



Save the Powerhouse  
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To  
NSW Planning Department  
<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-modification-1-additional-demolition-and-rebuild-wran-building-removal-loading-dock-and-other-internal-and-external-changes>

*Ultimo, 26 July, 2025*

## **SUBMISSION**

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### **POWERHOUSE ULTIMO MODIFICATION 1**

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### **ADDITIONAL DEMOLITION AND REBUILD OF THE WRAN BUILDING, REMOVAL OF THE LOADING DOCK AND OTHER INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CHANGES**

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### **STATE SIGNIFICANT PROJECT APPLICATION SSD-67588459-Mod 1**

“Save the Powerhouse” continues to **STRONGLY OBJECT** to both the overall “Revitalisation” project and the currently exhibited *Modification 1*.

“Save the Powerhouse” is a long-standing community campaign committed to retaining the Powerhouse Museum at its Ultimo site as a world-class Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS), a role it has successfully fulfilled since opening in 1988.

Our campaign began in early 2015 in response to former Premier Mike Baird’s announcement to relocate the Museum to Parramatta and sell the Ultimo site to developers. Since then, we have consistently opposed the various “Presence”, “Renewal” and “Revitalisation” schemes advanced by the same Museum Management/Create NSW/Infrastructure NSW team appointed by the previous NSW Government.

We engage with the community through public meetings and regular communications, including email newsletters (reaching over 300 subscribers) and our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse> (5,200+ followers).

The main modification proposed is the complete demolition of the Wran Building and Galleria (“**THE WRAN HERITAGE**”) and their replacement by a replica of a shape somewhat-similar to the original.

Other proposed modifications include –

- The cancellation of the Macarthur Street underground loading dock and
- The re-integration of the Harwood Building in the project. Previously, it had been carefully excised from the “Powerhouse Museum Ultimo Complex”.

### **-1- COMPLETE DEMOLITION OF THE WRAN BUILDING AND GALLERIA**

The proposed “modification 1” of **an already inappropriate, unpopular, destructive, and wasteful project** calls for the complete demolition of the Wran Building and the Galleria.

This violates established international heritage principles including Article 6 of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) **Venice Charter (1964)** The Venice Charter clearly states that “The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. **WHEREVER THE TRADITIONAL SETTING EXISTS, IT MUST BE KEPT.** No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and colour must be allowed.”  
[https://admin.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Venice\\_Charter\\_EN.pdf](https://admin.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Venice_Charter_EN.pdf).

- The “traditional setting” obviously exists and served its purpose until the untimely closure of the Museum in February 2024. **IT MUST BE KEPT!**  
**DEMOLITION OF HERITAGE-LISTED BUILDINGS TO REPLACE THEM BY PASTICHE REPLICAS IS REPREHENSIBLE!**

- The proposed “**APPROXIMATE REPLICA**’ the Applicant proposes to build is substantially shorter, clad in incongruous brick walls, and concealed behind a row of souvenir shops that diminish their dignity and public presence. It would **ALTER THE RELATIONS OF MASS AND COLOUR**



The proposed demolitions are not made necessary by the aging of the existing structures as wrongly claimed in the Government media release. These structures were built 37 years ago for a 100 year life span according to the building Codes applicable at the time. If the same principle were applied elsewhere the Cairo Pyramids, the Louvre or the Taj Mahal would need to be demolished and replaced by structures designed according to 2025 Building Codes!

In fact, the real reason for demolition is given in the Modification 1 documentation (Section 4.55(2), p. 12):

*"...it was determined that the existing Wran Building and Galleria structure are unable to support the approved works..."*

Translation: the proposed incongruous brick cladding is too heavy.

Note 1: It is inconceivable that such structural incompatibility was only discovered at this stage. This indicates serious flaws at the design and assessment level.

Note 2: The Powerhouse Museum Complex was **State Heritage-listed in July 2024**, including the Wran additions (see Gazette:

[https://gazette.nsw.gov.au/gazette/2024/7/2024-7\\_268-gazette.pdf](https://gazette.nsw.gov.au/gazette/2024/7/2024-7_268-gazette.pdf)).

Demolishing these heritage-listed components within a year of listing would make a mockery of heritage protection processes and -

The City of Sydney's support for the project was conditional on a review of "the extent of intervention and whether this is an appropriate adaptive reuse."

**Full demolition is neither adaptive nor appropriate.** Continued support would be indefensible.

## **-2- CANCELLATION OF LOADING DOCK & HARWOOD BUILDING RE-INTEGRATION**

We welcome the re-integration of the Harwood Building, the traditional storage, exhibition preparation and support facility and the reduced excavation. However, this change significantly alters the project's footprint and character.

The claim that the revised proposal remains "substantially the same development" is **FALSE**. A project of this altered scope requires a **new Development Application** under planning law.

*Note: many submissions to the EIS condemned the addition of a new loading dock, underlining the adequacy of that of the existing Harwood Building.*

*It is unbelievable that it took such a long time for the design team to understand this.*

## **-3- FURTHER OBJECTIONS (SEARS-Aligned)**

### **3.1 Capital Investment Value and Employment (SEARS 2)**

- The project represents **poor value for public money**, and is almost certain to exceeds its budget.

- It will impose high ongoing operational costs on the Arts Department, draining funds from regional and community cultural organisations for decades.
- Construction industry job creation is **not a justification**; the industry is already under pressure (which is one of the main reasons the NSW Government is unable to solve the housing crisis) and not suffering from lack of demand.

### 3.2 Built Form and Urban Design (SEARS 4)

- The proposed project **destroys the site's heritage values** (see above).
- Exhibition space will be **reduced by approximately 75%** as clearly demonstrated by Save the Powerhouse and others. This has never been challenged in official responses.
- Many blockbuster international exhibitions were held in the past in the existing Museum (see <http://tiny.cc/ios9yz> )
- General expert belief is that large open-plan spaces are not suited to Applied Arts and Sciences displays.
- The recent, very successful, “Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs” exhibition at the Australia Museum was arranged in a number of medium and small size spaces located on 2 different levels.
- The claim that a new eastern entrance is required is **misleading**—this entry already exists and was actively used until 2020. The current Management chose not to re-open it in 2022 in order to facilitate its collection “decanting”.



### 3.3 Ecologically Sustainable Development (SEARS 9)

- The project is **environmentally irresponsible**, with high embodied carbon emission from demolition and reconstruction.

- *Modification 1* worsens the carbon footprint, replacing existing sound steel structures with carbon-intensive new steel.

### 3.4 **Environmental Heritage** (SEARS 20)

The demolition of heritage buildings just a year after formal State listing is an act of **cultural vandalism**. (See section 1).

### 3.5 **Social Impact** (SEARS 21)

The Arts Minister promised that *“The Powerhouse Museum Ultimo will close its doors on February 5, 2024 for building and conservation works that are expected to take UP TO three years.*

In fact the museum will be closed for much longer as demolition and construction are now scheduled to last 3 years and will not start until the current modification application is approved.

Adding the time necessary for retro-fitting and exhibition set-up after construction completion, **the Museum will not re-open before the end of 2029, ie (minimum) 6 years after the unnecessary and untimely its closure in February 2024.**

*Note: The closure at the time was probably because the Museum Management had exhausted their yearly operational budget after only 7 months.*

In addition the museum will re-open with a greatly reduced total exhibition area and without its permanent exhibitions (steam revolution, transport and space, etc.) revered by the public.

### 3.6 **Engagement** (SEARS 27)

- The planning process has been marred by **non-transparent and exclusionary practices**.
- The public was not consulted on fundamental issues like function, collection strategy, or programming.
- Despite the Arts Minister’s pre-election promises critical documents remain hidden:
  - Business Case
  - Design Brief
  - Exhibition Plan
  - Conservation Management Plan
- Experts such as recently-deceased architect Lionel Glendenning and founding director Dr Lindsay Sharp were never consulted.

- The successive “Reference Groups” formed by the Arts Minister operate under **confidentiality agreements**, are limited to project advocacy, and **exclude dissenting voices** (see: <http://tiny.cc/ji2ozz>).

#### **-4- CONCLUSION**

Despite overwhelming public opposition (**only 3% of submissions supported the project**), the SSD Application was approved.

“Save the Powerhouse” strongly **opposes Modification 1**, which proposes an even worse outcome including -

:

- **Complete destruction of Wran-era heritage**
- A (minimum) **six-year closure** of the Museum

**THIS MADNESS MUST STOP AND COMMON SENSE MUST PREVAIL.  
NO CIVILIZED SOCIETY DESTROYS ITS HERITAGE.**

Patricia JOHNSON & Jean-Pierre ALEXANDRE  
Co-Convenors

*Save the Powerhouse*

