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John Graham vows to conclude Havilah probe ahead of Powerhouse opening

Arts Minister John Graham vows to conclude a 'serious' investigation into suspended Powerhouse Parramatta chief executive Lisa Havilah as $915 million museum prepares to open.

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NSW Arts Minister John Graham and Premier Chris Minns.
Picture: NewsWire/Nikki Short

NSW Arts Minister John Graham has vowed to finalise the long-running investigation into suspended Parramatta Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah as a petition calling for her reinstatement reached 650 signatures and an extensive legal defence aired just days out from the $915m building's grand opening.

It comes after Powerhouse workers on Friday in an all-staff address were reminded of their objective obligations as public servants with relation to the petition and social media policies, The Australian understands.

Mr Graham on Sunday confirmed the “serious” probe into allegations over governance and procurement, being conducted by the Department of Creative Industries Tourism Hospitality and Sport, was ongoing.

Havilah and chief operating officer Mark Wilsdon were stood down in August on full pay pending the outcome of the investigation, whose origins can be traced to a whistleblower complaint in March 2025. The Australian understands no timeline has been provided on resolution of the inquiry and formal requests to reinstate Havilah have been rejected by the government.

“I think it’s important we finish the investigation,” Mr Graham said at the Powerhouse Parramatta on Sunday. “It wouldn’t be appropriate to be dealing with these matters before we’ve actually worked through the process. It is a serious investigation, but people have got a right to have that process operate at a speed that they’ve requested. So we’ll make sure we conclude the investigation.”



Lisa Havilah, stood-down chief executive officer of Powerhouse. Picture: Tom Parrish

On Tuesday last week, a petition launched by former Casula Powerhouse boss Kon Gouriotis, and signed by luminaries such as Ben Quilty, Penelope Seidler and Anna Schwartz, called for the immediate reinstatement of Havilah.

The Change.org petition states: “We believe Lisa deserves a fair and timely process and with the opening of Powerhouse Parramatta weeks away, we call on the NSW government to act without delay, reinstate Lisa Havilah as chief

executive and allow her to stand alongside the extraordinary team who brought this vision to life."

It adds Havilah, who has overseen the project for eight years, "is fully co-operating with the investigation and has always unequivocally denied the allegations against her".

Responding to questions about the petition and to criticisms of the time taken to investigate, Mr Graham said: "People being investigated have got a right to interact with that (process), and they have rights as well about the time."

A report in The Saturday Paper said law firm Arnold Bloch Leibler was now representing Havilah, and had compiled an 18-page rebuttal to claims against her.

The high-end commercial law firm is considered one of the most prestigious in the country. As one insider remarked to The Australian: "ABL was clearly taken on to tell the government they're serious".

It comes at a critical time for the Minns government and for Mr Graham. The smooth delivery of the Powerhouse project – touted as the country's most significant cultural project since construction of the Sydney Opera House – and a successful, seamless, bells-and-whistles opening blitz, was seen as essential not just to the future of the new museum but to its 2027 pre-election strategy.

The museum – a 33,000sq m Moreau-Kusunoki designed building nicknamed the Oversized Milk Crate for its large-scale exoskeleton – will open to the public November 7.