https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-11-01/powerhouse-ceo-lisa-havilah-statement-conflict-of-interests/107325552

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By Jason Om

Suspended Powerhouse CEO Lisa Havilah issues statement as documents reveal she declared perceived conflicts of interest



Lisa Havilah was suspended as Powerhouse CEO in August amid a governance and procurement investigation. *(ABC News: Declan Bowring)*

In short:

Freedom of information documents reveal suspended Powerhouse CEO Lisa Havilah had 14 perceived conflicts of interest.

Ms Havilah has denied any wrongdoing in a statement made to 7.30.

What's next?

The new Powerhouse Parramatta opens on November 7.

The curtain is about to be raised on Sydney's so-called 'Opera House of the west' with the new Powerhouse Parramatta due to open on November 7.

But the $915 million project remains under a cloud with a Minns government investigation into alleged misconduct by unnamed executives, a whistleblower report, and a referral of undisclosed allegations to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

While supporters of the suspended CEO, Lisa Havilah, have launched a petition for her immediate reinstatement, questions persist over how millions of dollars in public money has been managed.

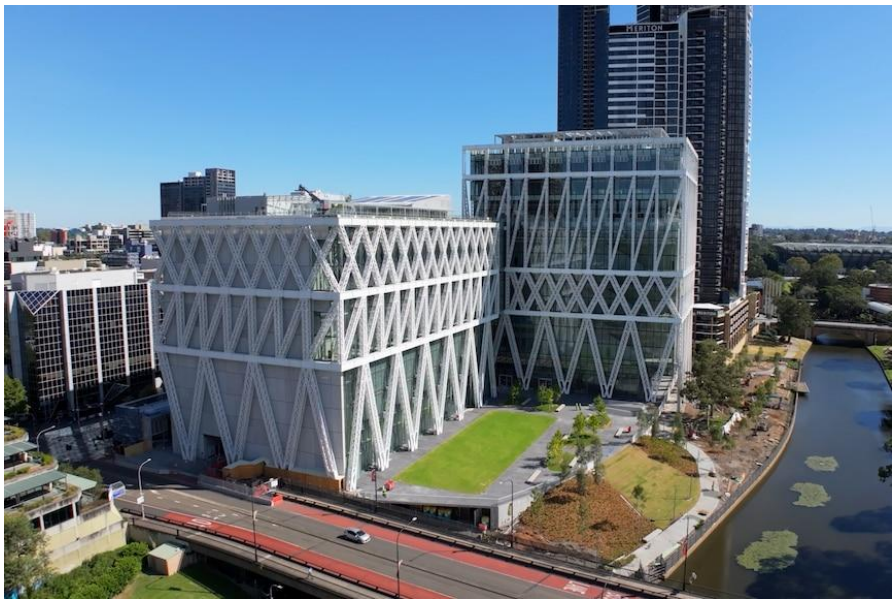
On the eve of the grand opening, Ms Havilah is fighting back against the government, saying that she acted with integrity.

7.30 can reveal Ms Havilah made 14 declarations of perceived conflicts of interest and matters that may give rise to a conflict of interest during her tenure, according to internal documents released under state freedom of information laws.

The declarations, since 2019, include entries about former work associates of Ms Havilah's hired to consult for the Powerhouse, and a $1.9 million marketing contract awarded to a company founded by former Powerhouse trustee, Mark Hassell.

In all 14 cases, there were "actions proposed to mitigate the real or perceived conflict", according to the documents.

Ms Havilah was suspended in August amid a governance and procurement investigation.



The Powerhouse Parramatta is due to open on November 7.
(Supplied: Powerhouse Parramatta)

Ms Havilah is not authorised to speak publicly but her spokesperson told 7.30 in a statement that the records show she acted properly.

"No findings have been made against Ms Havilah, who denies any wrongdoing and at all times has maintained the highest standards of integrity," the statement said.

"The disclosures in question were made out of an abundance of caution to ensure transparency regarding her legitimate professional relationships. The disclosures were made for the purpose of perceived conflicts of interest and did not give rise to any actual conflict of interest."

Declarations of conflicts of interest, real or perceived, are widely used by public institutions to ensure integrity of processes, particularly in the awarding of public contracts.

The Museum's own declaration form states that: "Conflicts of interest are not wrong in themselves. It is how they are managed that is important."

Ms Havilah's spokesperson said that none of the disclosures resulted in any personal gain for her.



It took four years for the Powerhouse Parramatta to be built.
(Supplied: Powerhouse Museum)

Millions of dollars in contracts

In 2019, Ms Havilah declared "a perceived conflict of interest" over the hiring of three former work associates as consultants for the Powerhouse Museum, Lisa Ffrench, Amanda Burgess and Cass O'Connor.

The documents state that "the perceived conflict has been disclosed, and the procurement was undertaken by the Executive Officer, who has noted this conflict. The contract will also be managed by the Executive Officer".

7.30 understands the Executive Officer referred to was not Ms Havilah.

Prior to becoming Powerhouse CEO in 2018, Ms Havilah was director of arts and performance venue, Carriageworks in Sydney's Eveleigh.

Some of her previous links to Carriageworks were declared in the documents.

An entry in May 2021 declared that during her time at Carriageworks, "Felix Media were a resident company".



Lisa Havilah was the CEO of Carriageworks from 2011 until 2018.
(Supplied: Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences)

Felix Media was awarded a $2.5 million contract (before rebates) over two other applicants to deliver a documentary film about the setting up of Powerhouse Parramatta.

In January this year, Ms Havilah noted "I have two conflicts to declare" as she had previously worked with public relations companies Articulate PR and Original Spin. The documents reveal a "perceived conflict of interest" was identified in November 2025 over a $1.9m marketing contract awarded to a "creativity-driven investment company" called Ki Community, founded by former Powerhouse trustee, Mark Hassell.

The 12-month contract was part of a selective request for tender and was to deliver an "integrated marketing, communications, and engagement plan" for Powerhouse Parramatta.

"The perceived risk relates to potential public or stakeholder perception of preferential treatment or informational advantage", the documents state. This risk was mitigated "to ensure transparency and fairness".

"With these measures, the residual risk is assessed as low-moderate, noting that transparency and equal access to information substantially mitigate the risk of any actual advantage," the document said."All respondents received equal access to the scoping information."



The Powerhouse Parramatta project is being investigated over alleged misconduct and has been referred to the ICAC. *(ABC News: Anton Rose, Monish Nand)*

In July, the Museum's Chief Operating Officer, Mark Wilsdon, also stepped aside. In a disclosure of conflict of interest form signed by him in May 2025, he wrote "I have work (sic) with Mark in my capacity as COO through FARM (Finance Audit and Risk Management Committee) and (Powerhouse) Trust".

"This perceived conflict will be managed through the procurement process. Other senior Powerhouse staff will also be involved. Mark Hassell will not be part of the team working with Powerhouse on this engagement. This perceived conflict will be appropriately mitigated by these actions."

A separate letter from Ki Community in November 2025 released to 7.30 declares that "Mark Hassell has not participated in, contributed to, or provided any input — directly or indirectly — into the preparation or submission of our tender response".

"He has not been involved in any way regarding the strategy, pricing, technical content, or supporting documentation for this tender."
7.30 contacted Ki Community but did not receive a reply.

Alleged misconduct probe continues

The Minns government had concerns about Powerhouse management as far back as March 2025 when Arts Minister John Graham asked his department to launch a fact-finding assessment.

A referral to the ICAC was also made at the time. The ICAC would not tell 7.30 whether the referral was still active.



The $915 million Powerhouse Parramatta project has been referred to ICAC. *(ABC News)*

7.30 requested the report of the government's assessment under freedom of information laws but was refused access because of secrecy provisions under the ICAC Act.

In December 2025, Mr Graham escalated the matter to a formal misconduct investigation.

By mid-2026, "a range of allegations were put to a number of Powerhouse executives," Mr Graham told a state parliamentary committee in August.

In response to the release of the disclosure documents, Mr Graham told 7.30:

"After seven years of hard work, from hundreds of people, the government and team at the Powerhouse Parramatta are focused on making sure when the doors swing open next week, everyone can enjoy a truly great museum experience.

"All public servants, including senior executives, have an obligation to declare and manage any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interests appropriately.

"An investigation into allegations relating to procurement and governance practices at the Powerhouse is progressing. It is not appropriate to comment on matters that are under investigation."

The Powerhouse declined to comment.