

QUESTIONS FOR THE MINISTER FOR THE ARTS (CREATE NSW), ON THURSDAY 28 AUGUST, 2025:

(Macquarie room, 9.15 to 5.30)

[Prepared for circulation by Dr Lindsay Sharp [former PHM director] of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, in consultation with colleagues, and circulated to ministers and members of the Legislative Council.]

RE: <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo->

modification-1-additional-demolition-and-rebuild-wran-building-removal-loading-dock-and-other-internal-and-external-changes

a) Why is the Government proceeding with the proposed outcomes of the recent (July) SSD, and the proposed 'Modification', which are completely contrary to the Government's promise to save the Powerhouse Museum, as the Museum's proven museum functionality as evidenced by its popular success since opening in 1988, is being destroyed by this 'Modification'?

b) Why is the Powerhouse Museum's exhibition space being reduced from 21,800 sqm (1988) to just 5,100sqm, when this is antithetical to the Government's purported intent to deliver a 'Heritage Revitalisation' of the Powerhouse Museum?

c) Why does this 'Modification' clearly signal Government's disregard for its publicly stated heritage 'Revitalisation' goals?

d) Why does this 'Modification' also clearly signal the falsity of the State Heritage listing of the Powerhouse Museum Complex (12 July,2024) which had 13 critical, destructive Exemptions approved by the Minister for Heritage, following the specification of those Exemptions by INSW?

e) Why do the Heritage Exemptions allow for the 1988 Powerhouse Museum to effectively be demolished - thereby causing a massive reduction in exhibition space (21,800 approx. m² to 5100 approx. m²) combined with loss of key visitor amenities, and the destruction of the Wran Building and Galleria?

f) Why is Government pursuing this wasteful 'Modification', adding to the already wasteful 'Heritage Revitalisation' SSD, at what cost in total now for the entire SSD, and what projected added cost for this 'Modification'?

g) Why was a new Business Case, as required by the SSD protocols, not provided for this massive, changed/expanded SSD, with its additional 1 hectare approx. now of added 'Harwood Building'- including its Loading Dock and museological storage and workshop facilities- and why is Government thereby avoiding and contradicting its own SSD rules, protocols and regulations ?

h) What added costs are now encumbered in adding back the Harwood Building/ restored Tram Depot, after excluding it from previous SSDs, and especially since earlier it was falsely deemed to leak and be beyond its useful life as a museum facility?

i) Is Government aware that this 'Modification' demonstrates exceptionally poor 'planning' and deeply concerning incompetence by the consultants, INSW and PHM staff since this 'Modification' should have been predictable and analysed for the substantive SSD?

j) Has Government checked the contracts with relevant consultants to see if some of the avoidable costs caused by such incompetence can be demanded from and pursued under professional indemnity insurance?

k) Has Government investigated why the Museum management, in consort with INSW, failed to properly assess the engineering risks and costs associated with the unnecessary brick additions outlined in the substantive SSD, and brought those responsible to account- with what penalties?

l) The Minister will be aware that staff at AGNSW are walking out in protest at Consolidated Revenue cuts and resulting job cuts while the Powerhouse Museum has received an extra \$9 million for additional staff this year- how can this unfairness be justified and why was the Sydney Modern Business Case so wrong?

m) Does Government agree that this 'Modification' exhibits deliberate ignorance about the 1988 Powerhouse Museum's integrated conception, design, construction and operations as a complete, world standard museum on the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo's layered, heritage site; and that this 'Modification' is a completely destructive plan which obliterates core NSW cultural and industrial heritage? If not, why not?

n) Does Government agree that earlier public, expert advice noted a loading dock under the Harris St courtyard was unworkable and amateurish, that the Powerhouse Museum had maintained a state-of-the-art museum back-of-house facility in the Harwood Building and that, while the 'Modification' proponents may be trying to save money on an already wasteful and unnecessary SSD, this particular 'Modification' illustrates their previous willful ignorance?

o) What extent of the entire Harwood Building/restored Tram Depot will be included/is included in this SSD 'Modification' and what, if any, will the excised portion be used for?

p) Does Government agree that the claim by INSW that the Wran and Galleria's steel structures do not meet appropriate industry construction standards appear false and misleading, because the steel structures are entirely up to the standard for supporting the roofs of both the original Wran and Galleria buildings which are structurally entirely consistent with the Powerhouse Museum architect's design specification for a 100-year lifespan?

q) Does Government agree that it is the heavy, unnecessary and non-functional bricking up of these spaces (ambient natural light reduction) which will require expensive demolition of existing steel arches and then new steel structures to carry the proponents' ill thought out and wasteful intervention?

r) And what is the additional weight of these part veneer and unnecessary and anti-heritage solid brick facades?

s) Why has Government not calculated and published the additional embodied/wasted carbon load of the previous SSD proposal, and the additional carbon loads caused by this unnecessary and wasteful 'Modification' (demolition and new build) and why is Government thereby avoiding and obviating its own SSD rules, protocols and regulations?

t) Is the Minister even aware that previous official responses regarding the earlier substantive EIS completely evaded or avoided key criticisms and objections such as the failure to provide a relevant Business Case summary or the additional embodied/wasted carbon load and, if he is, what is his excuse for these omissions?

u) Is Government aware that both The City Of Sydney, and the National Trust, have both demanded this 'Modification' be completely scrapped, as the outlined destruction goes against both key organisations' stated objectives, criteria and professional judgments?

v) If Government is aware of these absolute rejections- and many others- to this SSD 'Modification' what is Government's response?

w) Why was the exhibition period for the recent SSD 'Modification' limited to 13 days and was this an attempt to limit time for analysis, comment and submission?

x) If it is argued that this was only a 'minor Modification' so didn't need as much time (28 days) as a full SSD, how can that be sustained when it includes: total demolition of the Wran and Galleria Buildings; removal of major elements (New loading dock; Switch House bar and entertainment spaces; etc.) and the addition of up to 1 hectare of built and connecting space with the Harwood Building?

y) Does the Minister understand that this- and previous - object failures in planning reflects the reality that the Museum management team lacks any breadth and depth of museum expertise, deep curatorial experience and professional competence and that the current team members belong more in a modern art gallery, festival event and entertainment organisation?

z) Can the Minister explain why so many of the staff at most levels are previous associates and friends of the Director, Ms Havilah, and will he undertake to investigate if any inappropriate hirings have taken place?

MAIN BODY OF QUESTIONS FOR THIS WEEK'S B.E. COMMITTEE

APPEARANCES:

(Final session with Minister Sharpe- Friday)

1) Why is the Government proceeding with the proposed outcomes of the recent (July) SSD, and the proposed 'Modification', which are completely contrary to the Government's promise to save the Powerhouse Museum, as the Museum's proven museum functionality as evidenced by its popular success since opening in 1988, is being destroyed by this 'Modification'?

2) Why is the Powerhouse Museum's exhibition space being reduced from 21,800 sqm (1988) to just 5,100sqm, when this is antithetical to the Government's purported intent to deliver a 'Heritage Revitalisation' of the Powerhouse Museum?

3) Why does this 'Modification' clearly signal Government's disregard for its publicly stated heritage 'Revitalisation' goals?

4) Why does this 'Modification' also clearly signal the falsity of the State Heritage listing of the Powerhouse Museum Complex (12 July,2024) which had 13 critical, destructive Exemptions approved by the Minister for Heritage, following the specification of those Exemptions by INSW?

5) Was the timing of the release of the heritage exemptions in July 2024 — after the close of the EIS exhibition in May 2024 — deliberately chosen to prevent the public from commenting on these exemptions?

6) Why do these Exemptions allow for the 1988 Powerhouse Museum to effectively be demolished - thereby causing a massive reduction in exhibition space (21,800 approx. m² to 5100 approx. m²) combined with loss of key visitor amenities, and the destruction of the Wran Building and Galleria?

7) Why is Government pursuing this wasteful 'Modification', adding to the already wasteful 'Heritage Revitalisation' SSD, at what cost in total now for the entire SSD, what projected added cost for this 'Modification'.

8) What are the added costs, due to inefficiencies in operating three PHM sites (Parramatta, Castle Hill and Ultimo), over a decade after opening?

9) Why was a new Business Case, as required by the SSD protocols, not provided for this massive, changed/expanded SSD, with its additional 1 hectare approx. now of added 'Harwood Building'- including its Loading Dock and state of the art museological storage and workshop facilities- and why is Government thereby avoiding and obviating its own SSD rules, protocols and regulations ?

9) What added costs are now encumbered in adding back the Harwood Building/ restored Tram Depot, after excluding it from previous SSDs, and especially since earlier it was deemed to leak and be beyond its useful life as a museum facility?

10) Is Government aware that this 'Modification' demonstrates exceptionally poor 'planning' and deeply concerning incompetence by the consultants, INSW and PHM staff since this 'Modification' should have been predictable and analysed for the substantive SSD?

11) Has Government checked the contracts with relevant consultants to see if some of the avoidable costs caused by such incompetence can be demanded from and pursued under professional indemnity insurance?

12) Has this retrograde 'Modification' altered the terms, conditions and costs of the demolition contract, and construction contract, and if so by how much and in what

ways?

13) What exclusions are now part of the evolved contracts, what are their values and how much overage is included (with BPI inflation spelled out) in all aspects of demolition and construction?

14) How much does the contract(s) allow for fit-out, exhibitry, programming, marketing and other ancillary opening costs and what are those costs as advised to Treasury and the ERC?

15) Given the Government's previous commitment to re-open the Museum within 3 years, after its unnecessary closure in February 2024, what assumptions have been made about the financial year of the intended re-opening of the Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo, and what are the projected Consolidated Revenue budgetary allocations up to and including that F/Y?

16) Does Government agree that this 'Modification' exhibits deliberate ignorance about the 1988 Powerhouse Museum's integrated conception, design, construction and operations as a complete, world standard museum on the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo's layered, heritage site; and that this 'Modification' is a completely destructive plan which obliterates core NSW cultural and industrial heritage? If not, why not?

16) Does Government agree that earlier public, expert advice noted a loading dock under the Harris St courtyard was unworkable and amateurish, that the Powerhouse Museum had maintained a state-of-the-art museum back-of-house facility in the Harwood Building and that, while the 'Modification' proponents may be trying to save money on an already wasteful and unnecessary SSD, this particular 'Modification' illustrates their previous willful ignorance?

17) What extent of the entire Harwood Building/restored Tram Depot will be included/is included in this SSD 'Modification' and what, if any, will the excised portion be used for?

18) Does Government agree that the claim by INSW that the Wran and Galleria's steel structures do not meet appropriate industry construction standards appear false and misleading, because the steel structures are entirely up to the standard for supporting the roofs of both the original Wran and Galleria buildings which are structurally entirely consistent with the Powerhouse Museum architect's design specification for a 100-year lifespan?

19) Does Government agree that it is the heavy, unnecessary and non-functional bricking up of these spaces (ambient natural light reduction) which will require expensive demolition of existing steel arches and then new steel structures to carry the proponents' ill thought out and wasteful intervention?

20) And what is the additional weight of these part veneer and unnecessary and anti-heritage solid brick facades?

21) Why has Government not calculated and published the additional embodied/wasted carbon load of the previous SSD proposal, and the additional

carbon loads caused by this unnecessary and wasteful 'Modification' (demolition and new build) and why is Government thereby avoiding and obviating its own SSD rules, protocols and regulations?

22) Is Government aware that both The City Of Sydney, and the National Trust, have both demanded this 'Modification' be completely scrapped, as the outlined destruction goes against both key organisations' stated objectives, criteria and professional judgments?

23) If Government is aware of these absolute rejections- and many others- to this SSD 'Modification' what is Government's response?

24) Why was the exhibition period for the recent SSD 'Modification' limited to 13 days and was this an attempt to limit time for analysis, comment and submission?

25) If it is argued that this was only a 'minor Modification' so didn't need as much time (28 days) as a full SSD, how can that be sustained when it includes: total demolition of the Wran and Galleria Buildings; removal of major elements (New loading dock; Switch House bar and entertainment spaces; etc.) and the addition of up to 1 hectare of built and connecting space with the Harwood Building?

26) In respect of Work Health and Safety issues how will this 'Modification' affect visitors in the non-functional garden space south of the Boiler Hall adjacent to the Harwood Building and linked by walk way to Central Station and Darling Harbour? Trucks backing? Security handling and inspection? Other vehicles, etc.?

QUESTIONS ON TOURISM AND JOBS:

27) Minister, the recent SSD 'Modification' of the Powerhouse Museum plan calls for the demolition of all 1988 structures- in the context of tourism can you please outline the impacts on the projected tourism income, volumes, facilities, marketing and affects/effects on the project's Business Case during the next four years of closure, then once the facility is opened and how the reduction in square metre display space- from approximately 21,00 m² (1988) to 5,100 m² ('Modification' SSD July)- will affect the future tourism offer, attractiveness and net income of the Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo?

28) Minister, the core colonial history in social, industrial, technical, (applied) arts, economic, cultural and intellectual subjects are embodied, and their stories told, through the Powerhouse Museum's collections: if there are relatively limited displays about this in PHMU after reopening, how can the Museum attract international and interstate audiences in display spaces under a quarter of the size as offered in 1988?

29) Minister, given that the State Arts and Culture Budget is under enormous pressure at the moment, and much available funding is being transferred into the Night Time Economy and Western Sydney, how will the core story of NSW's history (The First State)- supporting that of First Nations- be told if all or most of PHMU's displays are expensive, very small and temporary- especially in terms of international and intra-national tourism?

30) Minister, given the reduction of m² display space to approximately 5,100 m², the availability of objects- large and small- at Castle Hill does not lend itself to either scale, given the enormous volumes envisaged in 'Modification' of the SSD, in terms of access, egress, smaller objects in vast spaces and moving large objects in and out- how is this 'Modification' appropriate to creating optimal museum display experiences for tourists, and how are the inevitable costs of temporary versus 'permanent' displays to be handled within a broader budgetary envelope?

31) Minister, tourism depends not only on the content and imaginative presentation of our State's cultural history but on being safe and appealing- so, if many hundreds of thousands of tourists are a core part of the Business Case underpinning the PHMU project, how can they be fitted into 5,100 m² of display space safely and comfortably, especially at peak visitor times, and where is the Business Case required by INSW SSD protocols demonstrating this?

32) Minister, classic, wholistic, focused marketing of NSW, within a highly competitive marketplace, requires that each major attraction fits into an 'integrated story', which also aims to encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more and, using word-of-mouth, encourage friends and family to also come visit: how does the future offer of PHMU fit into this comprehensive tourism offer?

33) Minister, please outline the social and economic impacts of the PHMU project, short and long term, both in construction and operation, on jobs and the environment in NSW, also both commercially and in the Public Service, with statistics and supporting data.

^[i] *The Powerhouse Museum, Australia's largest and most popular museum, is located in Darling Harbour, Sydney. Its unique and diverse collection of 385,000 objects spans history, science, technology, design, industry, decorative arts, music, transport and space exploration. The Museum has an ever-changing program of exhibitions covering approximately 20,000 square metres (equivalent to three international competition soccer fields). It presents 22 permanent exhibitions and several temporary exhibitions, complemented by more than 250 interactives.* <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/100602/20110120-1007/www.collectionsaustralia.net/org/171/about/index.html>

See also Final Business Case for the Renewal of the Powerhouse Museum, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 24 October 2014, p.7 *Located in the Old Ultimo Power Station on the edge of Sydney' central business district and adjacent to Darling Harbour, the Museum comprises approximately 20,000m² including an exhibition space of 1,800m²* [Final Business Case for the renewal of the Powerhouse Museum.PDF \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

^[ii] The 2011-12 revitalisation works were proposed for same spurious reasons as the current SSD for the Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation, the need for an exhibition space for international exhibitions or blockbusters, and alleged problems with the circulation. These were then and are now nonsense assertions. All the PHM's exhibition spaces meet international museum standards. Before the 2011-12 building works the PHM hosted a number of international exhibitions in the Wran building, and in the Switch House which in the current SSD will be substantially demolished, removing two floors of exhibition galleries long used for applied arts, design, decorative arts, temporary exhibitions, international exhibitions and exhibitions for children and families.

^[iii] Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Annual report 2011-12, p.8 <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/wkgts1b4/staging/6c301ceb53e52c5b719e9d853bb52786fd4ea9a0.pdf> Proponents of the current SSD EIS have incorrectly claimed that the PHM has had no substantial works since it opened in 1988. This is not true. The revitalisation works were justified on the same grounds as

the current EIS around alleged problems with the circulation patterns and the need for a gallery for international exhibitions in the Wran building. The Wran building had previously hosted a number of significant international travelling exhibitions. The works cost around \$25m and included moving the entry to the galleria (which has never worked), new toilets, escalators and lifts, a new schools entry and additional education spaces and lecture rooms under the forecourt, and a new shop and café in the Switch House opening to the Harris St forecourt. Completed only 12 years ago all these works are set for demolition. Then as now what the museum actually required was considered conservation, maintenance of the roof, gutters and window seals, renewal of services and improvements to the public domain, conservation of interiors and **revitalisation of the exhibition galleries**. The works removed much of Richard Johnson's interior design including the cubic armature in the turbine hall which provided definition and structure for thematic flow of exhibitions. Since then, with the progressive removal of exhibitions replaced by shuttered galleries, the PHM has lost much of the narrative coherence it had in its 1988 plan, and the thematic zoning of exhibition linked to audiences and education. The conversion of the Wran building to a black box space and other works stripped the museum inside and out of its colour palette and playful design.

[iv] Presentation space 3 of 900 m² is an auditorium – described in the Design Fact Sheet as a 'black box for diverse utilisation including exhibitions, programs, presentations and immersive experiences'. The PHM's Design Fact Sheet claims the space has a **flat floor with retractable seating**, p.7. Of note the Powerhouse Museum has three flexible theatres of differing sizes for lectures, film, informal talks, education and conferences. They will all be demolished for no sensible purpose. <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/wkgt1b4/production/f3d740600c4a4d9ef6f73791b12b877d8a3c0ea2.pdf>

The plans on exhibition for the Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation SSD show the **auditorium has fixed raked seating**. Appendix B, Architectural Drawings Cross Section D, p.

24. <https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-67588459%2120240409T051328.708%20GMT> These are the plans that form the basis for planning assessment and approval, not the 'fact sheets'. An auditorium with fixed raked seating is not practical as an exhibition space and for this reason it has been excluded from the calculation of exhibition space.

[v] The Powerhouse Fact Sheet claims the Wran building exhibition space is 1,000 m². It was converted to an 1,800 m² temporary exhibition gallery for 'international blockbusters' in the 2011-12 revitalisation works. In 2018 the museum subdivided the space for UTS lecture theatres, reversed by the current CEO a few years later. It is not known where the other 800 m² disappeared to. The correct sqm figure for this exhibition gallery is 1,800 m².

[vi] **Exhibition spaces will exceed 10,000 sqm, and new education space will be approximately 1400 sqm.**

Answers to Questions taken on Notice September 2022, p.4. No wonder they don't want to release the design briefs in case people check what was required in the design brief against what is delivered. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/other/17814/AQON%20%20Hon%20Ben%20Franklin%20MLC%20-%20Aboriginal%20Affairs,%20Arts,%20Regional%20Youth,%20Tourism%20-%20received%2029%20September%202022.pdf>

