

6 April 2018

## **Re Powerhouse Museum**

The Berejiklian government is poised to approve the closure and dismantling of the Powerhouse Museum in the face of sustained community protests. This is a shocking act of cultural vandalism. We write as former trustees, benefactors and museum leaders to ask you to oppose the NSW government's unprecedented museum demolition plan.

This is not about building a new museum in Parramatta, which is universally supported. But the community does not accept that the Powerhouse must close if Parramatta is to have a great new museum. It is very troubling that every aspect of the plans for the Parramatta museum is shrouded in secrecy. The community will not see the 'business case' because no credible business case can justify the \$1.2b cost of 'moving' the PHM just 23ks west to Parramatta for **no net increase in cultural facilities**. Indeed, it is certain that the government is planning what will be a cut-price, smaller and inferior version of the mighty Powerhouse, whose majestic spaces are equal to the best in comparable museums anywhere in the world.

The Powerhouse Museum is one of Labor's great cultural legacies. It was conceived and developed by Neville Wran and Jack Ferguson as a people's museum for the people of NSW. The Sulman award-winning museum, which opened in 1988, was ten years in planning, design and construction, using the highest quality materials and technology. The Museum's infrastructure was designed for a working life of at least 100 years. Can Labor really condone the closure of this great Museum just 30 years after it opened?

The Powerhouse Museum has been run into the ground by the Baird/ Berejiklian government. Uncertainty around the Museum's future has seen a dramatic collapse in donations to the collection, declining sponsorship, a flight of expert staff, and a deficit last year of \$10m. There has been a profound breach of trust with the Museum's visitors, donors and supporters. Longstanding benefactors have changed their wills and former Powerhouse Museum donors are now gifting their significant collections to museums in Canberra, Melbourne and even Adelaide. The government has put the endowment of generations of donors to the Museum at risk, thereby threatening the lifeblood of any museum - community confidence and philanthropy.

Labor's opportunity in this debate is to support museum development not demolition. It has a fine record of building cultural facilities of distinguished quality, including the Sydney Opera House and the Powerhouse Museum. And it also has a proud record of developing arts centres and theatres in Western Sydney. Labor should call for a Smithsonian for NSW, a network of distinctive state museums that improve museum access and cultural equity, not just in Parramatta but in Penrith, Campbelltown, Wollongong, the central coast and the Hunter. The Smithsonian has never closed one of its museums in the guise of meeting contemporary cultural aspirations; nor should NSW. Would the UK government close the V&A to open a new museum at Olympic Park, or close Tate Britain to open Tate Modern? None of the Smithsonian or Tate satellites are of lesser quality or inferior to the parent.

It would be bitter indeed if Labor in government had to complete the demolition of the Powerhouse, handing its real estate to developers, while sharing the opprobrium of the cost over-runs, scandal and secret deals.

We ask Labor to speak out against the destruction of the Powerhouse Museum.

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Pappas AM

Trustee 1999 - 2010, President 2003 - 2010, Powerhouse Museum

For and on behalf of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>; 11,000 signatories to the petition presented to NSW Parliament, 25 Feb 2016; 178 signatories to the PMA's 17 Feb 2016 open letter; authors of the 133 submissions to the Upper House Inquiry who oppose the Powerhouse move - representing 94% of all the submissions about the Powerhouse; countless museum visitors and supporters from across NSW; and followers of Save the Powerhouse.