, a deliberate destruction of a successful and recent (35 years old) museum.
5. The intended use of the museum:
- a. It is no secret that Director Havila intends to turn the building into a fashion centre. The intention is to remove any remnants of the industrial and applied art heritage (furniture, technology, machines, aircraft, etc.). There will be nowhere to display those treasures and they will be consigned to the storerooms of Castle Hill. (This is supported by the submission of Australian Museum Director Kim McKay who compliments the turning of Ultimo to a fashion hub. (See your own submissions).
  - b. It should be noted that Powerhouse collection of industrial, furniture, textiles, etc. is one of the finest in the world, and known as such. The last exhibition held "500 precious objects", curated by Mr Leo Schofield, drew huge crowds, a sign of where the public interest lays.
  - c. There are two reasons for that: firstly to make the Parramatta Museum viable, second, it will lead eventually to the demise of Ultimo for lack of visitors and its demolition. It is obvious that the Harwood Building is going to be sold to developers, and eventually after "proving" that the exercise was not successful, to convert the main building for commercial use, sometime in the future (just look at the old Commonwealth Building on Martin Place, gutted inside and converted to offices). And the outside will be retained under "Heritage" provisions. A hotel maybe? Office space? Like the stone government buildings in the CBD.

- d. Castle Hills is by definition a storage and conservation workshop. It is open to visitors only on weekend, it is far away and not easy to get to. That is not a museum. So science will not exist in NSW Monday to Friday. It will never reach even a fraction of the visitors in Ultimo.
- e. This deliberate cultural destruction has the Baird/ Berejiklian stamp all over it, it was a commitment of Labor to repair and retain Ultimo as it was, and they are lying like the other side.

#### 6. THE POLITICAL AGENDA:

- a. Mr Minns, Labor premier, before becoming premier made a commitment to retain Powerhouse Ultimo as a technological and applied arts museum. It appears that Infrastructure NSW already made the decisions before Labor was elected. So it is a broken promise that may throw Labor out of State Government at the next elections.
- b. The Parramatta development is not going to be a museum. It is an entertainment building with multiple restaurants, junk food and soft drink outlets, little display areas and poor access for exhibits. It was itself a political decision to try to convert Labor votes to Liberals in the Western Suburbs at a cost of a Billion dollars.
- c. Both parties may regret this betrayal of voters.
- d. The estimates of 2 million visitors to Parramatta are fantasy stuff, after the first visit, most will not return. Tourists and interstate visitors will not go there and half of Sydney living in the growing inner city, east, North and inner Western Suburbs will not trouble to reach the new museum.
- e. It appears that the Observatory, on Observatory Hill is now closed to the public apart from expensive prearranged tours.
- f. All the above shows an agenda of running down these important, historical and educational facilities for some strange marketing idea dreamed up by consultants. Sydney is going to be the poorer for it. It is an embarrassment interstate and internationally.

#### WHAT TO DO?:

- 1. I request the Minister to order a stop on this plan. As the museum is closed, make the necessary structural repairs **WITH ALL EXHIBITS IN PLACE**.
- 2. The proposals of providing accommodation for students is so ridiculous it does not merit discussion, where are the kitchens, Laundromat, hotel staff???

3. The proposal for artisan's workshops makes no sense. What is it? a weekend market of cheap junk like in every other suburb?
4. Ms Havila, being in charge, had nearly 10 years to mount fashion exhibitions and test a proof of concept. There should have been queues outside, she did not and the few fashion exhibitions held were poorly attended. Her attitude is just a talking point to justify the destruction of this institution. Families with kids are not interested in fashion, young people buy fast fashion online and throw it away after one use (apparently).
5. It is not often that such a blatantly ridiculous proposition receive the stamp of approval from people who should know better, but in getting things wrong, Infrastructure NSW are champions – examples abound.

I add my voice to the thousands who signed a petition opposing the plan, and these are the people committed enough to the cause. Millions of visitors, children taken there by their parents will be the poorer for this decision and already are.

I thank you for your attention to this matter.

(Signed)

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