

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/investigation-launched-into-allegations-of-wrongdoing-at-powerhouse-museum-20251009-p5n19q.html>

Sydney Morning Herald

29 October, 2025

- [Exclusive](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Art & design](#)
- [Arts](#)

Investigation launched into allegations of ‘wrongdoing’ at Powerhouse museum



By [Linda Morris](#)

October 28, 2025 — 5.30pm (in print 29 October)

An investigation has been launched into allegations of serious “wrongdoing” at the Powerhouse Museum after a staff whistleblower made a protected complaint.

The inquiry by the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism and Hospitality follows a complaint under the Public Interest Disclosure Act, which provides whistleblowers with protection from retribution.



The new Powerhouse Parramatta. *CREDIT: DION GEORGOPOULOS*

It is understood to include concerns around hiring and procurement practices at the museum, which is opening its new \$915 million western Sydney headquarters next year.

“All reports of wrongdoing and public interest disclosures are taken seriously and actioned appropriately by the department,” a department spokesperson confirmed.

“The department has engaged an independent firm to investigate a complaint relating to staff at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. The investigation and handling of the complaint is in progress. It would not be appropriate for the department to provide any further comment at this stage.”

It's the second probe called into the operations of the Powerhouse this month, with the upper house's portfolio committee naming the museum, the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW), Sound NSW, the Office of the 24-Hour Economy and Transport NSW in a limited inquiry examining the operational, staffing and program impacts of budget and recent restructures, including these agencies' reliance on external contractors and private consultants.

It comes just weeks after the AGNSW moved to axe 45 jobs to repair a \$7.5 million budget black hole, and as the Minns government convened an [arts tax summit](#) to find ways to bolster support for the beleaguered arts sector amid rising costs, stagnating government funding and a lingering cost of living crisis.

The Public Service Association raised external hiring issues with Arts Minister John Graham in May and has called for an audit into the museum's expenses in light of gallery [cutbacks](#).

The union cited a 56 per cent increase in contract expenses at the Powerhouse from \$6.069 million in 2022-23 to \$9.485 million in 2023-24 as a reason for concern. Professional fees separately amounted to \$4.509 million in 2022-23, it said.

The museum had moved to a privatised model for programming content, which largely ignores the museum's founding act, its collection and the skills and knowledge of long-serving staff, it said.

“This model is excessively and needlessly expensive,” the union wrote to the minister. “And deeply insulting to our members.”

Spending on consultants and external contractors was also interrogated by Greens MP Cate Faehrman in parliament's budget estimates hearings in August, where the museum disclosed that it had spent more than \$2.3 million over four years on payments to a group of artistic associates to deliver projects and programs.

Last year alone, payments to six hires, including artist Agatha Gothe-Snape, photographer Susannah Wimberley and chef Kylie Kwong, amounted to around \$900,000.

The museum was also asked about specific hires, including a private contractor who was allegedly employed at \$2100 a day to help it meet its \$75 million fundraising targets.

The museum confirmed the total contract value was \$175,649 and had been to "assist with identifying prospects and securing donations" for the Powerhouse Parramatta Capital Campaign. The Powerhouse had reached 95.9 per cent of its target, with 14 major donations totalling \$71.9 million secured, it said.

In response to claims that it had engaged a culinary archive advisor on a fee of \$1000 a day, the Powerhouse replied that it had conducted an open and competitive process for the July appointment and the \$162,400 role.

The Powerhouse denied that it engaged contractors or consultants on terms that were designed to split payments or avoid the necessary procurement guidelines.

Asked by Faehrman if consultants or contractors were engaged on rolling contracts with the purpose of not triggering procurement thresholds and having to go to market and seek quotes, the museum replied: "No."

The Herald revealed in March that the museum and its chief executive had put on a [lavish end-of-year celebration](#) for staff and stakeholders, during which she paid for a chef to performatively carve sashimi from a one-metre-long tuna.

Chief executive Lisa Havilah defended the live tuna performance as a "special gift" from her to staff and stakeholders to mark a historic year in which the museum's Ultimo campus was shuttered ahead of a \$300 million renovation and its new storage centre opened.

The previous night, the museum put on a \$500 per head end-of-year dinner for VIPs and attended by the arts minister, who defended the expenditure.

RELATED ARTICLE



[Arts](#)

[Powerhouse Museum builds 'tower to stars' for \\$18 million opening show](#)