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Heritage Council of NSW  
Locked Bag 5020  
Parramatta, NSW, 2124

**RE: Objection to the proposed listing on the State Heritage Register of the Ultimo Tramways Power House, 500 Harris St Ultimo**

I write to request a review of the current Notice of Intention for the heritage listing of the Powerhouse Museum and express concern about:

- the inadequacy of the Notice for heritage, cultural and social reasons
- the misleading research and recommendation from the Cracknell and Lonergan report *Assessment of Heritage Significance, Ultimo Tramways Power House Museum, Independent Review* prepared for heritage NSW, which does not include significant elements that must also be considered heritage
- the need to take in important related aspects of the Museum's buildings across time, as well as the significance of its collection and its relationship to the heritage of the full site.

**Background:**

I write as a museum professional, a curator, historian and contemporary advocate of historical and contemporary decorative arts, crafts and design, and a former senior curator at the Powerhouse Museum. I have received an AM in the Order of Australia and an Emeritus Award from the Australia Council, for my services to the field.

I remain active in this area, and am in continual contact with other museums and with designer- maker organisations associated with the applied arts, across Australia and overseas (all disapprove of the proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum to a less accessible location where meaningful display of the collection will be vastly diminished). My experience of the Powerhouse Museum, from 1988 until 2007, was that it was a leading museum in its uniquely integrated fields of science and technology, decorative arts and design and social history, recognised for over 100 years as 'applied arts and sciences', in the particular context of an Australian history, especially that of NSW.

As a state museum, with national and international significance, it has been perfectly re-located in the old Powerhouse buildings and the adjacent Tram depot, in the Sydney CBD of the state capital where local, state, interstate and international audiences could easily access it.

The 1988 award-winning architectural awards for adaptive reuse and extension of the buildings, excellently acknowledged the juxtaposition of past and present aspects of architecture.

The museum has provided a totally relevant and engaging location for objects of historical technical and engineering significance, notably those requiring the scale of the old and new buildings.

As well, the integrated nature of the past and present buildings provided continuing research relevance for the broader museum collection, to contemporary designers, makers and scientists, both professional practitioners and students.

Significantly, the Museum in its 1988 location was recognised world-wide for its engaging and informative exhibitions and associated events, which provided a range of audiences with compelling information in narratives about the exemplary collection, accumulated over more than 100 years. (See the extent of exhibitions from 1988-2018 here:

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/about-the-powerhouse-museum/powerhouse-museum-an-exhibition-archive/>)

It has been an integral part of cultural, historical and educational aspects of Sydney and NSW.

As well as the exhibitions of science and technology, the decorative arts and design exhibitions, drawn from the collection, were well-attended because they were accessible within the capital city, and unique because they were also presented in the context of science and technology, and ranged across industrial manufacture to contemporary designing and making.

Social history exhibitions provided a further significant context, from Indigenous Australia to migration stories and beyond.

#### **Concerns:**

The Notice of Intention for the 'Ultimo Tramways Power House' provides a title never used before, demonstrating ignorance of the site and its role in NSW cultural and heritage history. This notice does not recognise the broad significance of the museum buildings and their relationship to the collection, as they exist now, and which are at risk with the NSW Government's plans to demolish the museum and evict its collections from their purpose designed, state of the art facilities.

The assessment only considers the former Ultimo power house in its pre 1980 form, which is contrary to established principles of heritage practice.

It does not include the rare and significant engineering objects which have particular relevance to the location, and which are central to the conception, adaptation and design of the Powerhouse Museum and the contemporary identity of the museum.

As identified above, the nomination has ignored many aspects of the state significance of the Powerhouse Museum, particularly the social values of the museum for the people of NSW. None of the museum's major donors, benefactors, former trustees, Life Fellows, PHM alumni, members and volunteers have been consulted about the plans to close and sell the PHM site.

#### ***In my view, the complete Powerhouse Museum, and its collections, meet all the criteria listed, 'an item' being the complete museum, ie:***

- a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history;
  - b) an item has strong or special association ... of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history;
  - c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;
  - d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons; (*all community and cultural groups*)
  - e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history;
  - f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history;
  - g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's - cultural or natural places...
1. environmental heritage means those places, buildings, works, relics, moveable objects, and precincts, of state or local heritage significance (section 4, Heritage Act, 1977).
  2. state heritage significance, in relation to a place, building, work, relic, moveable object or precinct, means significance to the State in relation to the historical, scientific cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item (section 4A(1), Heritage Act, 1977).

**Conclusion:**

I ask that:

- The NSW Heritage Council reject the nomination in its current incomplete and partial form
- That it list on the State Heritage Register the whole Powerhouse Museum, including the Harwood building, the Wran building and galleria, and the museum's notable *in situ* steam and transport collections which are at risk of dispersal with the proposed eviction of the collections and demolition of the museum.
- That it acknowledges the heritage significance of the broader collection including the extensive decorative arts and design and social history holdings, as well as those from science and technology, and their necessary identification with the heritage of the old and new Museum buildings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Grace Cochrane". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Grace Cochrane AM