

**Supplementary
Submission
No 149a**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Kylie Winkworth

Date received: 16 August 2016

Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in NSW

Potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council amalgamations

Submission by Kylie Winkworth, museum and heritage consultant; a brief biographical note is at the end of this paper.

1 Summary

The focus of this submission concerns support for the more than 300 volunteer managed community museums, historical societies and heritage place museums across western Sydney and regional NSW, and the potential funding impact of council amalgamations on these museums and their significant collections.

Community museums are the oldest and most numerous cultural organisations in NSW, with the most volunteers, working in sometimes decrepit heritage buildings. Volunteers are caring for the irreplaceable heritage collections of their communities. These collections interpret the distinctive stories of towns, villages and suburbs, and are an indispensable part of history of NSW and the nation. Some of these collections are of state and national significance.

Many volunteers caring for collections are in their 70s and 80s and are working 40 hours a week and more to keep the museum going on miniscule budgets. They worry about the future of their museum and where the next generation of volunteers will come from. Most of the community museums in NSW are in heritage buildings. Many of these buildings are not fit for purpose, do not meet modern access standards, their design puts collections at risk, and they are sometimes dismal working environments for volunteers. In my work across NSW I have seen a number of museums that have had to close or curtail visitor access because they were unsafe.

Community museums and their volunteers need the support of paid trained curators or collections officers working with them in their region. But it is tough making this case to councils in the absence of policy and funding incentives, and given so much cost shifting from state to local government. Museum and heritage policies in NSW are poorly calibrated to support and sustain community museums, their important collections and the significant heritage buildings they own and manage. Indeed community museums were not even mentioned in the government's 2015 *Create in NSW Arts and Cultural Policy Framework*.

Without a policy and well targeted funding incentives it is likely that council amalgamations in regional NSW will make it even more difficult for community museums and their collections to attract support from councils. Recommended actions in 3 below include:

- Funding for the preparation of museum development plans or strategic plans for the museums and collections in each amalgamated lga, recognising that these cultural facilities are important community assets
- Grant funding to employ regional collections officers or curators working in councils to support regional networks of community museums
- Advocacy from Arts NSW and museum service agencies to promote strategic planning, regional museums networks and the development of regional museums to local government
- Arts NSW and the NSW Heritage Office should revive the highly successful partnership that funded museums in heritage buildings and thematic studies of heritage collections

2 Funding impacts/ risks of amalgamation

2.1 Community museums and collections will be most at risk from the impact of council amalgamations in NSW. Most museums in regional NSW are managed by elderly volunteers and operate with no or limited support from their council. Unlike the well-established network of regional galleries, managed by councils with paid staff in architect designed buildings, there are just a handful of council managed regional museums with paid staff, (Tweed, Newcastle, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Albury, Liverpool and Bathurst). There are well-founded concerns that funding support for community museums from local government will be further constrained as a result of amalgamations, particularly as NSW grant funding for museums is so miniscule and out of reach of most museums. Volunteer managed museums have a difficult pathway to transition into a council-funded regional museum. But they still need investment and support from both the state government and councils, to sustain their collections and buildings.

2.2 There are some proven strategies and models of support which have seen the creation of new regional museums through partnerships between councils and historical societies. The Tweed Regional Museum was created through a partnership between the three historical societies in Tweed Heads, Uki and Murwillumbah and Tweed Shire Council. And the Museum of the Riverina was developed from the collections and museum of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society and Wagga Wagga Council. The Cairns Historical Society and Museum is in the process of redeveloping its museum and exhibitions through a service agreement with council that is funding a paid museum manager and building refurbishment. Such partnerships improve the management and access to collections, enlarge audiences, support volunteers with assistance from curatorial staff, and upgrade to buildings to create fit for purpose modern museums.

2.3 There are good models and effective strategies to support regional networks of community museums and heritage places across a region. For example the Sustainable Collections Program in Orange, Cabonne and Blayney supports community museums and their collections with a range of programs and initiatives, see case study in 4 below.

2.4 However it is very hard to make the case to councils to pick up new cultural responsibilities that could have a substantial or even multi-million dollar price tag. Newly formed amalgamated councils are typically risk averse, focussed on cutting costs, and keen to show the amalgamated council will be cheaper for ratepayers. In this context, cultural positions are sometimes downgraded or axed. One large regional council recently tendered for a new cultural plan that was to be focussed just on council owned cultural facilities. This is contrary to the principles of cultural planning, which should engage with all the dimensions of culture in the area, and it leaves volunteer managed museums and heritage collections out in the cold.

2.5 To my knowledge none of the previously amalgamated councils in NSW or Queensland have done any integrated planning for community museums and collections post amalgamation.

2.6 The former mayor of Dubbo Mathew Dickerson flagged the risks of spending cuts to arts and culture when commenting on the forced amalgamation with Wellington.¹ While Dubbo has excellent cultural facilities managed by council, where will the post amalgamation cultural landscape leave the Oxley Museum in Wellington which needs assistance and a new building, and which has collections of state significance?

2.7 Most post amalgamation councils have no wards which can make it easy to ignore outlying villages with their community collections, halls and heritage buildings. It leaves rural villages without representation and advocacy for their community museums. Over time large regional councils become comfortably focussed on their prestige council owned cultural facilities. Port Macquarie Hastings Council had an acclaimed museum program supported by a community curator working with museums across the region, but both were axed following the opening of the Glasshouse Theatre and Gallery and a council restructure. Timbertown in Wauchope was sold and the Wauchope Historical Society was evicted from its adjacent museum and is now homeless.

2.8 When pressing the case for council investment in community museums, a common remark is that council is only concerned with funding the cultural facilities that council owns. Or they won't fund a community museum because council doesn't own the collection. In fact, the collections in community museums are donated by local families and are held in trust for the benefit of the whole community, and current and future generations. They are **community owned** in exactly the same way as the Powerhouse collections are, or gallery collections managed by councils. Heritage collections held in community museums and historical societies should be supported by councils, with well-targeted grants and support from the NSW government and its museums.

3 Recommendations

3.1 There are policies, strategies and funding models that are of proven success in supporting community museums and collections in regional NSW. These include council employed curators or regional collections officers supporting strong networks of museums in each region, the development of regional museums like Orange and Wagga with a brief to support community museums in their region, and initiatives like the Sustainable Collections Program in Central NSW, case study below.

3.2 The NSW Government should provide dedicated grants to amalgamated councils to prepare strategic plans for the museums and community collections in their new lga. Every amalgamated council should have a strategic plan or a museum development plan for the community museums and collections in their lga.

3.3 Following completion of the strategic plan for community museums and collections, the state government should offer grants to fund regional collections officers to work in every amalgamated council, or with groups of councils, along the lines of the Sustainable Collections Program, and subject obviously to clear performance measures. This funding would go some way to redress the gross funding inequalities for museums in regional NSW.

3.4 There should be more active advocacy from Arts NSW and museum service agencies to promote strategic planning, regional networks, the development of regional museums in major regional cities and best practice museum case studies through the LGSA and other forums. This should highlight the role of regional museums, and the importance of community museums in sharing local stories, as education and tourism destinations, as cultural assets, heritage icons, centres of social inclusion and community engagement.

3.5 Arts NSW and the NSW Heritage Office should revive the highly successful partnership that supported museums in heritage buildings and thematic studies of heritage collections. This should include funding programs to upgrade and conserve heritage buildings used as museums, and to upgrade the facilities so they're fit for purpose as 21st century museums. Funding for the preparation

of Conservation Management Plans and site masterplans would be a good starting point. This partnership recognised that museums fall between arts and heritage programs and that movable heritage and regional collections need more strategic mapping, documentation and conservation.

4 Case Study: the Sustainable Collections Program in Central NSW:

This case study demonstrates the benefits of a strong regional network of museums supported by council museum officers, documenting and sharing collections and distinctive village stories, increasing access and sustaining community museums and collections.

The Sustainable Collections Program (SCP) is a partnership between Orange, Cabonne and Blayney Councils and community museums, with funding support from the councils and Arts NSW. The program works with community museums and collections in the region on the documentation and interpretation of significant collections, audience engagement initiatives and planning for future sustainability of the museums and collections. Funding has supported the employment of collections officers to work with museum volunteers on the documentation of their collections, the interpretation of distinctive stories in each museum, using professional designers, and the presentation of public programs. Skills development is achieved not just with one off workshops, as traditionally offered by service agencies, but by embedding training in projects that have tangible outcomes in the museums. Collections and stories are shared on line on the website developed by the SCP, which supports all the museums. <http://www.centralnswmuseums.orangemuseum.com.au/> The Regional Museums Network meets regularly and is a forum for sharing best ideas and guiding collaborative projects, informed by Orange City Council's Museum Development Plan. The SCP and the network is managed by Orange City Council's museum and heritage co-ordinator Alison Russell. A booklet published in 2010 summarises the program which has won several state and national museum and heritage awards. <http://www.centralnswmuseums.com.au/wp/links-resources/>

Planning for the soon-to-open Orange Regional Museum has developed in tandem with the SCP and is a key element in the success of the program. Supporting community museums and collections is central to the mission of the new regional museum. Since 2005 the museum and its community museum partners have presented a number of innovative exhibitions and projects including:

- *Watermarks, a cultural history of water in Orange and district* A collaborative exhibition in Orange Regional Gallery in 2005, with objects drawn from museum collections, community organisations and families; presented with satellite exhibitions in community museums in the region and a series of public programs around water <http://www.watermarks.com.au/pages/index.cfm>
- *Half a World Away, post war migration to Orange and district* a collaborative exhibition held in Orange Regional Gallery in 2007, together with a book, website, driving tour and heritage site interpretation around Orange. This project was part funded with the assistance of the Migration Heritage Centre at the Powerhouse Museum. <http://www.halfaworldaway.com.au/>
- *Orange Blossoms; a cultural history of gardens in Orange and district* A community exhibition held in Orange Regional Gallery in 2009, together with an extensive series of public programs, garden inspections, and a community festival. The exhibition included public parks and private gardens, and profiled contemporary garden designers and gardeners. <http://www.orangeblossoms.com.au/pages/util/index.cfm>

- *Villages of the Heart* 2013 – 16 is new strand in the Sustainable Collections Program designed to provide a framework for storytelling, exploring heritage places and villages, building stronger communities, attachment to place and renewed valuing of rural communities. The initial focus was on documenting rural villages, stories, places, traditions and collections, and exploring community attachment to place. Some of the historical research and oral histories are now being uploaded to the Central NSW Museums website. <http://www.centralnswmuseums.com.au/wp/village-stories/>
- *Stage 2 of Villages of the Heart* is focused around the food and produce of the region. A regional partnerships grant with Sydney Living Museums, (SLM) funded by Arts NSW, is currently underway, exploring local food traditions, cooks, and produce through the concept of *From Paddock to Plate*. The work with SLM has a particular focus on public programs supported by SLM's resident gastronomer Jacqui Newling. As part of the program community museums are working on the reinterpretation of their kitchen collections and displays, and are presenting public programs around food traditions in their communities. The program has also engaged a filmmaker to work with young people, filming village stories. These short films will be presented in the 2016 Orange Youth Arts Festival.

Critical success factors and benefits:

- The organisation and support of Alison Russell, Orange City Council's museum and heritage co-ordinator has been crucial. The SCP could not operate without an energetic museum person on council staff to organise programs and workshops, write and acquit grants, manage budgets, organise training, museum services and public programs.
- Just a few community museums have been able to prepare a competitive grant to the Arts NSW Arts and Cultural Development Program, but a regional network of museums with council support can attract grants that fund innovative projects and that make a tangible difference for collections and communities.
- The three council partnership with \$15,000pa contributions enabled ORM to access significant Arts NSW grants, and grants from other agencies for museum projects
- The SCP has attracted strong support from Arts NSW and MGNSW through its museum adviser program but no other council has picked up this proven model
- The SCP has had strong support from the participating community museums, and their guidance through the regional museum network
- The program has expanded to document and support community collections such as the RSL and Bloomfield Hospital
- Museum assistance is provided on the ground, in the region and the museums where it's needed, and with a minimum of bureaucracy. Instead of applying for \$1,000 grants from MGNSW, the SCP directly assists museums needing conservation supplies, internet access, collection management programs, advice from conservators, museum policies and reports, new exhibition panels, and showcases etc.
- Professional assistance is offered in drafting grants and writing letters of support for museum projects including for vital building repairs.
- The SCP advises the three councils on museum needs and priorities and has lifted council support and funding for museums, over and above their contributions to the SCP.

The Sustainable Collections Program is arguably the most active and effective model for community museum funding, support and engagement operating in any region of Australia. **But it is not clear if the SCP will survive in its current form, following amalgamation** of the three councils as this will affect the funding model and the relative autonomy of the program.

About Kylie Winkworth:

Kylie Winkworth is the former museum adviser to Orange City Council and helped initiate and develop the Sustainable Collections Program. She is a museum and heritage consultant with long experience in regional and community museums, movable heritage and collections. She has worked in regional Australia with heritage places and collecting organisations, museums and local government, developing strategic plans, feasibility studies, exhibitions and collaborative projects. She has a particular interest in museum renewal and sustainability and in the wider issues of government policy and funding for collections. Her publications include *Significance 2.0*, co-authored with Roslyn Russell, which is now widely used by collecting organisations; and *Thematic Studies of Museum and Heritage Collections, a guide for museums, heritage networks and communities for the Queensland Heritage Trails Network*.

Kylie Winkworth has prepared strategic plans for a number of new regional museums and council partnerships, including the Museum of the Riverina, the Tweed Regional Museum, the Cairns Museum and Orange Regional Museum. In 1996-87 she chaired the Movable Heritage Taskforce for the NSW Heritage Office (1996-97) which initiated a number of movable heritage projects in regional NSW including, a thematic study, book and exhibition on shops and migration *What's in Store*; and *Golden Threads* a study, book and travelling exhibition on the Chinese in regional NSW.

Kylie Winkworth has written a number of provocative papers about museums in regional Australia including *Fixing the Slums of Australian Museums*, 2005; *Museums, Collections and Sustainability: Contending Concepts*, 2010; *More on the Museum Diet*, 2013; and 'Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: museums in regional Australia', in *Understanding Museums*, edited by Des Griffin and Leon Parossien, National Museum of Australia, <http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/>

In the area of heritage and museum policy, she has served on many boards and committees including the National Cultural Heritage Committee, which oversees the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act and the import and export of cultural property. Her appointments include:

2002-13	Member, National Cultural Heritage Committee, Department of Environment
2004-10	Director, Collections Council of Australia
2004-13	Member, National Trust, NSW Branch, Museums and Properties Committee
2002-11	Member, Migration Heritage Centre panel of advisors, Powerhouse Museum
1996-2003	Trustee of the Powerhouse Museum
1996-99 and	2004-08 Member of the NSW Arts Advisory Council, NSW Ministry for the Arts
1996-99	Chair, Museum Committee, NSW Ministry for the Arts
1999-2005	Member of the NSW Heritage Office Movable Heritage Panel

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/artlands-dubbo-mayor-at-loggerheads-with-deputy-premier-over-council-mergers-arts-funding-20160310-gnflhs.html>