

PYRMONT , New South Wales

Message

1. Executive Summary

I write to formally object to the proposed Modification 1 to SSD-67588459 concerning the “revitalisation” of the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo. This modification—particularly the complete demolition of the Wran Building and Galleria, the removal of the underground loading dock, changes to the Switch House, and other internal and external interventions—is inappropriate, unjustified, and fundamentally at odds with local and international heritage, planning, and public value principles.

It constitutes a reversal of public interest, fails to comply with heritage obligations, is environmentally irresponsible, and procedurally flawed.

2. Demolition of State Heritage Structures – The Wran Building and Galleria

The proposed demolition and “replica” rebuild of the Wran Building and Galleria is:

- In direct breach of Article 6 of the Venice Charter (ICOMOS), which requires preservation of scale, mass, and materials in heritage settings.
 - Contrary to the State Heritage Register listing (12 July 2024), which recognises these structures as integral components of the Powerhouse Museum Complex.
 - Culturally reckless, replacing an award-winning steel-and-glass design with a shorter, brick-clad imitation hidden behind souvenir shops—an affront to public architecture and civic dignity.
 - A destruction of real heritage to make way for a theme-park pastiche, not adaptive reuse.
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3. Misleading Justification and Engineering Oversight

The applicant claims the Wran structure “cannot support the approved works” due to load-bearing limitations—caused only by the new brick material selected. This:

- Represents flawed planning, as material compatibility should have been resolved earlier in the assessment process.
- Indicates a deliberate or negligent oversight, potentially intended to justify total demolition after gaining earlier approvals.
- Is inconsistent with the building’s original 100-year design life, per 1980s

engineering codes.

4. Environmental and Economic Mismanagement

- Demolishing structurally sound, State-listed buildings only 37 years old is environmentally indefensible, given the embodied carbon loss.
 - New construction with heavier steel and brick increases the carbon footprint, contrary to NSW's own sustainability targets.
 - Project budget is already at risk of blowout, and operational costs are expected to divert funds from regional arts and cultural institutions for years.
 - The economic rationale for demolition (rather than reuse) has never been disclosed to the public.
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5. Functional Downgrades and Public Access Impacts

The removal of the Macarthur Street underground loading dock undermines basic logistical functioning of a major museum. It raises serious concerns about:

- Deliveries, waste collection, emergency access, and exhibition logistics.
- Long-term operational viability without adequate back-of-house infrastructure.

At the same time:

- Exhibition space will be reduced by approximately 75%.
 - Permanent exhibits (transport, space, steam) will not return.
 - A six-year closure (minimum) is expected, far exceeding the publicly stated three-year period.
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6. Procedural Failures and Erosion of Public Trust

- Despite overwhelming public opposition (97% of submissions against the SSD application), the original project was approved.
- The public was not consulted on key changes to the museum's function, layout, or heritage footprint.
- Crucial documents remain withheld:
 - Business Case
 - Exhibition Plan
 - Conservation Management Plan
 - Structural Reports justifying demolition
- Experts including the founding director Dr Lindsay Sharp and architect Lionel Glendenning were not consulted.

7. Planning Law Breach – Not a “Modification”

The scale of proposed demolition, reconstruction, and reconfiguration:

- Alters the footprint, form, and use of the site
- Invalidates the claim that this is a “modification” under s4.55 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Requires a new Development Application, especially considering the altered structure and function of the site

8. Conditional Support Withdrawn – City of Sydney and Heritage Minister

The City of Sydney’s previous “in-principle” support was based on:

1. Provision of equivalent exhibition space
2. Appropriate adaptive reuse of heritage fabric

Neither condition has been met, making continued support indefensible. The Heritage Minister is now placed in the contradictory position of approving demolition of a building formally listed under her own portfolio.

9. Conclusion and Request for Action

I respectfully request that:

- Modification 1 be rejected in full
- A new proposal be submitted that prioritises genuine adaptive reuse
- The original Wran-era structures be retained and restored, not replaced by inferior replicas
- The Department reassess whether a fresh DA is required
- All future submissions be facilitated by a transparent and consultative planning process

This proposal is deeply flawed and destructive. It is a betrayal of the Powerhouse Museum’s legacy, the public’s trust, and the fundamental obligations of responsible planning in New South Wales.