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Flash floods threaten to sink Powerhouse Museum in Sydney



Flooding of the construction site of the New Powerhouse Museum site in Parramatta. Picture: Alan Mascarenhas

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JOURNALIST

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 - NO COMMENTS

The future of Sydney’s new Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta has been questioned after the construction site flooded in wild weather, despite assurances it was in a “one-in-1000 year” flood zone.

More than 100mm of rain has been recorded in some areas of Sydney’s west, with severe thunderstorm warnings for Sydney and heavy rainfall forecast for the next week.

With the museum construction site partially submerged on Wednesday, critics have again attacked the suitability of the riverside location.

Multiple experts at the initial planning stages had questioned the NSW government’s decision to move the existing Powerhouse museum to a high risk flood zone, next to the Parramatta River, former trustee of the museum Kylie Winkworth told The Australian.

The NSW government had “consistently underestimated” the impact of locating the Powerhouse museum in a high risk flood zone and away from its original home in Sydney’s Ultimo, Ms Winkworth said.

“It tells you how much they understand about museums” she said.

Former arts minister Don Harwin had claimed new site was in a “one-in-1000-year flood zone”.

But frequent flash flooding happened every year in Parramatta, according to local environment consultant Steven Molino, who has spent more than 20 years advising various groups and governments on flood risks.

“Rare floods would enter the building and through the museum” Mr Molino said.

Mr Molino said the state government “has not done a proper risk assessment”.

Parramatta resident and member of the North Parramatta Residents Action Group Suzette Meade said “yesterday just highlighted the foolish decision to build Parramatta’s museum on the wrong site”.

“It wasn’t even the usual biblical flood we get each February” she said.

Infrastructure NSW claimed the water would have peaked around 4m below the future Powerhouse Parramatta ground floor.

“Water would have only just entered the Museum’s undercroft space, an area underneath the Museum’s ground floor, not used by the public,” it said.

The NSW State Emergency Service has received more than 1000 requests for assistance since Monday, with 950 of those requests being flood and heavy rainfall related.

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