

# I Don know about plan

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**Don Harwin is grilled at the committee hearing. Picture: Dylan Robinson**

## **Arts Minister insists he made no Powerhouse play**

REINSTATED Arts Minister Don Harwin insists he was not involved in a decision to keep open the Powerhouse Museum site at Ultimo, despite the fact the major policy U-turn was announced on the day after he was brought back into cabinet.

Appearing before a parliamentary inquiry into the museum move yesterday, Mr Harwin also resisted calls to shift the proposed Parramatta location to avoid destroying two local heritage buildings.

Mr Harwin announced the Ultimo Powerhouse would continue to operate alongside a new museum at Parramatta on July 4, less than a day after he was reinstated as arts minister after a court case for breaching COVID restrictions was abandoned.

"I was not involved in any discussions about reopening Ultimo, but I was absolutely thrilled to be told about them when I was sworn back in," Mr Harwin told the committee.

"The truth is sometimes stranger than fiction."

Contradicting reports about the cost of moving the museum to Parramatta, Mr Harwin said \$19.6 million had been spent on consultants.

It was also revealed yesterday that the government does not know what it will cost to keep the Ultimo site operating.

Under the original plans, the government was set to reap \$195 million from the sale of the inner city site, which now will not go ahead.

Mr Harwin told the inquiry "there is no cost in keeping" the Ultimo Powerhouse site, but a business case will examine "what needs that site has so that it can be a worldclass museum".

The government is considering "a range of possible outcomes" for the museum, "from continuing to operate in its current form ... through to a major redevelopment", Infrastructure NSW chief executive Simon Draper said.

Despite concerns from locals, the government is pushing ahead with the planned Parramatta site, which would involve the demolition of the 19th century Willow Grove building and historic St George's Terrace buildings.