

Grace Cochrane AM  
Summer Hill, Sydney

## **Submission: Objection to Modifications to PUR SSD**

### **I object to the modification to the approved Revitalisation SSD-67588459 for the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo**

I was a curator, then senior curator of decorative arts and design, at the Powerhouse Museum from its opening in 1988 until 2005, and have maintained wide contact with hundreds of former colleagues from the Museum and associated connections across Australia and internationally. I have considerable knowledge of the unique purpose of the Museum and its relationship between science, industry and design, and related social history.

For the last decade I have collated all documents about the removal of the Museum to Parramatta, and the ridiculous plans for being 'saved' in Ultimo, by being a member of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, and managing its website:

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> with most recent news reports here:

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/news-chronology-2025/>

You will have received many submissions with detailed objections to demolition of exhibition spaces, destruction of the 1988 award winning buildings, removal of the entire collection to Castle Hill storage, and vast loss of experienced staff who understand the collection and its relationship to wide audiences.

#### **In brief, these are my very strong objections:**

1. The current CEO and many newly appointed staff know very little about the significance of the collection, and its cross-relationships of 'arts applied to industries', ie. 'applied arts and sciences', in subject areas. The CEO demonstrates and cites, that she is interested in 'art experiences' and not collection histories, background stories and current relationships to them. She is against theme and subtheme panels, and clearly accessible labels. (Compare Australian Museum and Chau Chak Wing Museums in Sydney!) Many formerly appealing spaces, (eg Wran building, photos below) were changed to very dark 'rabbit burrows'. And there has been a great loss of staff who are knowledgeable about the collection.
2. It is clear from her background CV and recent directives for staff and (obscure) proposals for the future, that the CEO is more interested in short-term pop-up entertainment, than in engaging and informative exhibitions largely based on the collection, while also supporting related incoming exhibitions. And Castle Hill has returned access to the collection to 'display storage', which was significantly changed when the Museum reopened in 1988.
3. It should be remembered that the Powerhouse Museum (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) is a very long-established STATE museum, not a regional museum, and should remain in the state capital's CBD. So the former government's decision to move it to Parramatta (contrary to preferences from its local council), appeared to be for 'votes in the west' and 'money in the city'. Their proposal to change Ultimo into a

Lyric Theatre and Fashion Museum was a personal preference of the former arts minister! And the shift of the collection to relatively publicly inaccessible Castle Hill raises issues of expense and safety in transporting to either venue.

4. Parramatta, like other suburban and regional state museums, deserves its own museum, reflecting its own history. The current proposals for opening exhibitions (as far as we can find them) appear to be to do with popular local experiences – not to do with a state museum. And they have destroyed heritage buildings (Willow Grove) in the process.

5. After providing very strong support for the incoming Labor government and its new Arts Minister in 2023, when it was promised that the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo would be 'saved', it is extremely disappointing to find that the potential program for the Museum in Ultimo will be vastly reduced in exhibition space that is being demolished from 21,800 sqm to just 5,100sqm. Short-term entertainment only?? Previous submissions provide more detail of these concerns. There will not be room for broad collection-based exhibitions.

6. The current architectural changes presented for the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo, not only reduce the viable exhibition space for such a diverse and engaging collection, but also destroy the Sulman award-winning additions made in 1988, which complemented the adjacent historic buildings. It is argued that the changes proposed are not physically necessary, and should remain as part of the architectural heritage history.

7. As our colleague, Jennifer Sanders writes: 'This wasteful Modification, adding to the already wasteful Heritage Revitalisation SSD, betrays the poor planning and deeply concerning - almost deliberate ignorance, about the Powerhouse Museum's conception, design, construction and operations as a complete, world standard museum on its Powerhouse Museum Complex site. Furthermore, this Modification illustrates the deceitfulness of INSW in developing and promoting, against popular and expert objections and considered advice, an expensive wasteful, destructive project which will patently NOT result in the Heritage Revitalisation of the Powerhouse Museum.'

8. I am glad that the adjacent historic Harwood building appears now to remain part of the Powerhouse Museum, but I object to the possibility of aspects of the important workspace being taken over by neighbouring institutions.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

I strongly recommend, with very wide support:

- that the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo is treated as a Museum, not an Entertainment Centre
- that the removal of all interior floors is reconsidered, in order to allow for more exhibition space
- that the Wran and Galleria buildings are retained as they were designed
- that the inappropriate competence of the current CEO and management is reviewed.

Former views of spaces of Wran Building and link to Galleria:  
'Inspired: Design across Time'  
2005 ...intended as 'Permanent changing exhibition'

