

Sydney Morning Herald:

Staged closure planned for the Powerhouse Museum

By [Linda Morris](#)

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The timetable for the shut down of Sydney's two biggest museums has been announced with the Australian Museum to shut its doors in August for 12 months so that work can begin on a new exhibition hall to house the King Tut blockbuster in 2021.

The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo will also begin a staged shutdown from June next year more than 30 years after it first shifted to the site of the Ultimo Power Station and tram depot.

The main heritage power station building will close to the public mid-2020 while the Wran Building, the 1980s addition that features the main entrance and touring hall, will remain open for exhibitions for a further 12 months.

[Lisa Havilah has given staff timetable for the closure of the Powerhouse Museum. *CREDIT:JAMES ALCOCK*]

This will give the museum a limited public presence in Ultimo while providing management more time to find temporary homes for the museum's very large objects in regional museums across the state.

The Boulton and Watt Steam engine and the Locomotive No. 1, which hauled NSW's first train, is on permanent display in the Wran annexe. The Collection Relocation Project is to send most objects to Castle Hill's Discovery Centre, with the remainder housed at Parramatta.

Originally, the museum was to have closed in January and reopened three years later in its new \$1.17 billion home on the Parramatta River. Even with the new timetable, the museum will be without a physical home for two years.

Arts Minister Don Harwin has announced the Powerhouse Museum will present *Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year* from August 16 on behalf of Australian Museum as it begins its \$57.5 million renovations.

[The Australian Museum's Pacific collections are moving out to make way for the King Tut exhibition. *CREDIT:MCT*]

To enable the major building works to get underway, the Australian Museum will temporarily close to the public from August 19 for about 12 months.

While the Powerhouse Museum prepares to exit Ultimo, Mr Harwin is pursuing plans for a "creative industries presence" at Ultimo, according to the Berejiklian government's brief response to a damning Upper House inquiry into the museum's relocation tabled last week.

That two-and-a-half-year-long inquiry urged the government immediately abandon the project and the Powerhouse Museum be restored to its former glory.

[Conceptual render of the planned new Powerhouse museum in Parramatta.]

Commercial or residential tower developments on the site of the Harwood building, where the bulk of the museum's collection is stored, and the Wran building is to offset the billion-dollar cost of the museum's new riverside home, according to a draft business case still in progress.

But the government's failure in its response to specifically mention plans to turn the heritage halls at Ultimo into a lyric theatre has fuelled speculation that Treasury is pushing for a cheaper scaled-down theatre and gallery presence for music performance and exhibitions similar to that opened at Barangaroo.

The museum's new chief executive officer, Lisa Havilah, was recruited from Carriageworks, a multi-space venue, and is thought to be advocating for the museum to remain a major stakeholder in any event.

Since 2016, the government maintains there have been six independent reviews justifying the new museum project. The final business case demonstrated expertise, time, detail, rigour and due diligence had underpinned proper project planning, Mr Harwin reported to the Upper House.

Greens MP David Shoebridge said keeping orphaned exhibition space open for the very large objects disrespected the state's cultural items. "Even a casual observer of the property market would realise the net cost to government of the project is blowing out probably to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

"One of the reasons the community remains so strongly opposed to the Powerhouse move is that it is underpinned by speculative property deals at Ultimo and Parramatta. Those deals are even more speculative with the collapse in house prices and confidence in the building industry."

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