

Objection to development of the Museums Discovery Centre at Castle Hill as presented – NSW Branch of Australian Museums and Galleries Association

The NSW Branch of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association would like to submit an objection to the development for the following reasons:

5.8 the **negative impact on the heritage of the Museum of the Applied Arts and Sciences**, an institution founded in 1880. This is particularly relevant in terms of the Museum's distinguished record as an applied sciences research institution, notably in Australian botany and the development of the Australian essential oils industry. Both the Parramatta Powerhouse and the MDC Expansion involve the planned destruction of existing heritage – Willow Grove , 1879, built by Annie Gallagher and the Museum's Experimental Plantation of Essential Oils at Castle Hill.

5.8.1 Both the Curio Projects Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report (ACHAR) and the Aborigicultural Impact Assessment Report, Mackay Tree Management fail to research or even acknowledge the Museum's institutional and scientific heritage existing on the site, particularly in the remnant Experimental Plantation trees which they describe as 'being established 50 years ago for oil production' (Mackay p6, p7). Indeed, the ASPECT Studios (Appendix D SDRP Response) assessment claims that

'The expansion of the MDC will recognise and disrupt the legacy of the Eucalypt plantation (and associated tradition of colonial botany) for which the property was acquired in 1948 (sic). The history of this plantation and its contribution to the burgeoning Eucalyptus oil industry blatantly ignored the pre-existing knowledge held by the Aboriginal people, but rather contributed to the industrialisations of this native resource.' P50

This claim that the Museum's scientific research program 'blatantly ignored' Aboriginal knowledge is a 'cancel culture' labelling of the Museum's distinguished research record and shows little understanding of the historical and scientific context of the Museum's work.

5.8.2 This failure to research, respect and incorporate the Museum's institutional history is an egregious oversight, not only by these two consultants but also by the Museum's leadership which has failed to understand and protect the cultural heritage of this site - an intrinsic part of the Museum since 1947.

I was personally the Manager of Powerhouse Museum storage for more than ten years until 2019. There is no reason to move the small object collection of over 300,000 object to Castle Hill, now that the site in Ultimo will continue to operate. The storage located in the Harwood Building has been externally assessed by experts as best practice purpose-built storage. With new air conditioning and storage furniture, the basement store will continue to be best practice. The advantages to having collection storage co-located with a major museum are well documented.

It is farcical that a 130 year old cultural and memory institution should destroy both Willow Grove and the eucalyptus plantation that is an important part of NSW history. Heritage architects have stated that Willow Grove cannot be dismantled and rebuilt. Heritage practice clearly states that place, context and stories are just as vitally important as bricks and mortar.

I am very happy to discuss these statement further. I represent the vast majority of the members of our professional organisation.

Yours sincerely

Judith Coombes

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