

THE NATION 3

lower

channels and was not intended for public disclosure”.

The AFP has – across numerous forums – denied any understaffing or functional decline in counter-terror resourcing.

Mr Nutt in May told the commission his agency did not lower its resourcing for counter-terrorism operations when the national terror threat level fell in 2022, nor when it rose again in 2024.

The AFP told News24 on Monday that Ms Barrett was never called to give evidence before the commission.

Museum claims sent to ICAC a year ago

TIM DOUGLAS
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Allegations of misconduct at the Powerhouse Museum were referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption more than a year before the institution's chief executive, Lisa Havilah, and chief operating officer Mark Wilsdon stepped aside on full pay amid “multiple” investigations into procurement practices.

The revelations were made on Monday when NSW Arts Minister John Graham appeared before a NSW budget estimates hearing.

Under questioning, Mr Graham also said the department would “reflect” on procurement freedoms allowed to NSW cultural institutions, which enable them to spend up to \$6m without ministerial imprimatur.

The hearings come less than a week after Havilah “stepped aside” as CEO of the \$915m Powerhouse Parramatta, which is due to open to the public on November 7, and a month after Wilsdon vacated his post. He is understood to be on leave, and has been replaced by Treasury executive Cassandra Wilkinson amid a forensic analysis of finances at the museum.

Melanie Hawyes, secretary of the NSW Department of Creative Industries, would not confirm details of the ICAC referral and whether it related to a historic whistleblower complaint lodged last year about hiring and procurement. She did confirm that both Havilah and Mr Wilsdon had been stood down from their duties on full pay pending the outcome of the investigation.

She also gave fresh detail about Havilah's departure, saying that after further allegations came to light last Thursday, she and the CEO had discussed the matter and “agreed it would be appropriate for her to step aside”.

Hawyes said she then “made arrangements to suspend her from duty and arrange for an interim chief executive to be brought in”.

Mr Graham confirmed Mr Wilsdon had been providing “significant information as part of the process ... The idea that two of the senior executives were working through this process” was starting to become “unsustainable”.

Mr Graham stressed that any allegations had not been established as fact.

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

“I can confirm, though, this is a serious investigation. It's serious.”

The minister faced sustained questioning over the decision to allow Havilah to remain in charge until fresh allegations emerged last week, despite a government investigation into the institution dating back to March 2025.

Asked why it had taken so long for the government to act on concerns repeatedly raised publicly, Mr Graham rejected the premise that the institution had escaped close scrutiny.

He revealed he approved a fact-finding assessment in March 2025 and there was also a referral to ICAC. A formal misconduct investigation was subsequently approved in December, with a Sydney law firm engaged by the agency.

He said allegations had been put to several Powerhouse executives in April, July and August.

Mr Graham also acknowledged that when he issued a media release on August 23 promoting the Powerhouse's opening program, he knew that there were “broad issues” concerning the institution.