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AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW

Powerhouse referred to ICAC over misconduct allegations



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Powerhouse Museum executives are being investigated over alleged misconduct around governance and procurement, just two months before the cultural institution opens its \$915 million flagship in Parramatta.

NSW Arts Minister John Graham confirmed to budget estimates on Monday that Sydney law firm Lander & Rogers is conducting a formal misconduct investigation into serious allegations against “a number of executives” at Powerhouse.



Standing aside: Lisa Havilah was bumped from her director role at Powerhouse Parramatta after seven years, amid a governance probe.

Janie Barrett

Graham revealed he had also referred undisclosed allegations to the state's Independent Commission Against Corruption in March 2025.

The confirmation of an investigation comes after [long-serving chief executive Lisa Havilah](#) was suspended from her role last Thursday, just 68 days before the 30,000-square-metre building on the banks of the Parramatta River opens its doors to an expected 2 million visitors per year.

Powerhouse chief operating officer Mark Wilsdon was stood down in July as the investigation took place and was replaced on an interim basis by NSW Treasury executive Cassandra Wilkinson. The COO was providing "significant information" to the investigation, Graham told estimates. *The Australian Financial Review* can reveal that concerns have also been raised over the museum's security contract.

"Powerhouse management is aware of concerns raised regarding the interim security contractor," a spokeswoman said on Monday.

The NSW Government's ['buyNSW' procurement hub](#) lists Hurstville-based Chief Group Services as an interim provider of security services at the Parramatta site between July 6 and August 31, under a "directly negotiated" contract worth \$583,569.

"The matters will continue to be reviewed and any integrity issues referred to the appropriate bodies. Powerhouse is responding with urgency and also with due regard for the privacy of the people involved."

On Monday, Graham confirmed the catalyst for the investigation was a protected whistleblower complaint made to NSW's Department of Creative Industries in March 2025. The content of the complaint is not public, but the minister did not refute remarks from other MPs at the estimates hearing that they related to allegations of cronyism and conflicts of interest.

Following a departmental review, Graham said he considered the allegations serious enough to refer to ICAC last year, and hired Lander & Rogers to investigate them in April.

Graham stressed to estimates that "a complaint is not a finding or a fact", and that the investigation continued.

Western Sydney's first state cultural institution has, according to reporting by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, burnt through \$70 million in operational spending ahead of its opening.

This includes a now-scrapped \$2.5 million program for “artistic associates” such as chef Kylie Kwong, \$1.7 million on a documentary about Powerhouse Parramatta's opening, and an uncontested \$2 million marketing contract to a company founded by a former Powerhouse trustee.

Havilah's director role has been taken on an interim basis by NSW Government Architect Abbie Galvin, supported by [former Sydney Opera House boss Louise Herron](#) as strategic adviser.



Arts minister John Graham appears at a budget estimates hearing on Monday.
Dominic Lorrimer

At Budget estimates on Monday, Graham said no current Powerhouse trustees were subject to allegations. Graham said he had written to the board on June 15, “setting out my expectations” around budget and ethical procurement.

He said the Powerhouse's audit committee had subsequently been “of assistance to the government and the investigation”.

Graham said his focus was on ensuring the “Opera House of the west” had a smooth opening on November 7. Visitors have been promised exhibitions that include the first Qantas plane, a rock from the moon, an immersive exhibition on ‘the dark’ by [celebrated theatre producer Kip Williams](#), and jeans worn by Apple founder Steve Jobs.

Department of Creative Industries secretary Melanie Hawyes told Budget estimates that both Havilah and Wilsdon remained on full pay, [which in Havilah’s case is about \\$400,000 per year](#).

Graham was asked at estimates whether the \$6 million threshold under which NSW cultural institution leaders don’t need ministerial sign-off on expenditure was still appropriate, in light of the Powerhouse investigation.

“That’s never been raised up until this most recent moment, but it’s an obvious question to reflect on as we work through this,” he said.