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To: Powerhouse.Ultimo@infrastructure.nsw.gov.au
Minister for Arts John Graham, and INSW Project team

SUBMISSION: PROPOSED RENEWAL OF THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM IN ULTIMO

Dear John Graham, Minister for the Arts, and INSW Project team,
I am a long-time professional in the field of decorative arts, crafts and design and, apart from other projects, for nearly 10 years have managed the archival website of news, inquiries and opinions for the prolonged controversial issue of closing/moving/'resurrecting' the Powerhouse Museum, for the Powerhouse Museum Alliance:
<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>.

I started at the Museum as a curator in 1988 when it opened in its new Harris Street location and, as a senior curator of contemporary decorative arts and design, became very conversant with the unique museum relationship between this area and science and technology. I have the greatest respect for the many professional people I worked with in the museum in the 20 years spent there, and their involvement with the broad audiences the museum generated. I remain in contact with almost all of them.

For all knowledgeable people involved over the years as staff, external specialists and wide audiences, the former government's plans were seen as outrageous, to:

- 1) close it in Ultimo and move it to Parramatta (money in the city; votes in the west),
- 2) keep it, but turn it into a Lyric theatre and Fashion hub

It is a state museum and needs to be in the Sydney CBD, while Parramatta needs its own local art gallery and museum (as in other Council areas). In fact, the content and program as we understand them from weak available information, is that Parramatta will be more like a pop-up gallery and entertainment centre rather than a state museum. We do not want that to occur in Ultimo either!

We were all very relieved when the new Labor government vowed to keep the Ultimo site, and to maintain it in its original museum role. However, as the documents on our website note, there have been many broken promises associated with this supposed commitment.
<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Winkworth-Labors-Ten-Broken-Promises-on-the-PHM-16-Dec-2023.pdf>

Future program?

Apart from the many issues raised about the heritage status, and building developments being planned for Ultimo (including maintaining the necessary adjacent Harwood building), and the safety of major objects in the proposed development schedule, key concerns also centre around the absolute lack of information about the future program for the Museum collection and associated activities, in Ultimo.

Major issues for professional people over recent years have focused on the management of the Museum. Trustees do not represent the museum world; professional curatorial, conservation, education and exhibition staff have been very much depleted, and replaced

with the CEO's personal contacts from the art world, not the museum world. The CEO has demonstrated that she is not interested in providing significant background contextual material, as museums are expected to do, but simply an 'art experience'. She is also known for not collaborating with staff, as always occurred in earlier times, but following her own misguided direction.

As our website notes for consideration in a document of 35 points here:

[Winkworth PMA sham heritage revitalisation 20 Feb 2024](#) :

- 'Any museum renewal project is about the museum and its collections, its exhibitions, education work and audiences. It is not primarily an architectural or construction job which is how MAAS and INSW are approaching the project. The refusal to release the secret design briefs is an ominous sign as they are crucial to understanding what is driving the changes to the museum and its architecture.'
- We believe that: 'MAAS should be focussed on completing the Parramatta Powerhouse, leaving the PHM open until Parramatta is finished. This would allow time for development of a suite of plans which would normally be public in any museum renewal: a site masterplan, a museum plan, an exhibition plan and the design briefs. Renewal works at the PHM should be done in stages, putting the public interest first.'
- And 'Arts Minister John Graham should honour his March 2023 promise to release the key documents on the Powerhouse Museum. Otherwise people are entitled to ask what are they hiding? In particular the design briefs for the PHM must be made public, just as the design briefs for Parramatta were.'

With a lifetime of working with teams of people in the museum and gallery world, I have no confidence at all in the current management and planning for the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo, and believe there should be a major review of the management system, and the proposed programs for the collection and its audiences.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Grace Cochrane".

Grace Cochrane AM

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>