

**Supplementary
Submission
No 149c**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in NSW

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

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A note about my experience is at the end of this submission.

This submission addresses the following terms of reference:

- a) NSW government policy funding and support for museums and galleries
- c) Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums and galleries and their research and collecting priorities
- g) The impact of the efficiency dividend
- f) The development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries

Introduction

NSW has no museum policy. The government spends around 75% of the arts and cultural budget for all of NSW on the NSW cultural institutions but it allocates this money without a policy, without transparent performance benchmarks or any mechanism for shaping programs and outcomes. What passes for policy is a list of capital works projects. In its policy free project list for cultural infrastructure, the government has missed the chance to review the structure, focus and framework of museums in NSW. Museum structures, policies and programs need rethinking to maximise the impact and returns from the community's investment in museums and collections **for all the residents of NSW**. We need landmark museums and galleries in Sydney **and** high quality cultural infrastructure in regional NSW.

NSW needs an ambitious, imaginative and forward looking plan for museums in NSW for the 21st century. It has \$4.6b of under-used inaccessible collection assets hidden in storage, but no strategy to share these collections or make them accessible online. NSW must increase its investment in cultural infrastructure to make up for decades of underinvestment. And it must rebuild museum budgets, staffing, capacity and programs. The government can fund an inspiring, fair and economically sound museum policy by scaling back plans to spend \$1.6b on sporting stadiums which its own reports admit are underutilised and have relatively low attendance and economic impact. This money could have a bigger cultural, economic, and education impact if it was reallocated to investment in museums and galleries and their staff. Far more people visit museums and galleries than attend stadiums but this is not reflected in the government's current spending priorities.

a & f. NSW government policy for museums and galleries, and the development and transparency of policy advice to government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries

The NSW Government released an arts and cultural policy framework *Create in NSW*, in February 2015¹. Its emphasis is on contemporary arts practice. The 'framework' has no concrete cultural policies and has not engaged with the opportunities hidden in NSW museums and collections.

Decision making for the state's cultural institutions appears to have shifted from Arts NSW to Infrastructure NSW (INSW). This body appears to have no expertise in museums, cultural planning and collections. Certainly there is no actual policy, just a list of infrastructure projects. There is no rationale or transparency around why the projects nominated by INSW are the top funding priorities for culture in NSW, or what the objectives are, or what benefits and outcomes NSW taxpayers might receive from our substantial capital and recurrent investment in museums and galleries and their collections. INSW's own report acknowledges that cultural and sporting infrastructure investment has suffered from the lack of an agreed strategic economic and planning framework.²

In 2013-4 \$260m was spent on the NSW cultural institutions, including \$68.5m in capital funding.³ This is about 75% of the arts and cultural funding for all of NSW. It is untenable that this funding is not tied to policy and outcomes for all the residents of NSW. Grant applicants to the Arts and Cultural Development Program managed by Arts NSW work with transparent assessment criteria, tied to outcomes. But this does not appear to apply to the cultural institutions and their pet capital projects which consume around 75% of the cultural funding for NSW.

While the people of NSW sit at the heart of the governing legislation of the State Library of NSW, the residents and taxpayers of NSW are missing from the legislation governing the gallery and museums. The gallery and museums have no stated obligation to serve or benefit the people of NSW, as opposed to the interests of the institution. It is not surprising then that wider community interests or obligations to the people of NSW are sometimes overlooked in the policies, strategies and development ambitions of the gallery and museums.⁴

There is a policy lacuna around the NSW cultural institutions operating with outdated legislation, and governed by boards of trustees with little or no expertise in museums and collections. This has led to examples of poor decisions, questionable strategy, and a lack transparency around collection policy, acquisitions and deaccessions. While NSW museums and their collections must be independent of the short term directives of government, there needs to be a transparent policy framework, consistent with high standards in collection management and the long term custodianship of the museums and their collections. The government's unprecedented and inexplicable decision to 'relocate/ demolish' the Powerhouse Museum without consultation is a case in point. But when MAAS abolished the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, for which it received \$370,000 in recurrent funding, appeals to the Arts Minister and Arts NSW were met with the comment they did not direct the decisions of the museum's management or board. The FOI papers reveal that the government through its senior public servants does indeed direct the trust to acquiesce to political decisions that are obviously not in the interests of the museum and its collections.

The scope and shape of NSW collecting organisations is mostly an unexamined inheritance from the nineteenth century, and the result of ad hoc decisions. It is incoherent, unfair and unrepresentative of the cultures, collections and history of NSW. Cultural opportunities go begging without leadership and imagination, and taxpayers are paying for vast collections that are hidden in storage. For example:

- NSW is the only state or territory without a museum responsible for history. NSW has no museum with a mandate to collect and interpret the history of NSW, or even Sydney. Social history was part of the Powerhouse Museum from 1988, but NSW history has disappeared from its exhibitions, collecting, research priorities and staffing structure, and it is not formally part of the outdated 1945 MAAS legislation.
- Sydney has a small Museum of Sydney which is not really about Sydney, and a collection of historic houses and buildings managed by Sydney Living Museums. But it does not have a museum that tells the story of Sydney **and NSW**. The 2011 *Planning Sydney's Cultural Facilities* review noted the relative lack of social history museums and suggested that Sydney does not capitalise on its strong cultural heritage.⁵
- NSW is the only state that does not have either a dedicated migration museum, or a state museum with responsibility for collecting, research and interpreting migration history.⁶ Yet the cultural diversity of NSW is one its great success stories and economic opportunities. Celebrating the migration stories of the diverse communities of NSW builds community harmony and respect.
- There are many consequences stemming from the absence of a museum of NSW history, with responsibility for collecting, researching and interpreting NSW history, (including migration heritage and Aboriginal contact history). While heritage sites tell bits of the story of Sydney, there is no cohesive museum interpretation of NSW history and the development of its civic institutions. This affects education in history, it diminishes general literacy of NSW history and civics, it means that significant objects of NSW history are not being collected, and there is no civic space to build community understanding of Aboriginal contact history and migration stories.
- In addition, economically important aspects of NSW history such as agriculture, mining and water are not exhibited or properly collected. The state's mining collection is in storage. NSW has no mining or gold museum, although this has been an important part of the state's economy since 1851. NSW has a shearing museum in Hay but no wool museum, although NSW was the founding state for Australia's wool industry. Both wool and gold mining have made a huge contribution to the development and prosperity of Sydney and NSW but who would know?
- Despite all the commercial development at Barangaroo, the promised cultural dividend in the form of an Indigenous Cultural Centre has not eventuated, and the concept languished without a champion. A concrete cavern and a bit of public art appear to be a low cultural return for a forest of high rise towers.
- Sydney has two art galleries in the city in the MCA and AGNSW, but there is none in Parramatta. The proposed Sydney Modern extension will double the size of the AGNSW in the domain at a cost of \$400m, further concentrating all the art gallery facilities and funding in the city centre. The project has been advanced by the NSW government, with \$15m towards design work, but most critics consider the scheme is not justified, fair or equitable.⁷ Contrast this with the pathetic \$385,000 the government made available for cultural infrastructure grants for regional NSW in 2016 where 30% of the population lives.
- Most international cities have opened acclaimed design museums in the last three decades. Design in all its forms and applications⁸ is one of Sydney's most important exports and it should be part of its image and brand as a global city. But the PHM's internationally significant collection of design and decorative arts is almost all in storage. A new design museum in Sydney would arguably have a greater cultural, tourism and economic impact

than the proposed Sydney Modern development. (I would be happy to elaborate on the pros and cons of these two options.)

- The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences used to have a network of branch museums in regional cities such as Goulburn, Bathurst, Maitland, Albury and Broken Hill, but these were closed in the 1980s as the Powerhouse Museum project was under development. This has left NSW with all the state-funded museum resources in the city, and no strategy to share collections with cities in regional NSW, or interpret stories of major significance for NSW history and its development. Other states such as Queensland and WA operate branch museums of their state museum in major regional cities.
- The State Library of NSW has a state wide mission that supports the network of regional and community libraries. But there is no equivalent Museum of NSW with a service mission to support museums across NSW. While NSW government museums have modest regional programs, these have shrunk in recent years and most of the museums' budgets and resources are dedicated to city based museums. In recent years there has been a marked shrinkage of regional services and a loss of focus on state museums reaching a state wide audience.
- Unlike the State Library of NSW, which supports libraries across NSW, the NSW Government museums and gallery provide few services to regional communities, relative to their budgets. Vertically integrated cultural structures such as the NSW library framework are more efficient, fairer, and deliver better services for the whole community of NSW.
- There are significant overlaps and duplication in NSW collecting institutions in many collecting areas. But there are no policies or funding incentives for co-operative research and exhibition projects, in areas such as Asian art and cultures, Indigenous history and culture, decorative arts and design. NSW might be get better value from its cultural spend if the next major cultural infrastructure investment in the city was a collaborative cultural facility and collection research centre, with exhibition spaces for the state museums and library to present innovative new shows in areas of identified omissions or overlap.
- Despite the above policy incoherence, the government's 'best' museum idea is the unprecedented demolition of the Powerhouse, just to move it to a less accessible site 23ks west, at a likely cost of close to \$1b. After all this expenditure there will be no net cultural gain and it will still leave 97.6% of MAAS collections in storage. It would seem that no one in the NSW government is looking at the opportunity cost of this wasteful project and asking what the other museum options might be. And it is also not asking communities in Parramatta and western Sydney what kind of museum will best meet their needs and cultural aspirations.

a, f and c. Recommendations and Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums and galleries and their research and collecting priorities

1. NSW needs an ambitious, imaginative and forward looking plan for museums in NSW for the 21st century. Rationality, fairness, access to important collections and histories, cultural equity and cultural tourism benefits should be at the centre of the policy and plan.
2. A NSW museum policy and plan is essential to identify and prioritise museum and gallery infrastructure priorities. Just dishing out infrastructure money to the claims of the existing

cultural institutions is not rational, fair or fit for the cultural opportunities of the 21st century.

3. A high priority in a NSW Museum Plan is a Museum of NSW with responsibility for NSW history, migration heritage and Aboriginal contact history.
4. Macquarie Street is Sydney's major civic and cultural boulevard, anchored at both ends by World Heritage listed buildings; the Sydney Opera House and Hyde Park Barracks.⁹ It is one of the few cities in the world where a single street interprets 200 years of settlement, landscape evolution, and civic and design history. Macquarie St, with a collections arc reaching into the Domain and College St, is already Sydney's 'museum mile'. This identity should be enhanced with strategic new museum additions, carefully evaluated through the NSW Museum Plan.¹⁰
5. Responsibility for arts, cultural policy **and infrastructure** should be returned to Arts NSW. Its staff, policy capacity and budget should be rebuilt and increased to provide informed advice to government, shaped by transparent and consultative policy processes. Decisions on cultural infrastructure should not be outsourced to INSW. Their reports have demonstrably failed to identify and consider the best cultural infrastructure opportunities for Sydney.
6. The government should look at new mechanisms to fund and support NSW museums and galleries to reach a state wide audience, including with substantial investment in online access to collections.
7. Governance arrangements and the legislation should be modernised to enshrine responsibility for meeting the cultural needs of the people of NSW. This could include among other things ensuring that boards and trusts have representatives from regional NSW.
8. The government should reform the Arts Advisory Council abolished in 2009 to provide cross disciplinary cultural policy advice to Arts NSW and the Minister for the Arts. This council served NSW well over many decades. *Create in NSW* may have been a more inclusive and ambitious policy if it had been shaped by a broad multidisciplinary advisory council.
9. Consideration should be given to modernising MAAS as the state's Smithsonian - the Museum of NSW , managing unique destination museums including the PHM at Ultimo, a museum of NSW history in Parramatta (subject to consultation), and a design museum in the city.
10. The Museum of NSW should be vertically integrated to support regional museums in the major regional cities of NSW, in partnership with councils. In turn the regional museums would provide services and support a network of community museums and heritage places in their region. In this way every community in NSW would be supported and equipped to care for their museums and heritage collections.

11. A similar model for the AGNSW would see it working more closely with the network of regional galleries, developing collaborative exhibition projects and other initiatives in partnership with regional galleries in NSW.

g. The Impact of the Efficiency Dividend

Cultural success relies on the work of highly skilled and creative people who with research, knowledge and great ideas devise well curated exhibitions, public programs and imaginative ways to share the state's collections. The capability and performance of NSW cultural institutions has shrunk with more than 10 years of the compounding 'efficiency dividend'. All the museums have had major redundancy programs, with the loss of experienced specialist curators, scientific and research capacity, collections and digital expertise. Damaging restructures hire some new staff but they are almost always at a lower level and/ or are less experienced people. The pay gap between the SES positions and salaried employees in museums has widened. Overall staff numbers have been cut while SES positions have stayed the same or even increased.

We would not run a major hospital with a skeleton staff of junior doctors but this is the trend in staffing NSW government museums. **The efficiency dividend is highly inefficient.** Staff costs are a high fixed cost in museum budgets, so this is what has been cut every year since the efficiency dividend was introduced. The effect is to hollow out capacity, innovation, creativity and resource intensive projects. Other states outperform NSW in attendance at blockbusters, with only two NSW exhibitions in the top ten, one of them the Powerhouse Museum's *Harry Potter* exhibition.¹¹ With a few notable exceptions, NSW museums and the gallery are not investing in developing major exhibitions with an original thesis that are curated and led by research collaborations. Fewer substantial catalogues are published.

The performance and capacity of MAAS and the PHM has been especially hard hit by budget cuts, the efficiency dividends, restructures and redundancies. Staff numbers at the PHM have nearly halved over the last decade, and have dropped by more than half over 15 years. Education staff at the Powerhouse shrunk from 17 people in 2005 to just 3 in 2015. Specialist curators have been replaced by generalists. Digital innovation has gone. The efficiency dividend has had a major impact on regional services and programs. In 2014 the museum's acclaimed regional services program was gutted, experienced staff were made redundant, the movable heritage fellowship was axed, fewer visits are now made to regional NSW and most regional services from the museum now charge a fee. The Migration Heritage Centre was abolished. Both regional services and the MHC were funded with \$250,000 and \$370,000pa in recurrent funding. But facing budget cuts, management and the trustees evidently thought services benefitting regional communities and their museums were dispensable.

Recommendations

1. The efficiency dividend must be removed from the cultural institutions. It is inefficient. It leaves collection assets unused and inaccessible. And it disproportionately impacts already disadvantaged regional communities.
2. The government must invest in employing skilled and expert museum staff for projects and work that will share the state's collections with the people of NSW

3. MAAS staff numbers must be restored to at least 2005 levels and its budget increased to allow the museum to rebuild its education services and digital skills. The roles of specialist curators should be re-established.

Biographical Note

Kylie Winkworth is an independent museum and heritage consultant with long experience in museum policy, planning, regional and community museums, movable heritage and collections. She has worked 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. 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. She was a director of the Collections Council of Australia; a Trustee of the Powerhouse Museum 1996-2003; chair of the Museum Committee for NSW Ministry for the Arts, and a member of the NSW Arts Advisory Council, 1996-2003 and 2004-2008.

¹ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/arts-in-nsw/create-in-nsw/the-nsw-arts-and-cultural-policy-framework-create-in-nsw/>

² Infrastructure NSW, 2014 *State Infrastructure Strategy Update*, p.120

³ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/category/arts-in-nsw/state-cultural-institutions/>

⁴ For example the MAAS research strategy does not mention NSW. It has no declared interest in researching aspects of NSW culture, history, technology or society. Nominated research priorities do not appear to be framed around outcomes or benefits for the people of NSW. <https://maas.museum/research/> Would the ANGNSW trustees have prioritised building in the Domain if serving the people of NSW was one of the objects of the trust and the gallery?

⁵ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/creative-spaces/planning-sydneys-cultural-facilities/review-of-sydneys-cultural-facilities/>

⁶ The Powerhouse Museum closed the acclaimed NSW Migration Heritage Centre which worked in partnership with communities and councils across NSW, even though it had dedicated recurrent funding of \$370,000pa. This award winning virtual museum model was one of the most successful innovations in recent Australian museum history. Its partnership model has driven significant contributions from local government, and it has garnered national and international attention as an alternative to the proliferation of ethno specific migration museums. The NSW Migration Heritage Centre's innovative model of collaborative regional partnerships to document and interpret the migration heritage of NSW has now been copied by Queensland, while the PHM has closed the MHC.

⁷ 2011 review *Planning Sydney's Cultural Facilities* did not suggest that the AGNSW needed to double in size, but it did highlight the need for improved education facilities at the gallery, which could be accommodated in a more modest extension to the south. There is no sound case for doubling the size of the gallery into the Domain: visitor numbers to GOMA in Brisbane and the Ian Potter Centre/NGV Australian suggest a distinctive separate gallery would attract more visitors; there has been only one blockbuster that was bigger than the

gallery's available temporary exhibition space; and the gallery has a small collection relative to the size of the proposed expansion. If needing more exhibition space for unseen collections was the criteria for museum expansion then MAAS would be a higher priority for a new museum.

⁸ Design includes architecture, graphic design and branding, games, interiors, gardens, film, theatre, decorative arts, the crafts and object design, design for the digital and virtual world, fashion and textiles, industrial and product design, engineering, transport and communications, entertainment, and urban design. It is vital for the 21st century economy and issues such as innovation, new materials, environmental design and sustainability.

⁹ In its desperation to shoehorn Walsh Bay into a cultural precinct, NSW somehow missed the cultural precinct already looping through Macquarie St, the Domain and College St.

¹⁰ Not forgetting other collections and museums in the Macquarie St collections arc, including the RAHS, Sydney Hospital Museum, the Reserve Bank and the RBG.

¹¹Not that blockbusters are the only measure of a great museum. *Recreation and Arts Baseline Report*, prepared by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) for Infrastructure NSW, 2012
www.insw.com/media/16754/pwc_insw_culture_baseline_report_final.pdf