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Sydney Morning Herald

Parramatta River breaks its banks, flooding Powerhouse Museum site

By [Linda Morris](#) and [Andrew Taylor](#)

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Floodwaters have breached the site of the new \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse a year after a one-in-20-year flood.

Hit by three days of heavy rain, the swollen Parramatta River burst its banks on Saturday, creeping up to the construction fence line.

[A man watches the rising Parramatta River on Saturday. *CREDIT: DYLAN COKER*]

A [flood warning has been made for the ground floor of a four-level car park](#) that is earmarked for demolition to make way for the museum.

Images shared on social media showed water from the river flooding streets and bike paths, while a video posted by Parramatta Labor councillor Donna Davis depict the museum site inundated with floodwaters.

Cr Davis on Facebook said it was “old news” that the site on the river floods every time there is heavy rain. “That’s why we know this is not the best place for a squillion \$ museum,” she said. “A Powerhouse Museum that has been redesigned to permanently close the ground floor ‘undercroft’ because it’s not safe from flooding – resulting in the loss of valuable community space.”

In February last year the car park and grassed riverfront were also flooded, the water level in Parramatta River in the CBD reaching about 3.3m above the normal bank level.

[Parramatta ferry wharf overflows and floods due to continuous and heavy rain on Saturday. *CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES*]

The Berejiklian government has been criticised for its selection of the flood-prone site for the [Parramatta Powerhouse, approved with 188 conditions last month](#).

A screened undercroft, closed to the public and built beneath the museum, has been designed to collect floodwater and mitigate against flooding upstream.

Suzette Meade of the North Parramatta Action Group said the river levels flooding the Powerhouse site mirrored the “government’s stubbornness to concede this is the wrong site for Parramatta’s long-awaited museum on so many levels”.

“It’s not too late for [Planning minister] Rob Stokes to grab the reins of this runaway horse and lead the government’s cultural commitment to the 26-hectare Cumberland Hospital precinct, which is not under water today.”

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Shadow Arts Minister Walt Secord said the government had been repeatedly warned this would happen. “This is the second time in two years the Powerhouse Parramatta site has been inundated by flooding. The Berejiklian government ... maintained it was a one-in-1000-year chance of happening and it has happened twice in two years. This is a complete debacle.”

Steven Molino, an environmental and natural hazards consultant with long experience in the Parramatta area, was commissioned by opponents to review the flood plans: “We are going to have a better than 10 per cent chance of losing unique and irreplaceable collection items,” he told the Upper House committee.

Mr Molino said the risks to collections displayed on the museum’s ground floor were not properly considered in the environment impact statement, the basis of which the museum was conditionally approved.

The impacts on the collection were to be assessed as a condition of approval. “That seems to be completely the wrong way around.

“I have project-managed and authored multiple EIS’s, including environmental impact statements for dams and other projects that have involved significant flood risks.

“Normally you would assess the most significant risks during the impact assessment process, not condition it as something to be assessed after the project has been approved ... the idea is to see what the likely impacts are and to be able to demonstrate through that EIS process that those impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated to a level that is acceptable and practical. That has not been done, to my thinking, with the museum.”

Arts minister Don Harwin told a recent parliamentary inquiry that the museum collection would not be at risk. “Let us make it quite clear: The ground floor of the new museum, which is at the level that has been approved above the one-in-1000-year flood level, is one of the highest ground floors, arguably, of any building in Parramatta.

“Some of the material that has gone out suggesting that people are in danger or that the collection is in danger is just simply wrong.”



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