

Baird down on museum critics

Three years ago, then-NSW premier Mike Baird made one of the best decisions of his time in office.

He announced that the **Powerhouse** Museum would move from its crowded, crumbling Ultimo base to larger, far more modern and accessible premises in Parramatta.

This move would not just be a boon for the museum itself. It would also be a grand recognition of Western Sydney's demographic primacy, and the ever-growing cultural power of the west. For his trouble, Baird endured hostile criticism from hidebound inner-city traditionalists who resented even the idea of change. That resentment remains, as the former premier discovered during a frequently heated parliamentary inquiry into museums and galleries.

Returning to NSW Parliament yesterday some 19 months after he resigned as premier, Baird justifiably maintained that he was "very proud" of the museum-shifting, Western Sydney-affirming decision.

"You can build the spine of a region ... but I believe the arts and culture facilities give Western Sydney its soul," Baird told Parliament during an 80-minute hearing.

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

Furthermore, Baird emphasised that the move was based on a recommendation from Infrastructure NSW, was endorsed by Cabinet, and held to a rigorous business case. "We are making a great museum even greater," Baird said. "It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity."

Indeed it is, but you would never think so listening to the complaints of critics, whose negativity truly underscores how difficult it can often be to advance Western Sydney's cause.

Greens MP David Shoebridge declared the museum move to be "a potentially wasteful and dangerous use of public money" and accused the expremier of insufficient negotiation with Parramatta Council. "You wouldn't do something so cavalier as engaging in this kind of project without having that formal communication, would you?" Shoebridge asked.

Baird's reply could serve as a universal response to just about any Greens complaint. He said that Shoebridge "must be living in a parallel universe". Granted, Baird referred here only to the benefits of relocating the museum, but his words apply far more broadly.

Labor MP Walt Secord threw a further accusation at Baird: "You had a thought bubble and now everybody is paying for it."

And all they will get out of it is a brilliant new world-class **Powerhouse** Museum. What a terrible deal. No wonder Labor and the Greens are so upset.