

Vow to resume scrutiny of Powerhouse move

Linda Morris

The political battle over the Powerhouse Museum's move to Parramatta may not be over yet, with key opponents pledging fresh parliamentary scrutiny of the Berejiklian government's plans.

Labor and the Greens have rejected any suggestion the Coalition has a fresh mandate to shift the Powerhouse at a capital cost of \$1.1 billion and use the proceeds from the institution's redeveloped Ultimo site without oversight.

Greens MLC David Shoebridge, deputy chairman of the long-running upper house inquiry which recommended the project be abandoned, is hoping to gather enough crossbench support with Labor to re-establish a select committee in the arts portfolio to monitor governance and management of the relocation.

At its first meeting after the election on March 23 in which the Berejiklian government secured a working majority, the Labor caucus gave its backing to fresh scrutiny of the Powerhouse Museum move, including support for a new committee.

Labor's arts spokesperson Walt Secord wants former museum boss, Dolla Merrillees, now working at Western Sydney University, to appear before any new inquiry.

The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party's Robert Borsak is the inquiry chairman and is said to be looking at potential terms of reference.

The two-and-a-half-year parliamentary inquiry had urged the Powerhouse Museum be given a cash injection and restored to its former glory, while Parramatta would receive funding for

its own, separate "world-class" institution.

It also raised fresh questions around the scope of the new museum's international design brief and the conduct of senior staff at the failed Powerhouse Ball. But the NSW Premier insisted there was no turning back: "The Powerhouse in western Sydney is part of the future of western Sydney."

Selection of the five architectural teams that will go on to develop design concepts for the shell of the new museum is expected to be announced later this year. "Regardless of whether the museum move happens, it is the job of parliament to scrutinise government policy," Mr Shoebridge said. "We have a very strong prospect of getting the numbers to continue the work of the original committee which has already exposed significant flaws in policy."

"The Greens intend to keep a close eye on the Ultimo site and I will do everything I can to ensure that it remains in public hands and doesn't become a tower block. There are a lot of days and a lot of weeks and a lot of months until the government's proposed closure date. The government got re-elected but it would be foolish to say it has a mandate for relocation. There is a strong grassroots movement opposed to the Powerhouse's relocation."

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David Shoebridge,
Greens MLC