

Submission re Parramatta Powerhouse Environmental Impact Statement, 21 July 2020
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I am writing to object to the continuation of the Parramatta Powerhouse project in its current form. I have concentrated on the one aspect of the EIS in which I have some expertise – the destruction of the heritage properties, Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces.

Although the government decided on 4 July to retain the Powerhouse at the Ultimo site as an operating museum, there has been no announcement about re-considering the nature of the institution¹ that is to go Parramatta as a part of the Powerhouse network, and therefore the impact on the location and site.

Section 6.2.2 of the current Environmental Impact Statement ('Post settlement heritage') makes for chilling reading. The critical paragraph in this section is:

The submitted concept designs made it clear that it was not possible to deliver on the design ambitions of the brief and deliver connectivity, whilst also retaining the local heritage items. The retention of heritage was considered carefully during the judging process, however, ultimately the Jury were unanimous in their decision on the final chosen concept by Moreau Kusunoki and Genton.

Arising from these statements, I wish to register that I am mystified that the government is still proceeding with the EIS process. The 'design ambitions of the brief' were framed around a concept and plan for a new institution which has been abandoned as a result of the 4 July announcement. Without a new concept and plan – which would necessitate a new brief - it seems a waste of time to continue with the same process.

I absolutely support calls to restart the planning process including a more meaningful community consultation process. Since 4 July, many versions of the 'Parramatta Powerhouse' have been articulated by the government – which clearly has invested little time identifying how to proceed from this point – it renders the current EIS process invalid.

In section 6.2.2, the EIS describes well the historical significance and uniqueness of the heritage buildings to be demolished, and then attempts to outline how the 'sense of loss and loss of social and cultural' can be ameliorated. Assuming that the strategies are implemented as suggested – and there has to be a question mark over how successfully that will occur - the suggested strategies do not effectively compensate in any way for the loss.

The potential to save the heritage buildings and integrate them into a revised version of the new institution must surely now be possible.

I take the opportunity to make the following points:

- **Profiling Parramatta in Parramatta:** clearly considerable work still needs to be done on a sensible and coherent allocation of content and collections to the Parramatta Powerhouse. I suggest that the extraordinary history of Parramatta as a significant place in Australia's history – particularly the early period - needs to be strongly represented. And this can only really be done successfully through meaningful consultation with the Parramatta community.

¹ I cannot bring myself to call it a 'museum' as it clearly lacks most of the key characteristics of a professional museum.

- **Make use of existing research and restart the cultural planning process as a NSW wide exercise:** As experienced museum professional and manager Michael Parry has said recently, 'there is a significant amount of original research that has been generated [which] can help identify the right way to deliver cultural services to Parramatta, Sydney and NSW more broadly. It could avoid some of the grasping at straws by various proponents who claim to know what the community 'needs', most often because it simply reflects their personal preferences'.²

Finally, I wish to comment on the future of the Powerhouse at Ultimo. The prospect that the Ultimo site will focus on fashion, at the expense of the large technology objects currently on exhibit in the Turbine and Boiler Halls, makes no sense at all. Apart from the substantial cost, complicated logistics and high risk to move these objects, there is no better place for them to be displayed than in the old power station buildings. Without doubt, they are not only magnificent spaces in which to display them to great effect, but provide a unique, relevant and unbeatable context.

² Michael Parry, 'Some observations on MAAS', <https://medium.com/@vaguelym/some-observations-on-maas-840a86ccd2a0>, accessed 20 July 2020.