

## Powerhouse Museum Alliance

### **There *are* Serious Flood Risks at the Powerhouse Parramatta Site**

While NSW is in the grip of a flood emergency, bringing widespread misery and destruction, the Powerhouse Museum Alliance is grateful the proposed Powerhouse Parramatta site has **only flooded** to the level of the undercroft. This is the space the Powerhouse intended to use for exhibitions, public programs, a café and other activities, until it was ruled out by the DPIE's peer review water expert, and the Department of Planning's conditions of consent. Both demonstrated a better grasp of the flood risks on the site than MAAS.<sup>1</sup> Still the NSW Government has approved the only museum in the world designed to allow high velocity floodwaters 2-3m deep to flow underneath the museum.

**The flood at the museum site on Sunday 21 March level is NOT evidence that the Powerhouse Parramatta site is safe for visitors and the museum's collections.**

It is incorrect for the MAAS CEO to assert that *the engineering work undertaken by internationally renowned engineers ARUP will ensure that the ground level of the museum **will never be impacted by a flood event***. The President of the MAAS Trust, Peter Collins was poorly advised to mistakenly claim that *the weekend flood demonstrates that our new Museum... **is positioned well above even the rarest of flood events***.

The flood modelling for the Powerhouse Parramatta EIS **does not support these statements**. Steven Molino, Sydney's foremost expert on flood risks in the Parramatta River catchment notes that ARUP's own report shows the Powerhouse Parramatta building has **at least a 12% chance of a flood occurring in the 100 year design life of the museum. That is not never.**<sup>2</sup>

For more than year now the PMA has highlighted the serious risks to visitors and the collection in building a museum at this location.<sup>3</sup> It is troubling that the flood risks on the Powerhouse Parramatta site have either not been understood by the museum, or are being misrepresented to the public. Jennifer Sanders, the former deputy director of the Powerhouse Museum says *it is inexplicable that the NSW Government is spending more than \$1b building a museum in a high risk flood zone when there is a better site in the Fleet St precinct, a location strongly supported by the Parramatta community*.

The river level assessment issued by Arup with the media statements on Monday 22 March only deals with **riverine flood levels, not the more serious risk of an overland flood**. A Probable Maximum Overland Flood (PMF) **will be 3.8m through the ground floor of the museum.**<sup>4</sup> Although rare, these super cell flood events do occur and the Parramatta CBD is particularly at risk.<sup>5</sup> The design brief states the museum's collection should not be displayed below the level of a PMF, but MAAS continues to insist the collection will be exhibited on the ground floor in the P1 space.

The museum cannot demonstrate the collection will be safe in the Powerhouse Parramatta development because this work was **not done in the EIS**. A Flood Damages Assessment is a condition of consent (E32), but the assessment will not be done until the building is ready for occupation. It is

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extraordinary that the NSW Government is poised to spend \$1b on a museum and will not know if the development is fit for purpose, and safe to display the treasures of NSW, until after it is built.

Apart from the risk of a flood through the ground floor of the museum, there is the issue of visitor safety during a flood event in a 24 x 7 entertainment precinct. The building will provide a mesmerising viewing platform for flood spectacles. It is not clear how people will be safe in a development that offers close proximity to watch the torrent of debris-laden floodwaters. One slip with a group of kids sky-larking could be a disaster. How will the museum manage a group of young men fooling around the edge of the floodwaters after drinking at the onsite micro-brewery? There is no answer to questions about visitor safety during a flood event because these issues were not considered in the EIS. Visitor safety is postponed to a still to be written Flood Emergency Management Plan.

The discretionary siting of a major new museum in a high risk flood zone is contrary to prudent museum planning and sensible infrastructure investment. A flood in the museum poses risks to visitors, the collection, museum programming and to the museum's reputation. Every flood event means higher recurrent costs and risks. The PMA reiterates our deep concern that the MAAS Trust and the NSW Government have misunderstood the flood risks inherent in this development and ignored the evidence that **the site is not safe from flooding**, detailed in the EIS and in Steven Molino's expert reports. To crash on with this development when there is a safer and more expansive museum site at north Parramatta shows hubris and reckless intransigence.

23 March 2021

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<sup>1</sup> WMA Independent Flooding Assessment 8 February 2021

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-10416%2120210212T213021.014%20GMT>

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-10416%2120210212T213020.785%20GMT>

For the conditions of consent relating to the undercroft and flood risk management see: C1, C2, C18-24, C39 E30, E31 and E32, and F13

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-10416%2120210212T213020.263%20GMT>

<sup>2</sup> Steven Molino, Evidence to the Select Committee on the Government's Management of the Powerhouse, 21 February 2021, p.49 <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/transcripts/2511/Transcript%20-%20Powerhouse%20Museum%20-%202015%20February%202021%20-%20Uncorrected.pdf>

See also Powerhouse Parramatta EIS, Appendix J Arup, Flood Risk and Stormwater Addendum 16 September 2020, p.55

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=EXH-2839%2120201008T013206.975%20GMT>

<sup>3</sup> See Winkworth submissions 137 a, b, and c, and accompanying expert reports by Steven Molino.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=264#tab-submissions>

<sup>4</sup> Powerhouse Parramatta EIS, Appendix J Arup, Flood Risk and Stormwater Addendum 16 September 2020, p.18

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=EXH-2839%2120201008T013206.975%20GMT>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/nine-minutes-to-flee-parramatta-s-catastrophic-flash-flooding-warning-20190214-p50xtv.html>

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