

**8 March, 2018**

**Powerhouse Museum's Fashion Ball is all play, no cash**

Linda Morris (*Sydney Morning Herald*) enlarges on her report of 7 March, to comment on the cash benefit of the event, despite its 'success in terms of publicity and engagement with the fashion community'. The revised report reads:

'Management of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has come under fresh parliamentary scrutiny after its inaugural fashion ball, dubbed Sydney's answer to New York's Met Gala, disappointed, raising a mere \$70,000 in donations from Australia's fashionistas. Museum staff claim the \$1000-a-seat black-tie fundraiser at the MAAS's inner city Powerhouse site took hundreds of hours to organise but posted a minor "profit" once expenses were deducted. A third of the 264 guests drawn from the country's top fashion heavyweights - including designers, editors and celebrities - received complimentary tickets, it was revealed.

The museum declined to disclose its costs, but said it met its fundraising target, received \$70,000 in cash donations on its night of nights and hoped for more. Tickets to last month's event, at which the Presets performed, cost \$11,000 a table, with diners supping on nicoise salad followed by grilled Cape Grim sirloin and coupes of expresso gelato paired with martinis and French champagne. Bentley Motors, Moet & Chandon and watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen supported the event. Designer Collette Dinnigan, model Jasinta Franklin and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop were guests.

The ball was intended to celebrate the future of the fashion industry while raising money for the Australian Fashion Fund, set up with donors and corporate partners to build the museum's fashion collection but also to develop and support industry talent. Though regarded a success in terms of publicity and engagement with the fashion community, staff question whether the funds raised justified the costs and effort.



The MAAS Fashion Ball has come under fire for its high cost and modest profit.  
*Photo: Dominic Lorrimer*

In Parliament, Arts Minister Don Harwin talked up the success of the February 1 ball but took on notice a request by Shooters, Fishers and Farmers MP Robert Borsak for the event's costings. Mr Borsak quoted reports the event made less than \$300, not including donations. The *Herald* has been told a similar figure by several sources.

The museum said the fundraiser costs were covered by a proportion of ticket sales, partnership funding and funds from the museum's Centre for Fashion itself. It was also in ongoing discussions with attendees about further funding. The development shows growing fractures between management and staff worried about cutbacks and job losses.

On Tuesday, the museum denied allegations that senior executives participated in a night of drunken revelry after the fundraiser. Mr Borsak raised in Parliament on Tuesday evening reports that senior security personnel attended the museum's executive offices after a noise complaint and found several prominent museum staff "intoxicated, drinking Moet & Chandon in the presence of a white powder".

In a statement, MAAS said there was no record of a noise complaint being received and neither security nor police "were required to attend".

"No complaints about the post-event function were received," MAAS said. "Further, we refute the allegations of illegal activity at this post-event function." But the museum had investigated and documented reports of inappropriate alcohol use during the function by one staff member and a "formal letter" had been issued.

The controversy couldn't come at a worse time for the museum, with NSW cabinet considering the business case to shift the Powerhouse from its Ultimo site to a new riverside location in Parramatta at a potential cost of more than \$1 billion. Morale, said one insider, was "rock bottom". While staff were supportive of a museum in western Sydney, they could see no reason to decommission the Ultimo site. Staff fear this alleged incident will only give the government greater impetus to "start again".

PSA general secretary Stewart Little said he was worried museum management was undermining the best efforts of its staff, and not forcefully pushing the case for retention of the Ultimo site. "It's like being on the Titanic and they want to get off," he said. "Do you think they are concerned about staff or their own futures, given the uncertainty?" '