

Sydney Morning Herald

Powerhouse execs' alleged misconduct



[Linda Morris](#)

September 1, 2026

A formal misconduct investigation is under way into “serious” allegations involving two executives of the Powerhouse Museum, NSW Arts Minister John Graham has disclosed, as he defended his oversight of the billion-dollar project following the sudden departure of the museum’s chief executive.

Graham revealed that the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism and Hospitality had referred undisclosed matters to the ICAC in March 2025, at the same time as the department had launched a “fact-finding investigation” over “multiple concerns” raised in a protected whistleblower complaint.



John Graham addresses questions at a budget estimates hearing on Monday morning. DOMINIC LORRIMER

After the finalisation of a fact-finding inquiry last December, Sydney-based law firm Lander and Rogers had been engaged to supervise a formal misconduct investigation this year.

“A range of allegations were put to a number of powerhouse executives,” Graham told budget estimates on Monday. “That misconduct investigation is ongoing, but that is the matter that has led to the recent changes,” he said, adding that the allegations were of a “serious nature”.

Sydney’s arts world has been [left reeling](#) after the museum’s high-profile chief executive Lisa Havilah stepped down from her role, a mere 72 days before the museum’s much-anticipated [opening on November 7](#).

Its chief operating officer, Mark Wilsdon, is on leave at present, and Treasury official Cassandra Wilkinson has been parachuted into the position in an acting capacity while Treasury conducts a review of the operational budget of both Parramatta and Ultimo Powerhouse projects. NSW Government Architect Abbie Galvin has been appointed acting chief executive, with former Sydney Opera House boss Louise Herron as a senior adviser. They are due to start on Tuesday.



(From left) Outgoing Powerhouse Parramatta boss Lisa Havilah; newly appointed interim chief executive Abbie Galvin; and strategic adviser Louise Herron. THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Graham said that the chief operating officer had been “also providing significant information as part of this process”.

“The idea that two of the senior executives were working through this process” while also making sure the museum was delivered “was starting to become unsustainable”.

Asked by Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party’s Mark Banasiak why he had appeared to ignore issues he had raised in parliament since 2023, Graham conceded that he had been aware of broad issues, some of which were found to be “wildly inaccurate”, some of which had been individually dealt with.

Department secretary Melanie Hawyes said she had met Havilah on Thursday morning after “further allegations that had come to light” and “on that basis we agreed that it would be appropriate” for the chief executive “to stand aside”.



The Parramatta Powerhouse, dubbed the Opera House of the West, is still on track to open on November 7. RORY GARDINER

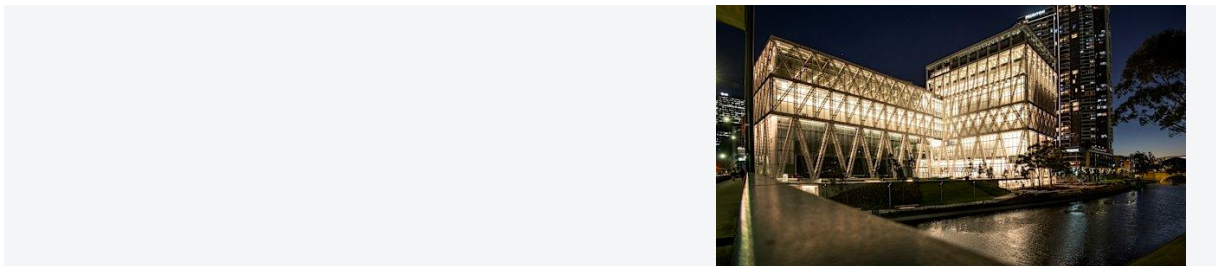
“I will say Miss Havilah’s concerns were with the welfare of her team and the success of the launch. The team is very much focused on the launch, and we will [give] all the support needed to make sure it’s an amazing success.”

Hawyes stressed that the “interim arrangements” should not be “taken as any sort of sense of a sanction or a finding”.

“These allegations that have come to light need to be tested, and that is what this investigation will do.”

The *Herald* has disclosed a pre-operational spending spree at the Powerhouse, including a \$1.7 million-plus documentary commissioned into its foundation.

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The museum awarded an [uncontested \\$2 million marketing contract](#) to a boutique agency co-founded by a former board trustee, part of more than \$5 million spent on drumming up publicity before the opening.

The Ki Community contract and the spending on the documentary raised by the *Herald* were under “close examination”, Graham said, while noting they fell within the chief executive’s financial delegation authority. He backed museum board president David Borger and his fellow trustees, saying they had played a “constructive role” and had been of assistance to government’s ongoing investigation.

“This is the Opera House of the West, I want it to open on November 7, and I’m confident that will happen,” Graham said.