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‘Anti-Lisa agendas’: Petition calls to reinstate Powerhouse boss



Jack Gramenz
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Lisa Havilah would be reinstated as chief executive of the Powerhouse Museum in time for its opening next month, if petitioners calling for a lift on her suspension amid an ongoing investigation get their way.

Havilah stepped down in August, 72 days before the November 7 opening of the museum at Parramatta, pending completion of a departmental investigation into “governance and procurement practices”.



Lisa Havilah at the construction site of the soon-to-open museum in October 2025.
JANIE BARRETT

Arts Minister John Graham told budget estimates days later a formal misconduct investigation was under way into "serious" allegations involving two museum executives.

But supporters of a petition calling for her to be reinstated said the investigation should not stop her leading the opening of the museum she "conceived and championed".

"We understand Lisa is fully cooperating with the investigation and has always unequivocally denied the allegations against her," an online petition calling for Havilah's reinstatement launched on Tuesday said.

"We believe Lisa deserves a fair and timely process, and with the opening of Powerhouse Parramatta just 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 have brought this vision to life."



The Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta is slated to open to the public on November 7.
JANIE BARRETT

The NSW parliament's website has its own portal for online petitions, allowing the public to raise concerns. Petitions signed by more than 500 people prompt a response from ministers within 35 calendar days. Online petitions that collect 20,000 or more signatures are debated in the house.

The petition calling for Havilah's reinstatement is being promoted on a separate online platform, and does not appear on the NSW parliament's portal. As of about 7pm on Tuesday it had collected 242 verified signatures.

Two supporters, both of whom said they had worked with Havilah in the past at organisations where she had been chief executive, said she had been "denied natural justice" by the government and accusations "don't fit with the Lisa I worked with".

"What I'm reading in the press looks to me like a few people with anti-Lisa agendas (for whatever reasons) having a pile-on," one said.

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Havilah's husband, Glenn Barkley, previously referred to a "pile-on" when defending his wife from online attacks after she stood down.

"There's room for respectful debate, but when it tips over into the pile-on which we've seen from adults who should know better, I think they should be held to account," he told this masthead in September.

NSW Government Architect Abbie Galvin was appointed acting chief executive, with former Sydney Opera House boss Louise Herron as a senior adviser following Havilah's departure.



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

Havilah agreed it would be appropriate to stand aside after "further allegations that had come to light" were raised at a meeting that preceded her departure, according to Department of Creative Industries secretary Melanie Hawyes.

Hawyes told budget estimates that the "interim arrangements" should not be "taken as any sort of sense of a sanction or a finding" and that an investigation would test the allegations made.