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From the director Kevin Sumption PSM

4 September 2020

Project Leader
Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission re Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy

Introduction

The Australian National Maritime Museum (the Museum) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy (Place Strategy) and related Economic Strategy.

The Museum was conceived as the leading cultural offer in Darling Harbour, with the main museum building co-funded by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments. As the only national cultural institution headquartered out of Canberra and one of the country's most visited museums, we have a vital cultural impact at national, state and local level. As a key anchor and tourism driver in Pyrmont, the Museum ordinarily attracts over 1 million onsite visitors each year, of which approximately 50% are tourists (2/3 domestic and 1/3 international).

Since the Museum opened in 1991, over 20 million people – including many students, families and tourists – have visited the Museum, resulting in a substantial contribution to the economy and cultural life of NSW. We work with NSW Government agencies, the City of Sydney and local partners to ensure the Museum's building and precinct provide a compelling, world-class attraction offering opportunities for discovery, discussion, entertainment and relaxation. Our long-term vision is to continue to be a formidable part of Darling Harbour's cultural and entertainment experience through further enhancement and optimisation of our site.

The Museum strongly supports the NSW Government's strategic focus on the Pyrmont Peninsula, including the opportunity to continue to grow its attractiveness to visitors and enhance its role as an attractive waterfront tourism and entertainment district – and hence supporting the global attractiveness of Sydney Harbour with a 24-hour economy – through capitalising on what already makes the precinct unique, including its already strong cultural offer. Our thoughts on how the Place Strategy should be further developed are provided below.

Creativity, Culture and Heritage and a vibrant 24-hour Cultural and Entertainment Destination

The 10 key directions of the Place Strategy importantly identify creatively, culture and heritage as a key factor to the successful future development of the Peninsula, including building on existing cultural and entertainment offerings. The Museum firmly agrees with this position, as well as the opportunity to provide a vibrant 24-hour cultural and entertainment destination, with small bars, performance spaces, museums and other entertainment as articulated in the Five Big Moves. The arts, culture and creativity are what bring an area to life and provide a reason to visit.

The Place Strategy itself would be strengthened by overt acknowledgement that Western Harbour could be an even stronger tourism driver and key strategic site. The optimisation of Pyrmont and the Western Harbour as a signature destination in Sydney's tourism offering would make a significant economic contribution to NSW, yet the fundamental role and potential of this major tourism asset seems to have been largely overlooked.

Furthermore, the Place Strategy identifies Ultimo as being the sub-precinct with the scope for the greatest amount of growth, change and opportunity for the creation of new cultural experiences and facilities. In our view there is a stronger case for investment in the high-profile Western Harbour and Museum surrounds as this area provide the optimal location for a cultural hub that reflects the vibrancy of the local community and is enriched by visitors. Leveraging this highly visible, pedestrianised location would provide a far higher return on investment than investing in a less accessible area of the Peninsula. It would also support investment in the Fish Markets.

Leading cities around the world are investing in iconic museum buildings to deliver cultural, social and economic benefits. As the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain has shown, an imaginatively designed museum can turn a city around – "The Bilbao Effect". The Western Harbour needs a new iconic cultural building and the Museum's site is the best place for it. We have had aspirations to do more with our site for some time and has a plan for a series of enhancements, including an expansion of the Museum's footprint to showcase our storytelling responsibilities in relation to migration.

Therefore, the Museum sees this as the perfect time to progress its development plans in alignment with the NSW Government's Place Strategy. Such a facility would concurrently contribute to several policy goals including the support of social inclusion and community harmony, as well as policy objectives in the arts, economic development, diplomacy, tourism, education and civic engagement – and importantly, provide a platform for the renewal and strengthening of Sydney's Western Harbour. Financially, the Museum is not currently in a position to deliver its full plan and would therefore require external funding to do so. It also expects that this important cultural infrastructure would also attract a high level of philanthropic interest.

The Economic Strategy for the Peninsula is to "enhance its role as an attractive waterfront tourism and entertainment district supporting the global attractiveness of the Sydney Harbour with a 24-hour economy." The Museum's location and development aspirations – as well as Government investment in the harbour foreshore walk and enhanced amenity for the area - would support the unique proposition of the Peninsula's 24-hour economy through providing a high-profile and accessible site for hosting globally significant events, arts, entertainment and recreation, pop-ups and cultural events, with such opportunities being key to attracting business, residents and tourists.

Concluding Summary

The Museum believes the strategies for Pyrmont should emphasise the Western Harbour as a key tourism asset and site for a cultural hub – including the development of an iconic cultural building and attraction as a platform for the development of a world-renowned tourist destination, 24-hour entertainment precinct and improved local amenity. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our plans with you further to inform the further development of the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KS2', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Kevin Sumption PSM
Director and CEO