

To
Infrastructure NSW
<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-revitalisation>

CC

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The Hon John Graham, Minister for the Arts
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Pyrmont, 07 October, 2024

**POWERHOUSE ULTIMO REVITALISATION
STATE SIGNIFICANT PROJECT APPLICATION
SSD-67588459
SUBMISSION TO SUBMISSION AND AMENDMENT REPORT
OF 3 September 2024**

Submission from Tom Lockley.

I do not support the SSD application.

This submission draws on many sources I have interacted with over the past nine years. It includes material from people who would prefer not to have their identity revealed, but I take full responsibility for all assertions made. Vast amounts of supportive material are available, and I am happy to send detailed information as requested. Also, as usual, I promise to publicise widely all government responses, and if I have made errors of fact, will publicly acknowledge them. So far, in nearly nine years of interaction with government sources, no such errors have been pointed out.

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Introduction

This submission puts on record the grave deficiencies of process that have been evident throughout the whole saga of the destruction, or at best, the serious degradation, of THE Powerhouse MUSEUM over the past ten years. This should lead to a conclusion that the process does not meet the standard required for an SSD. It supports submissions from others that criticise the Government's plans,

None of the Government papers had significant input from people with significant museum qualifications and experience. This is unreasonable. This matter was raised formally in a submission to the recent EIS 'consultation' but there has been no response*.

Preparing this submission is a very difficult task, because of the enormity of the process (OED: *enormity: the great or extreme scale, seriousness, or extent of something perceived as bad or morally wrong*). In the circumstances, all that can be done in this submission is to outline some of the bases for the central assertion made in the opening paragraph. Copious supporting evidence is available for all assertions made. All these matters have been communicated, over the years, to the Government. Responses have been relatively few and typically outline the Government's intentions without addressing the issues raised.

Conventions used in this submission:

Time does not permit the production of a fully referenced document, but * indicates that detailed references for an assertion are readily available on request. We would be happy to answer any questions.

'we' and its variants mean the writers' assessment of consensus of the views of the majority of people objecting to this proposal.

'I' refers to my own statements which may not be consonant with the above,

'THE Powerhouse MUSEUM' means the fully functioning museum of world class, which has always been Australia's premier museum of the Applied Arts and Sciences. It is essentially based on the 1988 award-winning adaptive use of the derelict Ultimo Powerhouse, which should certainly be protected as a major heritage item. It may be upgraded but not significantly demolished or degraded.

'Powerhouse Ultimo' means the facility described in the current EIS. Its main differences from THE Powerhouse MUSEUM are the demolition of 1988 interior structures, the removal of almost all remaining exhibits and the institution of a regime of temporary displays* that are largely 'unmediated', ie with little or no explanatory material*. A feature is a 'creative industries hub' that considerably extends the arts, fashion and design activities that have always been an important part of the museum's activities but should not be seen as the prime function of a museum.

'Government' refers to the Government and its agencies, notably the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Treasury, Departments of the Arts and Heritage, Infrastructure NSW, MAAS museum as controlled by the Government-appointed, Government-tasked CEO, and the current architects are responding to the design brief. This general group is referred to as 'they' or 'their'.

Are the consultation exercises properly briefed?

Another point that needs to be addressed is whether the briefing material supplied at consultations etc is of suitable quality. For example, in regard to the EIS,

The declarant certifies on page 19 of the basic document that this EIS contains all available information relevant to the environmental assessment of the development, activity or infrastructure to which the EIS relates'. However:

- 1. The people who prepared the EIS — even the declarant — have no museum qualifications or experience.*
- 2. There appears to be no input from any people with museum qualifications and experience.*
- 3. Throughout the entire museum development process since 2014 there is no evidence of any person with significant museum qualifications and experience being involved in the basic decisions made.*
- 4. This situation has continued to the present time. There is no evidence that any person with significant museum qualifications and experience has been involved in the preparation of the design brief.*
- 5. No such person has recommended the process, and as far as we know, no such person has approved the process as being superior to the proposal for making basic repairs to the museum, reopening it with appropriate staffing and resources, thereby saving the huge expenditure of the so-called revitalisation, and reopening the museum.*
- 6. We have evidence that the overwhelming majority of people with museum knowledge and experience are opposed to the proposal contained in the EIS.*
- 7. This opposition to the proposal is certainly 'available information relevant to the environmental assessment of the project' and should be included in the EIS.*

Therefore the application for the EIS should be withdrawn, remedied, and resubmitted.

Arrangement of the rest of this submission

These notes are divided into three sections chronologically:

1. The recent period of the Labor government, March 2023 to date
2. 4 July 2020 (announcement that the museum would not be destroyed) to March 2023
3. 24 November 2014 to 4 July 2020: the period when the museum was to be destroyed and the site used for 'urban renewal'.

Under each section are brief notes on common features of the whole process:

- a) financial ineptitude
- b) matters of heritage
- c) lack of expert involvement
- d) lack of proper consultative processes
- e) matters of secrecy, obfuscation and Governmental errors of fact

1. The recent period of the Labor government, March 2023 to date

a) financial ineptitude under Labor

At a time when there are huge demands on the state budget and an acute shortage of skilled building labour, the Government is going to spend at least \$350 million to gut the award-winning museum and rebuild it, with the emphasis being on the creation of three large spaces and a creative industries hub that is not the business of the museum as defined by the MAAS act. In view of the massive public opinion opposing this process it is the height of irresponsibility, especially when it is considered that the past record of Government estimates in all projects is one of underestimation, and this is especially true of museum matters.

*The plans also demolish all the 2011-13 revitalisation works, including new education spaces, the expansion of the Wran building's temporary exhibition space, the shop and café fronting the sunny Harris St forecourt, along with the new glass lift, the new amenities, and escalators over three levels. None of this demolition is necessary to create an entry from the Goods Line. Labor's deliberate waste of museum assets and the investment of generations in the Powerhouse Museum is staggering.**

The closure of the museum deprives the public of access for at least three years, and this is unnecessary. This also means that the recreational and educational programs of the museum must be abandoned for this time. As just one example, this means that the wonderful HSC TAS / HSIE support activities will be denied to several cohorts. This is a severe loss to the educational system, which has an unaccounted financial value in a wider sense.

b) matters of heritage under Labor

This Government has constantly ignored the heritage of the museum itself. The heritage listing that was finally obtained in January 2020 was reassessed in 2023 as applying only to the remains of the original Power Station*. Following massive protest, a new assessment was recently made, covering a wider scope, but with so many exclusions that the Government is still able to gut the museum completely*.

c) lack of expert involvement under Labor

The Minister for the Arts promised on 4 May 2023 that there would be genuine consultation with stakeholders, dealing with basic issues. This has simply not occurred. The policy (and the substandard procedures) of the previous coalition Government has continued.

As per usual practice since 2014, at all so-called consultation exercises very few people with significant museum qualifications and experience were on hand*. No person with significant museum qualifications and experience has been involved in

basic decisions*, and no such people can be found in Create NSW or any of the architectural firms that have been involved in the latest plans*.

For the first time since the 1960s the museum has no curator of transport and engineering for this internationally significant collection*.

d) lack of proper consultative processes under Labor

We had hoped for a more honest consultation process, but the recent response to EIS submissions conclusively demonstrates that the total consultation process is invalid.

For example, over 90% of submissions oppose the project, and these include major organisations and some very distinguished experts. This is backed up by the massive public submission organised by *Save the Powerhouse* Facebook.

Any responsible summary of the consultation input would list this opposition as the major feature of the responses. But the report on consultations begins with comments on the proposed alterations, which were far less significant than the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents did not want the major demolition of the museum. For the EIS five sessions were held, two online and three 'live'.

Attendances were very small- about 10 for the online sessions and even less for the others. In the perception of attendees, people who attended almost unanimously expressed a preference to keep the museum open and make necessary and desirable improvements under these circumstances.

Many people who have previously taken part in consultations, expressing these sentiments, have given up: a typical comment is 'How many times do we have to start the bleeding obvious?'

e) matters of secrecy, obfuscation and Governmental errors of fact under Labor

The previous Government's tradition of secrecy has been carried on by its successor.

We have constantly argued that the business case for the total museum program should be public, but the response for useful information is always that the matter is 'cabinet in confidence' or otherwise restricted. Justification for this is hard to follow: it is taxpayers' money. There should not be any secret negotiations before the project is finally authorised. We were promised a current 'Business Case Summary' in the EIS consultation report, page 24, but even this rather useless document does not exist.

The government's promised heritage revitalisation for the Powerhouse Museum is broken. Labor's plans will see the PHM gutted, emptied of its collections and demolished to the bare brick walls, erasing all trace of the 1988 museum. There is no attempt to repair, restore, conserve or renew any part of the actual Powerhouse Museum or its exhibitions.*

The government has not honoured its promises of transparency or released the secret documents behind the scheme to convert the Powerhouse Museum into a creative arts, events and venue hire facility.*

2: 4 July 2020 ('reprieve' of THE Powerhouse MUSEUM) to March 2023

a) financial ineptitude after the 'reprieve', July 2020

Comments from the other sections also apply here, but a principal feature of this period was the controversy over Willow Grove in Parramatta.

The historic building was on the site commandeered by the Government as outlined elsewhere, and the Government planned to demolish it and re-erect it. Expert advice was that this was impractical and hugely expensive; the sandstock bricks do not withstand any sort of rough handling, and the interior plasterwork would be very hard to duplicate and extraordinarily expensive. The Government eventually saw the wisdom of this judgement,

b) matters of heritage after the 'reprieve', July 2020

Throughout the world great museums and galleries are often housed in historic buildings – the Louvre, the Hermitage, the Uffizi, Quai d'Orsay, and indeed the Powerhouse Museum. The key point to be made here is that even for people who do not appreciate great workmanship and wonderful history, heritage aspects of a building do have a commercial value. Copious studies exist regarding this matter: a typical example is *Valuing the Priceless: The Value of Historic Heritage in Australia*. Throughout the Business Case, and all other documents, the Government has stressed the appeal of new buildings but there has been no consideration at all of the cash values of heritage buildings in attracting visitors and in visitor impact.

During this period the museum heritage was at last assessed, and the amazing conclusion was that the museum itself had little heritage value. For example, it was said that the museum had a local significance only: this is ridiculous. The huge support for the museum was evidenced by the numerous submissions from organisations and people from many places. THE Powerhouse MUSEUM was of world class, and deserved to be preserved in its heritage building, on its present site, most accessible to people from Sydney, from New South Wales, from Australia and from the world.

c) lack of expert involvement: after the 'reprieve', July 2020

We have constantly asked for a briefing on the philosophy of Powerhouse Ultimo. All we get is unsubstantiated allegations that THE Powerhouse MUSEUM is not fit for purpose and promises of something wonderful in the future. We are concerned when we get inklings of what is to come: we have acquired speakers notes for the CEO who gave a major address in 2021. This was first entitled 'Perspectives' but was later renamed as 'Unmaking the Institution' when presented. She speaks of a distrust of consultations as a source of data, and an administrative technique of deferring responses to questions until they no longer matter.

There are also concerns about the current and future policy of having ‘unmediated’ exhibits, with no explanation, which contributes to a fear of what is happening to the museum’s educational function and programs.

*In 2021-22 the PHM had just 16,701 learners and teachers on site and online, down from 63,911 in 2018-19. By contrast the Australian Museum had 71,680 learners in 2021-22, so this isn’t the legacy of Covid. On these figures the government ought to be calling in the auditors to look at where the money is going, (\$55 million pa), not gifting the management of MAAS two capital projects worth \$1.4 billion, more than five times the cost of Sydney Modern.**

d) lack of proper consultative processes: after the ‘reprieve’, July 2020

All the bogus consultations that we have been subjected to in the past had taught us to be very wary. In March March-April 2022 we were promised that a consultation process would be held to inform the development of a Conservation Management Plan for the museum. Because of past experiences, we secured a clear statement that the current consultation would be genuine - ... *the process will proceed as advertised, the consultations will proceed according to the steps of the Burra Charter, the process will be accurately reported, this will lead to a Conservation Management Plan and that the CMP would inform the design brief for the work to be done at **THE** Powerhouse MUSEUM*:*

Nevertheless, a week after the consultation finished, the Government issued an 873-page document, entitled 'Conservation Management Program' which completely ignored the thrust of the consultation input and sanctioned the destruction process outlined above.

e) matters of secrecy, obfuscation and Governmental errors of fact: after the ‘reprieve’, July 2020

The tradition of secrecy continued. Just one example: the destruction of the display cabinets on level 1 was done to an appalling standard, with no protection for the exhibits from toxic dust. According to the CEO by email, 19 May 2021* this destruction was made necessary because the display cabinets and viewing platform did not meet fire safety standards. We have repeatedly asked for the relevant documentation with no response.

In the same email the following statements were made:

- *Other than the removal of the showcases and the creation of Microcars no further work is planned for the Transport Hall. (All aircraft are removed, and further demolition is in progress).*

- *There are no plans to make any changes in the Steam Revolution Gallery.*
(Demolition is already under way and requests for its preservation have been ignored).
- *We are only successful in our renewal if we value and carry forward the legacy of the work of those who went before us. (No printable comment!).*
- *Masterplanning Dialogues will continue across 2021 (They weren't).*

The inclusion of the Spectrum of Public Participation of the *International Association for Public Participation* on page 5 of the EIS Community and Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes Report is an act of hypocrisy. The report does not adhere to these standards.

3. 24 November 2014 to 4 July 2020: the period when the museum was to be completely destroyed

a) financial ineptitude: the early years

When the then Premier announced his decision to move THE Powerhouse MUSEUM to Parramatta, he said that the Ultimo site would be sold for 'urban renewal' and that the process would finance the total project. Any surplus money would be used for other arts projects in western Sydney.

This estimate was utterly ridiculous. The clear site would sell, at best, for \$250 million dollars, barely enough to remove the items displayed at Ultimo and store them. The project was not taken seriously by anyone with any knowledge of museum costs.

We believe that it is on this basis that Liz-Anne Macgregor, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, recommended the 'move' as 'a perfect fit' for the Parramatta project. When the true costs became known she was asked if she still maintained this position but she never replied.

b) matters of heritage: the early years

When the museum was created in 1988 no one considered applying for heritage listing. The building was of such outstanding quality that nobody would have believed that it would be under threat of destruction for at least a century.

Graham Quint, National Trust advocate, applied for Powerhouse Museum heritage listing in November 2015*, but this was not considered until 2020, as outlined elsewhere, after significant changes in Heritage personnel*.

The outcome was that a heritage listing would be made for the preservation of the *Ultimo Tramways Power House*. Only the basic structure of the original Powerhouse buildings was covered.

In the released 2018 Business Case papers, heritage values were barely mentioned, and even within that document Weir Phillips Heritage believed it should have had much higher priority*.

c) lack of expert involvement: the early years

Ms Macgregor's involvement was the only expert advice ever quoted by the Government during this period. We have asked for copies of this, with no response.

At the Legislative Council Museums Inquiry on 29 August 2017 the arts minister announced the names of an Expert Advisory Group that *provided their knowledge and guidance directly to the project committee*. This was in answer to an offer by museum experts to assist planning. We found that the group had not yet met, 2 years and 10 months after the project was announced, and when it did meet (17 September and 25

September) most of the named experts did not attend. There is no indication anywhere of their activities. This appears to be entirely wrong information supplied under oath. When we reported this to the Government there was no attempt to correct the record.

d) lack of proper consultative processes: the early years

The trustees and also Parramatta Council were not consulted prior to the Premier's announcement and there is clear evidence that they were not even informed about the decision – both found out about it by reading the press announcement*. Even the then MAAS director was not consulted: she was apparently not even informed of the decision in advance!*

There was no consultation with the public until the appointment of a new Arts Minister in January 2018. We were delighted to hear that the public's views were to be sought. However, when major 'consultation' exercises were eventually held in July, we were asked only for our suggestions for the Government's intentions to move the museum. There was no consultation on the basic issue of the proposed destruction of THE Powerhouse MUSEUM .

e) matters of secrecy, obfuscation and Governmental errors of fact: the early years

Just one example: The democratically elected Parramatta City Council (to 12 May 2016) steadfastly opposed the Government's use of their chosen site. They wanted an open riverside area for the end of their civic link project (see Resolution 16308, 14 December 2015; Resolution 16353, 14 January 2016; and Resolution 16646, 9 May 2016).

In June 2017 an Expert Steering Committee, none of whom had museum experience or qualifications, was formed by the Government administrator. They very quickly approved the purchase plan in a letter dated 20 July* with no apparent recognition that it contradicted the views of the elected Council. When an elected council was restored, there was a strong movement to have the purchase decision changed.

The Inquiry hearing of 29 August had some completely wrong statements about this matter*. We pointed out this clear error of fact in an email submission to the Inquiry on 12 September 2017 and its receipt and distribution was confirmed in a phone call. However the false information was then repeated by Government witnesses in the Inquiry evidence of Monday, 28 May 2018* and remains a matter of public record.

Treasury procedural papers require the examination of a 'base case' – the status quo – before examining alternatives. The Government got around this need by declaring the 'base case' to be their decision to move the museum to Parramatta, thereby avoiding scrutiny of the basic decision, which, as has been shown elsewhere, would be seen to be very questionable.*

It is also relevant to note that the Premier's absurd costing was supported by two major supposedly expert consultation activities. We have pointed out that their assessments

were completely wrong, but they have not acknowledged this fact*. This tells us a lot about the value of Government-sponsored consultation reports – the reports simply gave the Government the response the Government wanted.