

Former Premier Mike Baird faced off with critics over Powerhouse Museum move at inquiry

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MIKE Baird says anyone who cannot see the many benefits of [moving the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta](#) "must be living in a parallel universe". The former NSW premier made the bold statement yesterday as he stared down his critics during an often heated parliamentary inquiry into museums and galleries.

Mr Baird faced off with Greens and Labor MPs who accused him of making "cavalier" decisions "all done on a thought bubble", proclaiming his pride at his 2015 decision as anything else would have been a "second best" option for the west.



Former NSW Premier Mike Baird says moving the Powerhouse Museum was the best option and anything else would have been "second best". Picture: AAP Image/Daniel Munoz

Three years ago he announced the museum would be shifted from inner-city Ultimo to the heart of Western Sydney at a cost expected to top \$1 billion. And returning to NSW Parliament 19 months after he quit the top job, Mr Baird said he was "very proud" of the decision.

"You can build the spine of a region ... but I believe the arts and culture facilities give Western Sydney its soul," he said during the 80-minute grilling.

"This was long overdue in Western Sydney and I have to say as the premier it was something I was very proud of."



He faced off with Greens and Labor MPs in a heated exchange. Picture: AAP Image/Daniel Munoz



He is "proud" of the decision he made to move it to Western Sydney.
Picture: AAP Image/Daniel Munoz



New Powerhouse Museum design unveiled

During one a fierce exchange, Greens MP David Shoebridge criticised Mr Baird for not engaging with Parramatta Council prior to announcing the move. "You wouldn't do something so cavalier as engaging in this kind of project without having that formal communication, would you?" he said, labelling it "a potentially wasteful and dangerous use of public money".

But Mr Baird shot back that he "must be living in a parallel universe" to not understand the benefits of moving the Powerhouse.

Labor MP Walt Secord quizzed Mr Baird on whether he would be willing to hand over \$1 billion before a business case had been done in his current position overseeing institutional lending at NAB. Mr Baird said it was a hypothetical question and he was "not in the business of funding museums".

Mr Secord also pressured the former premier to admit he made a "captain's call" when announcing the move, adding: "You had a thought bubble and now everybody is paying for it."



Powerhouse Museum is coming to Parramatta.

Mr Baird said that was incorrect and pointed out Mr Secord had supported it at the time. Labor has since backflipped on its support.

Mr Baird said the move was based on a recommendation from Infrastructure NSW, had the endorsement of Cabinet, and was subject to a rigorous business case. "We are making a great museum even greater. It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity," he said.