Dear Kirsten

On 4 September 2019, Arts Queensland engaged independent advisors - referred to as the Independent Expert Panel (IEP) - to provide specialist design, heritage and functional advice to ensure the refined design for the New Performing Arts Venue (NPAV) achieves an exemplary design outcome consistent with the Queensland Cultural Centre (QCC) Conservation Management Plan (CMP).

The refined design is at Concept Design phase - it is a refinement of the competition-winning design concept by Blight Rayner + Snøhetta, Principal Consultant design team. To note, the IEP previously provided advice within the context of the CMP and supported the preferred design concept go through to the next phase of design development, i.e. Concept Design. In addition, the IEP provided advice during development of the NPAV Concept Design Tender Brief and the IEP was also sought to advise on the NPAV preferred concept design prior to engagement with moral rights authors and the Queensland Heritage Council.

The following themes were considered by the IEP in relation to the NPAV Concept Design:

1. Has the refined design addressed the previous IEP advice?
2. Does the refined design continue to advance the policies and principles of the Conservation Management Plan?
3. Are there areas of focus or opportunities for the refined design to consider to continue to support Robin Gibson’s legacy and QPAC’s international reputation, ensuring world-class artist and audience experiences and the growth of performing arts in Queensland?

As coordinating advisor of the Independent Expert Panel (IEP), I provide this advice on behalf of my fellow IEP advisors in attendance: Michael Lynch AO CBE; Alice Hampson and Malcolm Middleton OAM, Queensland Government Architect.

The IEP unanimously supports the refined design to go through to the next phase of design development.

The IEP is also able to advise that the approach and methodology to develop the refined design was sound – it was informed by ongoing client and stakeholder consultation, design team and consultant development, and embedded heritage consultant advice and development of a Heritage Impact Statement (HIS).

In review of the refined design, the IEP is able to advise that the refined design addresses the previous IEP advice and continues to advance the policies and principles of the Conservation Management Plan, with further commentary provided below.

The IEP recognises significant strengths in the refined design and project delivery approaches:

**Methodology**

- IEP accepts the advice of the Heritage consultant and the findings of the HIS, clearly articulating that the refined design advances CMP policies and principles, including: continuing practice of design excellence; maintaining relationship to setting; development is informed by cultural heritage significance; and respecting Gibson design framework.
- IEP acknowledges the quality contributions made by Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) staff knowledge, experience and commitment and the role of the Office of the Queensland Government Architect.
- IEP recognises the value of the strong collaboration that is occurring including embedding heritage matters within all aspects of the design and project team considerations, and advises this to continue.
- IEP agrees that heritage aspects are being effectively understood and guided, managed and expressed in the refined design.
- IEP recognises this is the first major project to be delivered under the guidance of the CMP and has resulted in informed, quality discussion pushing the boundaries and testing conventional thinking, a process supported by Government Heritage agencies.

**Design resolution**
- IEP accepts the increased height and depth of the fly tower to meet technical needs of a modern theatre, noting the resulting solution respects the massing volume of the existing form and cubic nature of the original design framework.
- IEP notes the single storey offices presented and, should the office accommodation proceed, advises this would not detract from the original design intent of the original Gibson design.
- IEP congratulates approaches to optimise equitable accessibility across the project, particularly in theatre planning and the significant work occurring in the redesign of the ground level and arrival foyer to ensure accessibility.
- IEP supports the space and use changes internally to better suit the operational and functional efficiency and effectiveness of the wider QPAC campus.

The IEP identifies that the following areas of focus and opportunities are advised for the refined design to consider:

**Consultation**
- IEP strongly supports the project’s vision to embody engagement to country and advises the time-critical requirement to develop more authentic responses to First Nations narratives and engagement – essential for a meaningful connection to place, something that the building did not address over the last 40 years. IEP advises consultation to inform an authentic story, one that is integrated into the materiality, meaning and design resolution the building.
- IEP notes consultation with user-groups is to be implemented and advises consultation broader than State companies, to engage with broader art forms.

**Site wide materiality**
- IEP recognises the transparent scalloped glass veil as a fundamental and signature element of the design and acknowledges various options are being explored to mitigate internal solar heat gain and excessive glare associated with the glazed façade to ensure effective environmental control measures, e.g. fritted glass, non-glass panels or screens. IEP strongly supports option 1, i.e. exploration of the fritting of the glass, recognising the significance of consistency of the materiality of the façade. Furthermore, the IEP advises that the design intent and excellence, in all aspects of the glass veil, is assured during design, procurement and construction stages.
- IEP notes the design response to refine the soffit to the underside of the glass veil with a ‘top-hung’ structural approach and minimised edge-thickness, and recognises ongoing resolution is required towards a simple and elegant solution.
- IEP further recognises the power of the monolithic concrete cubic form-making behind the glass veil as a signature element respecting the original design framework and consistency of material. The IEP advises the emergence of timber ‘seeping out from the theatre volume’ as a distraction, not fully in context with the concrete core and the philosophy of the original design framework. IEP advises concentration on refinement of the glass veil detailing and simplicity of materiality.
- IEP considers introduction of water to the arrival sequence requires further exploration, such as a survey of the water in the original design and its light reflective properties connecting with the use of light central to Gibson’s approach.
- IEP notes the change to precast concrete for some key constructed elements and advises careful consideration of, e.g. colour, texture and panel junctions/detailing to ensure a simple and elegant response, respectful to Gibson design framework.
- In relation to new elements, such as furniture and interior fit-outs, the IEP advises survey of original design references and elements, guided by the CMP.
In relation to public art, the IEP supports an integrated and site-specific response, connected with the narrative of the project and meaning of place – and with opportunity to align with First Nations engagement. IEP advises for key elements, not to detract from original Gibson framework of simple and authentic design responses, limited of adornment.

**Spatial functions/relationships**

- IEP notes the ongoing development of the theatre space with technical integration (informed by international-standard contemporary theatre design, practice and research) and advises to ensure the design addresses the diversity of all performing arts – addressing acoustic quality and the functional and operational needs of presenters and artists to ensure exemplary patron experience.
- IEP advises the significance of the corner Russell/Grey Streets and opportunity for improved public realm resolution – the corner, as café, is currently unresolved both in design and functional/operational use.
- IEP acknowledges further integration has been achieved of the Gibson ‘grid’ and considers further articulation be considered, such as with the pre cast panels.
- IEP supports the successful integration of the new Studios into the plan and advises further understanding of the public engagement with the spaces, e.g. what is the value of ‘closed’ rehearsal space or opportunity for ‘recital hall’?

The IEP advisors continue to thank Arts Queensland, QPAC, the Department of Housing and Public Works and Malcolm Middleton, in his capacity as Queensland Government Architect - and wish to thank Blight Rayner + Snøhetta and heritage consultant Andrew Ladlay - for their detailed and effective support.

The IEP, in light of the significance and ‘once in a generation’ opportunity this landmark project affords to the cultural heart of Queensland for its people, would support the potential for future public exhibition and subsequent publication that records and celebrates the creative talent, investment and diversity of the competition submissions and the winning project that will mark a new era of excellence for the cultural life of Brisbane.

The IEP reiterates its support for ongoing engagement with Arts Queensland and the design and project teams in the development of the project, recommending to review the project at Schematic Design. The IEP appreciates the opportunity to be contributing to this significant project.

Yours sincerely

Issued by email dated 12 September 2019

Susan Street AO
Coordinating advisor, Independent Expert Panel