

Campaign to save the Powerhouse  
Australia's major museum of arts and sciences in Sydney's most evocative heritage building.

## ABC investigations

Do not bin this just because you think you know about what is happening! Read it and if you do not act on it, you will be complicit in one of the greatest cultural crimes ever. We have 15 days.

On July 1 this closes preparatory to demolition.



This statement is personal, but it embodies the position of the entire arts and museum community.

The battle to save the Powerhouse museum at Ultimo, and to preserve vestiges of Australia's reputation as a civilised and cultured country, has raged for over five years.

Only 32 years ago this building won a world-wide award for its architecture: now destruction will begin in 15 days. The entire museum and arts industry, not only in Sydney but even world-wide, is horrified.

Thousands of people have protested the against destruction of the museum, and despite masses of documentation and irrefutable evidence, this Government is continually doubling down and expressing determination to proceed. Not even the financial chaos of the Covidvirus pandemic will dissuade this Government from its course, wasting at least a billion dollars and trashing magnificent heritage.

But in the current environment we cannot cut through and get the kind of media exposure that we need.

The facts are as stated: copious references can be provided. Almost all have been pointed out to the Government, and we have challenged them to find errors of fact but this simply cannot be done.

ABC investigations are practically our last hope of getting action before the July 1 deadline.

I live 5 minutes away from ABC Ultimo. I have worked at least 2 days a week on this since mid-2015. I have contact throughout the entire protest movement. I have access to all facts, and can respond to any query within minutes. Phone 0403 615 134 any hour of the day or night.

Please look at this and even if you only go to the section on page 3 'where the story really starts' you should be persuaded that this is a story you must feature.

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## The lady and the idea – 2014

This bit is the only thing in the whole story that cannot be documented.

But here is the consensus.

Liz-Anne Macgregor, appointed by Baird as 'Cultural Ambassador to the West', and anointed by the Telegraph, was tasked with finding an appropriate way of bringing culture to western Sydney, now the population centre of the conurbation.

Baird suggested that the Museum of Contemporary Art could be moved. Liz-Anne suggested that the Powerhouse Museum should be moved instead. This fitted in with a lot of good ideas: taking a jewel out of Clover Moore's crown: she could not object without being pilloried by the Tele for being an inner city snob; it was spectacular; it would free up a couple of acres for urban development and far be it from me to suggest that that might be of benefit to anyone ...

## Fanciful financing by the professional banker

After announcing the 'move' without any further investigation or even consultation with the Trustees or the Parramatta Council, Baird claimed that the building of a museum 'to rival the Smithsonian' could be financed by the sale of the site and the idea was immediately categorised as a grab for profits by the Government Baird so he announced that all surplus money would be used for cultural purposes in the west.

An 'expert' report commissioned by the Western Sydney Business Chamber that supported this idea and even supported these calculations!

This shows the lack of expertise in the whole plan. The proceeds of the sale of the bare site was assessed by our experts at \$250 million, (which was actually above the final amount assessed by the Government) and it was obvious to all that this would not nearly be enough.

## Uproar in the arts world beginning 2015, growing ever stronger

The heritage of the building is such that many people would be in front of the bulldozers if its demolition would make a billion dollars for the state. But particularly in view of the disastrous financing and overall loss of cultural assets of world class, there was considerable anger, culminating in a full page advertisement (February 16, 2016) in the Herald and the Australian, protesting the move and signed by a who's who of the arts and museum world.

## Undemocratic government in Parramatta helps the destroyers

As part of the process of Council amalgamation, the elected Parramatta Council was replaced with a Government-appointed Administrator in May 2016. At their last meeting the elected council had passed a resolution requesting that the riverside site preferred by the Government should be retained as open space. This was their fourth such resolution. Since then it has been comprehensively ignored, and statements have claimed the support of the Council. Since reestablishment, the only resolutions passed by the Council on the subject have requested the retention of heritage buildings on the site.

## Resistance grows

The opposition to the move continued, and grew in strength despite stubborn persistence from the Government and continuing propaganda from the Telegraph. At this time the move idea had support from the Labour party as well as the Government

## Inquiry established June 2016

In June 2016 an upper house Inquiry was announced, and over 130 submissions were quickly received with overwhelming support (eg from the National Trust, International Commission on Monuments and Sites, a real who's who of the artistic, engineering and museum community).

There were significant demonstrations and a strong program of resistance developed in late 2016.

## Baird resigned, Berejiklian Government formed January 2017

Baird resigned to spend more time with his family, then took a job with the National Bank. As a shareholder I requested that he not be allowed to make financial decisions because of his stupid decision re the Powerhouse.

The Berejiklian Government appointed Don Harwin as Arts Minister. Everyone was heartened when he announced that there would be consultation: at first only on the museum to be built at Parramatta, then as opposition continued there were hints that the museum might remain at Ultimo.

## Release of the Business Case mid-2017

Throughout the process has been shrouded in secrecy. At the Inquiry the Government witnesses typically refused to answer on the basis that the matter was 'cabinet in confidence'. The Government released a so-called Business Case Summary on 2 April, giving nothing but platitudinous assertions.

Thanks to a dissident Government member, Matthew Mason-Cox, the Government was forced to release a copy of the Business Case. Some 3,000 pages of highly redacted material was issued, and made available to the public by appointment only. The papers confirmed that there was no prior research and consultation, and this fact was confirmed by evidence from the Trustees, Infrastructure NSW, the MAAS director and Parramatta Council. The cost of the project was stated by the Government at around \$650 million and by outside experts at up to \$1.5 billion.

## July 2017: Shonky consultation and an undemocratic land deal

'Consultation' meetings were held at Parramatta and Ultimo. On the day of the meeting at Ultimo, 31 July, the Government announced that the 'Council', ie their appointed Administrator, had concluded an agreement to sell the riverside site to the Government for the museum.

Attendees at the meetings were told that they were to comment on the features wanted in the transplanted museum at Parramatta and suggestions for the use of the empty Ultimo buildings. Our people reported that at every table there were people who objected to the total idea of the 'move' but this did not figure in the reports of the meetings. We have evidence that the facilitators were specially trained to deal with the dissidents.

## Appointment of CEO to move museum 2018

Lisa Havilah was appointed as CEO, not director, with the task of getting the 'move' done, in November 2018.

## Labour Party promises not to destroy the museum

After the resignation of Luke Foley as leader of the opposition in November 2018 his successor Michael Daley announced on January 30 that the Labour party would retain the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo and build a new museum in Parramatta.

## Conclusion of the huge Inquiry February 2019

The Inquiry was originally planned to have three sittings, but there were 14 sittings over a period of over two years. On 28 February 2019 the Inquiry issued its report, with full evidence to support its Finding that the *Final Business Case for the Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney Project* did not comply with NSW Treasury's *Guide to Cost-Benefit Analysis*. Government members of the Inquiry rejected the finding

On March 23 the Government was re-elected.

## And this is where the current scandals start

On 17 July 2019 Mr Harwin released his response to the Inquiry. It is not worth the paper it is not written on.

He says that the project has been checked by six independent reviews involving more than 30 independent reviewers in a wide range of specialities. (Over the years the project has been criticised for an almost complete lack of people with experience in the general arts field, and no participation of people with experience and qualifications in museums).

He also says that highly qualified consultants ... have contributed through peer review processes and governance programs'. This is easily disproved. Nothing of the sort has happened.

In regard to the six reviews we sought details from Infrastructure NSW by a GIPA and they have not given any information apart from the names and dates of the reports. We suspect that they are hiding details that would indicate that this is not what it is claimed to be.

To crown all, the response to the Inquiry was simply a rewriting of a passage from the Business Case summary released on 2 April 2018, referred to above. It did not respond to the Finding in any way.

## And evidence of Government mendacity continues to appear:

Two examples of several:

### Fabricated consultation records

As part of the project, another round of consultation was mandatory. A new PR firm was hired and Zoom meetings were held, concentrating on Parramatta region people, at which the majority of respondents protested the general idea of the 'move'. Negative comments were not mentioned in the quickly prepared glossy report.

The report includes comments from the National Trust that are obviously fabricated. Full details are attached.

### Non-compliance with disclosure requirements

The Legislative Council has passed a resolution demanding release of a wide range of documents on the project. The Government has divided these documents into three sections: one for the general public, one for the new Inquiry politicians, and the largest section, retained by the Government as confidential.

The first distribution to the public (last Wednesday) contained very little material that is not available on the internet, and what there is is inconsequential. At least a quarter of the material is drafts of the 2017-18 MAAS annual report, and this 'snow job' is the crowning insult to democracy.

Tom Lockley, 15 June 2020