

Submission
No 69

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY
CBD

Organisation: Regional Arts NSW
Name: Ms Elizabeth Rogers
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Telephone: 02 9247 8577
Date Received: 10/09/2008

Catherine Watson
The Committee Manager
Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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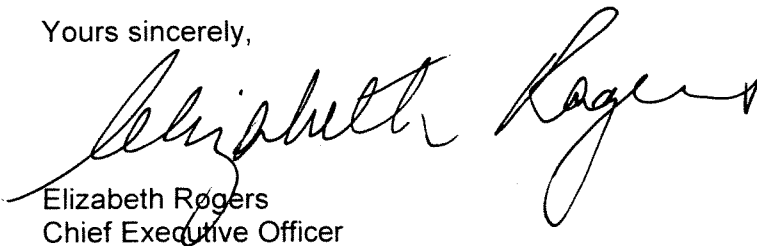
Reference: **Submission to the Inquiry into the Development of Arts & Cultural
Infrastructure
Outside the Sydney CBD from Regional Arts NSW.**

Dear Catherine,

Please find enclosed the submission from Regional Arts NSW to the above Inquiry.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry and for granting an extension to the deadline.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Rogers
Chief Executive Officer



Submission to the Inquiry into the Development of Arts & Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

This submission by Regional Arts NSW examines the current infrastructure in place, both tangible (built) facilities and intangible (human) resources across the diverse regions of the state and responds to the key points requested in the Inquiry.

This is by no means a definitive survey, but an attempt to create a state wide picture that reflects the diversity of the regions and outline some of the challenges faced by the arts and cultural sector in delivering these services to the regional and remote communities across NSW.

It also examines the different needs of the diversity of art forms that come clumped under to catchall term, arts and culture. The requirements for an orchestral concert are very different to the needs of a local ceramics group – but both are essential components of the same.

There is a strong argument for regional service centres to become 'centres of excellence' or regional hubs for the delivery of arts and cultural services when the provision of appropriate infrastructure is met, as they offer health, education and retail services for the surrounding satellite communities. However, a successful model requires not just well designed, accessible venues, but consideration for adequate and ongoing funding. A regional arts centre is not a profit making venture, but an essential community facility that needs ongoing maintenance just like a sports facility.

This report does not spell out a list of recommendations and the conclusions are drawn within the text. However, it is worth highlighting some general issues.

An extensive audit of regional cultural infrastructure to be undertaken under three broad categories, professionally managed venues in regional cities, council owned venues in regional towns with basic facilities for arts and cultural activities and community halls. This audit could then assist to:

1. Determine needs for new buildings or renovation/redevelopment of existing (including heritage) buildings to create a cultural precinct in the town centre.
2. Compile a schedule for refurbishment of current buildings to bring up to standard
3. Identify regional centres that require future infrastructure development to provide cultural precincts.
4. Include in planning strategies for future development.
5. Determine a renovation/ refurbishment program to enable increased uses for existing venues in consultation with the local council/shire.
6. Assist with completion of refurbishment of older buildings into multi-purpose arts centres.
7. Ensure current OH & S and accessibility issues are addressed.

8. Develop and establish a \$3m dollar annual funding program to address the above three venue categories to enable consistent and planned ongoing provision of arts and cultural infrastructure in regional areas within which there is provision made for a small capital grants program to assist community volunteers to access funds for repairs and equipment for community halls with matching funds from council and value 'in kind' contributions from community members in either volunteer hours or donations of materials, labour and equipment.

A whole of government approach needs to be taken to arts and cultural infrastructure in regional NSW. It is noted that as well as Arts NSW, the NSW Departments of Planning, Lands, State and Regional Development, Education and Training, Transport and Local Government have roles in this issue. In addition there are a number of Federal Government agencies delivering regional infrastructure funding programs. The significance of the local government contributions needs to be taken into consideration and there are opportunities for increased partnership arrangements.

Skilled arts managers and arts practitioners are the people side of the story. Regional NSW faces the challenge of attracting skilled people to work and live in regional centres at appropriate salaries and providing ongoing professional development for the volunteer sector. Regional arts organisations operating in the non-profit sector require secure and ongoing indexed funding arrangements. The review of Cultural Grants and the new funding guidelines from Arts NSW should streamline and simplify this process for the future.

There has been no specific reference in this submission to Aboriginal Arts and Cultural infrastructure in regional NSW. This organisation will be undertaking a survey in this area for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations during 2009 and any information included in this submission would be purely speculative.

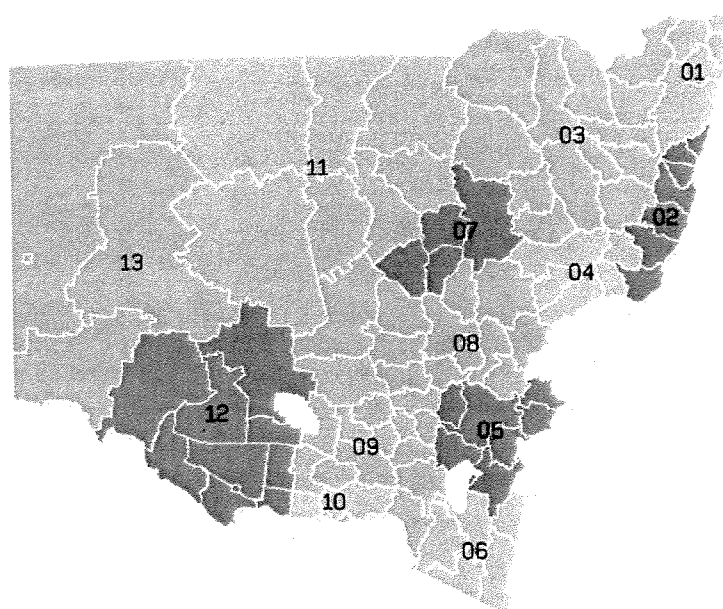
INTRODUCTION

Regional Arts NSW

Regional Arts NSW (RANSW) is the peak body for regional arts activity for the state of NSW. Based in Sydney it provides a range of services for the network of independent Regional Arts Boards across the state in the key areas of advocacy, capacity building, communications, and support. It represents the Regional Arts Network at a state level. The Chair and CEO represent NSW on the Board of the national body, Regional Arts Australia.

RANSW is a non-profit organisation with its Board made up of representatives of the Regional Arts Boards. It receives funding to deliver its programs from the NSW Government through Arts NSW and the Australian Government through the Regional Arts Fund and the Australia Council.

The Regional Arts Network in NSW



THE REGIONAL ARTS NSW NETWORK

The Regional Arts Network in NSW enables people who live in the regions to manage their own arts and cultural priorities. It provides a local voice to tell local stories.

- 01 Arts Northern Rivers
- 02 Arts Mid North Coast
- 03 Arts North West
- 04 Arts Upper Hunter
- 05 Southern Tablelands Arts
- 06 South East Arts Region
- 07 Orana Arts
- 08 Arts OutWest
- 09 Eastern Riverina
Arts Program
- 10 Murray Arts
- 11 Out Back Arts
- 12 South West Arts
- 13 West Darling Arts.

Regional arts development in NSW is decentralised through a network of regional organisations known as the Regional Arts Boards (RABs). Each RAB services an area of the state made up of a group of local government areas. The local councils in each area, together with the State Government, contribute financially to each Board to employ a regional arts development officer (RADO) and other support staff.

This structure enables people who live in the regions to manage their own arts and cultural priorities for their own region. It provides a local voice to tell local stories. The Regional Arts Network services over 100 local government areas covering more than 662,000 square kilometres, where 1.7 million people live. There are around 1200 local arts and cultural groups. The Network reaches into all four corners of the state.

Two future Regional Arts Boards will service the South Coast/Shoalhaven and the Griffith/Leeton areas.

RANSW's response to this Inquiry is in relation to the area of the state within its remit as outlined above.

SUITABILITY OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ARTS AND CULTURAL LIFE IN REGIONAL NSW

Following is an overview of current arts & cultural Infrastructure in Regional NSW. It needs to be noted that a complete audit of regional arts infrastructure is not possible within the time frame of the Inquiry. The information below is based on general knowledge of conditions across the state.

1. Performing Arts

Broadly speaking, arts and cultural infrastructure in terms of the built environment decreases the further west one travels from the greater Sydney metropolitan area. Performing arts centres capable of presenting medium to large scale professional productions are mainly located in the larger regional towns of the tablelands and slopes of the Great Dividing Range and the north coast. These centres are located in Albury, Bathurst, Orange, Griffith, Coffs Harbour, Taree, Lismore, Queanbeyan, Nowra and Wagga. New theatres are currently under construction in Tamworth, Port Macquarie and Cessnock and a 500 seat theatre is being planned for Dubbo. The Australian Government's *Playing Australia Fund* is instrumental in assisting professional companies to tour to these regional centres.

New England/North West has developed a touring circuit using a variety of smaller venues. In many cases, these are buildings that have been recycled to accommodate performances among other purposes. In Bingara, the art-deco cinema has been restored and refurbished, in Narrabri a new building has been constructed (the main auditorium has a flat floor and no fly tower), in Glenn Innes an old church has been converted into a theatre using mostly volunteer labour and driven by the local dramatic society.

Similar renovations have taken place in other areas of the state such as Cootamundra, where a multi-purpose arts centre that accommodates performances, artists' studios and workshops, a retail gallery and music studios has been created from an old horse carriage works. In Temora, the council is refitting its old 60's memorial hall to accommodate film as well as music and theatrical performance. At best, these developments are a compromise, driven by community demand and largely funded by local government. The challenges that face these networks of smaller venues are the types of productions they are able to host, the availability and cost of suitable product, the lack of a central coordinating body to facilitate tours, the varying technical, marketing and audience development skills of the local presenters and no funds to pay even a part time person to support the management committee. .

Further west and on the far south coast from Batemans Bay to Eden the situation becomes grimmer. Community halls are inadequate for current requirements. At best, they are uncomfortable, have flat floors, lack basic heating and cooling systems, have insufficient power supply (some touring companies have to hire, or invest in their own portable generators), have unacceptable toilet facilities, are not accessible for disabled patrons and in some cases, do not comply with public safety requirements.

A theatre company touring to community halls needs to truck in everything needed for the production both technical equipment and extra skilled personnel. This increases the cost of the show to the local presenter that cannot be recouped through ticket sales.

The alternatives to community halls in western NSW are the clubs, in particular RSL and bowling clubs whose auditoriums can and have been used for performing arts touring. Again there is a downside. The scale of the production that can be mounted in a club auditorium is restricted. Although many of the basic issues facing the use of community halls (air-conditioning, toilets, accessibility and public safety requirements) are met, the club management is more familiar with the requirements of bands rather than theatre productions. Bands bump in, play their gig and bump out on the same evening. There is no set build, lighting checks, rehearsal time for the actors, the bar is open throughout and sound spillage from other areas of the club does not affect an amplified music performance. When a theatre production requires 2 – 3 days in a room for a 2 hour performance, does not want the bar open during the performance, complains about kitchen noises and the room cannot be used while the theatre company is in residence, there are financial issues for the club as well as inconvenience for its members.

Classical music touring faces different challenges. Some wonderful smaller concerts have been performed by ensembles and chamber groups in regional areas using churches, regional galleries, concert venues in the network of regional conservatoriums and some private school facilities. The production requirements are different to those of a theatre company and good acoustics which require hard surfaces are essential. However, there are no concert halls in regional NSW suitable for larger orchestras. On the rare occasions when orchestras tour, they tend to use the larger performing arts centre.

Dance touring is equally problematical. It has the same production requirements as a touring theatre company plus a number of dance specific requirements including warm up and rehearsal space for dancers and a sprung floor on the stage. There is a type of 'portable' flooring that rolls up called 'tarquet' which can be used to cover a stage floor, but it is extremely heavy and requires a number of men, or a fork lift to manoeuvre it around and a medium sized truck to transport it.

Regional NSW audiences who wish to experience professional theatre, music or dance productions are limited by the type of performing arts facility available to them in their regions. If they live within a couple of hours' drive time of a regional performing arts centre or the greater metropolitan area, it is possible for them to access a varied program of drama, comedy, dance and music throughout the year. The cost of a ticket is increased by the cost of fuel, food and overnight accommodation.

Audiences who live in the more remote parts of the state may get to see perhaps one performance per year. There is no choice in the program, nor is there the opportunity for local presenters to undertake any audience development projects.

2. Museums and Galleries

There are a number of publicly funded museums and galleries in regional NSW. As with the performing arts centres, the quality and facilities of these spaces diminish the further from the greater metropolitan area one travels. There are regional art galleries in Albury*, Wagga Wagga*, Griffith*, Bathurst*, Orange*, Cowra, Goulburn, Bega, Nowra*, Taree*, Coffs Harbour*, Port Macquarie*, Lismore*, Murwillumbah, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Armidale, Tamworth*, Moree, Dubbo* Broken Hill*. Those marked with an asterisk also have, or plan to have, a performing arts centre located in that town, or in the case of Nowra, nearby. These regional galleries have the staff and facilities to create their own exhibitions and to receive touring exhibitions such as those mounted by the state and national cultural institutions. *Visions Australia* is the Australian Government's initiative to assist exhibition touring across the country.

In addition to the galleries whose core business is the public exhibition of visual arts, painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, timberwork etc, there is a plethora of commercial galleries across the state that sell a broad range of arts and craft work from the high end established artists and emerging professional artists to the lower end outlets that stock locally made paintings and handiworks, perhaps as part of a gift shop or tourism enterprise. Even publicly funded exhibition galleries have a gallery shop. Naturally, the larger professional enterprises tend to be located in the larger population areas where there is an already established environment and market for cultural products, or in regional areas with scenic landscape that attracts artists to live and work there such as Broken Hill or the lush coastal regions. (The cost of living in Sydney for artists is a further factor in the decision to live in regional areas).

Art galleries play a vital role in economic, social and educational fabric of regional areas. They make a strong statement about the identity of the community as an attractive place to live, visit and do business. They provide a signal for families considering relocating to a regional area that there are social, cultural and educational opportunities. A high quality art gallery can play a major role in attracting tourism to even a small town. An example of this is the Bungendore Woodworks Gallery, winner of a number of tourism awards over the years; it provides an economic outlet for the work of local artists and provides a social hub for a cross section of the community to meet. The associated functions of a gallery include regular exhibition openings, performance events, usually music associated with a particular exhibition, and if there is a café located in the building, forms a central meeting point for the community. In addition, galleries provide educational opportunities for regional communities through public programs that provide information and education to groups such as seniors or school children, workshops that develop artistic skills and lectures and seminars about artists, art history and even arts management issues.

Publicly funded museums play a similar role. Regional museums have both permanent and touring exhibitions and have a theme significant to their location. Museums are currently located in Broken Hill (mining), Albury (local history), Bathurst (fossils and minerals), Dubbo (local history), Bowral (cricket), Eden (whaling), Huskisson (coastal boat building), Lithgow (mining), Thirlmere (rail transport), Hay (shearing). Across NSW there are scores of museums developed and managed by volunteers who are frequently associated with local historical societies or heritage groups. The volunteers have varying museum management skills which means affects the maintenance, display and accessibility of the collections.

3. Libraries & combined facilities

The largest and most comprehensive built infrastructure managed by regional councils is the library network which plays a pivotal role in a regional community and provides a key access point to further cultural development. Libraries are no longer just collections of books. They have a range of public programs that engage with communities through children's and young people's programs, multi-cultural networks, CD and DVD collections, local history repositories, information centres and centres for information technology. Libraries and community services should be tied together and the recent movement known broadly as 'convergence' is uniting libraries with other cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, performing arts centres and community arts facilities to form bigger cultural centres.

The most recent and developed example of 'convergence' is the library/museum complex that opened in Albury in 2007. Not only are the two institutions housed together in the same building, to all intents and purposes it is the same institution and the innovative staffing structure reflects this philosophy. A visitor entering this architecturally spectacular new building will find customer service staff common to both facilities. The Albury City Council has created a 'cultural precinct' where the new library/museum, regional gallery and performing arts centre are all accessed from a park in the main street. Attendance figures have far exceeded expectations for both the museum and library.

Tamworth provides another example of co-located cultural infrastructure with the library and the art gallery in the same building. Shared community facilities include meeting rooms and workshop spaces.

In Coolamon, the *Up to Date Store*, a preserved example of a turn of the century department store, has been transformed into a museum and is adjoined now by a library and learning centre. There are plans to develop a performing arts space within the complex. The project used the significant heritage building and then sympathetically built the new library structure with access from both the museum and learning centre as well as the main street. This project is a great example of the various sources of funding that have been secured to develop this project. Funding for both infrastructure and projects has come in the form of various grants over a five year period from NSW Libraries, Arts NSW, NSW Dept State and Regional Development, NSW Heritage Office, Dept of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, Regional Arts NSW, Artstart, Dept of Community Services and the Coolamon Shire Council.

In Dubbo the new Western Plains Cultural Centre (WPCC) contains a museum and a contemporary art gallery together with workshops and meetings rooms for community use and a café in the same building. It is a combination of a new purpose built gallery and a recycled 1920's high school building. The planned new theatre will be located a short walk across the park. In the ten months since the new cultural centre was opened, 43,000 people have visited. A recent visitor survey indicates that during May/June 2008, 40% were repeat visitors, 60% new visitors, 29% were from Dubbo and 55% from the region. The figures indicate that a high-quality, metropolitan standard, cultural institution provides a benefit to the surrounding smaller towns and villages that a regional centre services in other ways. Current tourism figures indicated that visitation is up around 12 % year to date (2008) in Dubbo, although there is no specific tourism research for the WPCC at this stage, it is reasonable to assume that this facility is contributing to the tourism economy of the city.

Cootamundra is another small Riverina town where community drivers created a multi-functional arts centre in a heritage listed building. The old horse carriage works has been transformed into an art & craft gallery selling locally made work, artist workshops, music studios, a function room and plans are in place to finish the development with a performing arts space. In addition, a large Men's Shed is co-located and the work created is sold in the gallery. An adjoining shop on the site is leased to a commercial business and provides ongoing income to the Centre. Much of the work in transforming this building has been done by volunteers with financial assistance from Council in purchasing the once derelict building, Arts NSW Infrastructure Fund, community fundraising and some sponsorship. The benefits to the town are manifold. In addition to giving the community access to arts and cultural activity, the Cootamundra Arts Centre has brought people back to a previously neglected part of town and other small businesses have opened in shops that were empty for many years. This type of cultural infrastructure in small towns leads to increased social engagement and participation as well as having flow on economic benefits to the community through rejuvenation and tourism.

The examples above illustrate the positive outcomes for towns and regional centres where there has been investment in arts and cultural infrastructure. However, it must be emphasised that these cases are the exception rather than the norm. Furthermore, investment in the built cultural environment alone is insufficient to drive these outcomes. There must also be investment in the people who create, produce and deliver the art in whichever form it takes.

4. Regional Conservatoriums

Regional Conservatoriums provide professional employment for musicians, mainly as teachers, throughout NSW. The conservatoriums are located in Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Coffs Harbour, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Goulburn, Grafton, Gunnedah, Lismore, Muswellbrook, Orange, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga and Young. They are primarily funded by DET, however, like libraries; they play a much larger role in country towns than simply as a provider of educational services.

Their facilities are used for public concerts, both locally produced and for touring ensembles and orchestras, creating opportunities for regional audiences to enjoy classical and contemporary music. In some cases, notably Coffs Harbour and Deniliquin, the buildings housing the conservatoriums are not suitable for the purpose and the programs are compromised.

5. Regional Cinema

Many of the smaller towns in regional NSW do not have a cinema. The old cinemas built in the 30s, 40s and 50s have in many cases been demolished or turned into commercial retail space. There are some notable exceptions, the Roxy Theatre in Bingara (North West region) operated as a cinema until 1958, after which it was closed and remained untouched for 40 years. In 2004 it was completely restored and reopened to the public as a multi-purpose cinema, regional centre for the performing arts and a function centre for community events, conferences and seminars. The NSW Film and Television Office has been very proactive in assisting regional towns to screen films through its Regional Cinema Program in local halls, outdoor screenings and even the local swimming pool and there are some travelling film festivals offering the more remote areas at least annual access to public film screening. In the West Darling region, an area of 176,000 square kilometres with one independent cinema in Broken Hill, the Big Screen Australia Film Festival, a project of the National Film and Sound Archive, tours classic Australian films to the region annually. Films such as Mad Max are screened outdoors at Silverton, Menindee, Tibooburra and Ivanhoe. The infrastructure shortcomings for regional cinema can be compared to those facing all the other artforms above.

Human Infrastructure

Key to the development of built infrastructure in regional NSW is the ability to provide adequately skilled and remunerated staff. Most of the professional arts managers in regional areas are employed by councils, generally in the museum and gallery sectors or as cultural officers working for council. There are a very small number of performing companies employing professional artists based in regional NSW. They include Hothouse Theatre in Albury/Wodonga, Outback Theatre for Young People in Hay/Deniliquin and Northern Rivers Performing Arts in Lismore. In addition there are two youth circus companies, Flying Fruit Fly Circus in Albury and Spaghetti Circus in Mullumbimby. Conservatoriums employ professional musicians, mainly as teachers.

The NSW regional arts board program is unique to this state, with each board employing a regional arts development officer and ancillary staff to deliver arts and cultural development programs and projects tailored to meet the needs of each individual region. (see Introduction page1). This strategic approach came out of a report undertaken for the NSW Ministry for the Arts by Justin McDonnell in 1996 where he noted '...the rapidly growing coastal strip, the number of medium sized inland cities and the far flung rural hinterland present, in turn, a challenge in diversity for which no single response will ever be adequate nor sufficiently comprehensive'. Twelve years later the program has now matured and the 13 boards and their staff are now stable and well managed organisations capable of building strong partnerships and relationships with a range of arts and non-arts funding bodies at local, state and national levels. They address the 'challenge of diversity' through the regional focus of their organisations. However, there is a strong case for increased investment in the core operations of these organisations. Their success is now jeopardised by the significant increase in demands for their services.

Technological Infrastructure

Access to new technology is critical for arts and cultural organisations across regional NSW. As more and more knowledge and information is exchanged via the internet, access to technology can have a real impact on artists' ability to earn a living in a regional area. Regional Arts NSW, like many other service agencies, can no longer afford to provide news and current information via print and snail mail. For regional artists to gain information about funding rounds, employment opportunities, arts competitions, expressions of interest, tenders and so on, they need to be able to access email and the internet with reasonable download capacity and speed. The 'digital divide' is a real threat to regional and remote communities.

Access to high speed broadband is essential for those artists working in the creative industries including multi-media arts, digital video, media, film, design, software development, music production as well as enabling marketing and distribution of creative industry output into the global economy. The Visual Arts Network project delivered by Arts Northern Rivers over three years, allowed local artists the opportunity to engage with metropolitan and international galleries and audiences through a professionally curated virtual gallery.

New technology is also essential for arts education and training programs. For example, the Music Hub program in Orana Arts region allows professional music teachers to deliver tuition to talented students living in towns where there are no teachers via video link and/or Skype. This type of program helps to break down the barriers of isolation in regional communities. The availability of broadband and mobile communications is improving in the larger centres, but services to the more remote towns, hamlets and farm properties are poor, disadvantaging those people.

Although new technology, when available, can provide regional audiences with access to cultural experiences such as live digital broadcast into cinemas of opera or ballet performances from the Sydney Opera House, or in some cases, direct from the Metropolitan Opera in New York (sold out in Singleton) the reality is that these types of cultural experiences are limited to a handful of towns and provide no substitute for the experience of engaging with other members of the community attending a theatre production, a concert or a festival.

Transport

Transport is a hidden infrastructure issue in relation to arts and cultural development in regional areas where there is little or no public transport servicing arts and cultural venues. This in turn places a heavy reliance on cars to transport audiences to venues whether it is taking kids to concert practice or the elderly or disabled to the theatre in the regional centres. The further distance travelled to a regional centre, the more challenging it is for audiences to attend arts and cultural venues. For example, the closest professional theatre production for a family living in Warren is in Orange entailing a three hour drive. Add in the cost of fuel, overnight accommodation and meals, and the cost of premium seats at the opera in Sydney begins to look cheap. Yet there is a small theatre in Nevertire with the capacity of hosting professional touring theatre productions, but it lucky if one tour a year is available.

ISSUES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES.

In regional NSW, most of the arts and cultural infrastructure is in public ownership, either owned and managed by the local council, or owned by a non-profit arts organisation. The only private sector infrastructure is made up of private art galleries and in the larger regional centres, commercial cinemas. Construction of new buildings are developed through varying combinations of local, state and federal government funding together with community fundraising activities that may include contributions 'in kind' from local business and volunteer labour.

There are two major issues that are currently causing concern for local councils who invest in arts infrastructure. The first is the Section 94 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, which enables local councils to levy contributions for community facilities from developers. The proposed amendments to Section 94 regulations will reduce the capacity of councils to fund such facilities.

The second issue is to do with community facilities built on Crown Land. When a council makes improvements to a community facility on Crown Land, the Dept of Lands increases the fees for the lease, deeming it 'commercial improvement'.

Following are two examples of unfair charges imposed by the Dept of Lands on the Ballina Council

1. Northern Rivers Community Gallery

The former Ballina Shire Council Chambers is located on a crown reserve. Council is the reserve trust manager for that land. The Council resolved to refurbish that building to provide the Northern Rivers Community Gallery.

Funding for that refurbishment was as follows:

Source	Estimate (\$)
Ballina Shire Council	775,000
Grants – Ministry Arts	100,000 (3 capital grants)
Grant - Dept Plannin	10,000
Community Donations	70,000
Grant - DOTARS – Sustainable Regions	355,000
Revised Total	1,310,000

The business plan for the gallery was to lease part of the building for a café (the refurbishment included a café). The rental from the café was then to be used to finance the cost of a gallery curator who could then manage the facility and co-ordinate volunteers.

Unfortunately the Dept of Lands would only allow Council to lease the café if 50% of the rental from the café was paid directly to the Department. The café rental figure is approximately \$20,000 per annum. This now means that Council has had to allocate additional funding to the operation of the gallery as the net rental received is not sufficient to operate the gallery. The business also includes other income from sales etc.

2. Ballina Tourism Centre, Library and Community Meeting Room

The second example is in River Street Ballina. On this crown land there is currently the Council tourism centre, the Ballina library and a large community meeting room. These three facilities currently cost council around \$800,000 per annum. The buildings were all constructed by Council. The rental for the property has traditionally been around \$15,000 per annum. The Dept of Lands then issued a new rental figure of \$90,000. Following much negotiation they have now reduced it to \$45,000. This is still a huge increase on the previous figure.

THE DESIRABILITY OF LOCATING CULTURAL FACILITIES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO CREATE HUBS.

In regional NSW the co-location of cultural facilities in close proximity is extremely desirable. The two examples quoted previously of the current and proposed developments in Albury and Dubbo show the far sightedness of these regional councils in understanding that cultural buildings, either as converged facilities, or co-located in close walking distance with appropriate landscaping give a heart and life to the CBD that would be lacking if the facilities were widely dispersed. The cultural precinct creates a civic identity to these towns, a communal meeting place, develops audiences through cross promotion and encourages participation in the arts. It also stimulates urban rejuvenation and economic benefits from increased tourism and by attracting new families and skilled professionals looking for a sea/tree change.

The fast growing areas of the north coast require major investment in their cultural infrastructure. For example the Mid North Coast has experienced a 70% population increase over the past 25 years, yet there is no mention of plans for a cultural precinct in the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy from the Department of Planning. There is only a reference to cultural heritage. Coffs Harbour, designated a major regional centre in this document, with a population of 70,000, has an inadequate theatre with only 242 seats, an interim gallery/library, an interim regional gallery with a part time staff member and a desperate need for a purpose built building to house the regional conservatorium.

The far South Coast is in a similar situation. There is a regional gallery in Bega, a number of commercial art galleries, and the closest performance space is in Nowra. Even the branch libraries in the Bega Valley Shire have been threatened with closure and are currently operating only 4 days a week. There is a strong argument for investing in cultural precincts in the major regional towns across the state. The increased arts and cultural capacity in these towns can provide outreach services to the smaller surrounding villages and hamlets. The people living in these communities already access government, health, education and retail services in the regional centre.

In addition, assistance is needed for smaller communities to refurbish their community halls and heritage buildings to enable arts and cultural activities to take place at this more local level. The examples quoted previously in Cootamundra and Coolamon as well as through the New England/North West region show how smaller regional communities with some basic infrastructure in place can develop cultural precincts in their town centre to develop participation in arts and cultural activities.

ACCESSIBILITY OF CULTURAL AND ARTS EDUCATION.

Arts and cultural education programs are delivered in NSW over a number of levels. The major education provider is the Dept of Education and Training with two primary funding streams through school education and TAFE. There is a continuation of the pattern of good to excellent resources in the eastern parts of the state that significantly diminish as you travel further west. Access to face to face arts and cultural education is driven by cost imperatives. Economies of scale make it more cost effective to deliver courses to larger groups in regional centres. The loss of a specialist teacher in a small community not only impacts on the educational opportunities for the students, but the town band, concert programs and other community arts activities are also affected. In one small town the loss of the music teacher cost it its doctor who wanted his children to have the same cultural advantages of city children.

Despite having arts and cultural subjects in the curriculum for school children, the availability and skills levels of specialist teachers determines the quality of these programs.

TAFE institutes offer accredited training at Certificate and Diploma levels in diverse range of arts and media courses such ceramics, fine arts, visual arts, multimedia, photo-imaging, design, screen and contemporary craft. Some offer pathways to University degrees. However, there is a growing trend for regional TAFE institutes to focus on 'vocational' courses regarding arts courses as 'recreational' and therefore reducing the number of courses being offered. For example Cooma, a regional centre has a TAFE campus which is currently offering its final year of a Certificate 4 in visual arts. With the closure of the art department there will be no access to art and cultural education in the Snowy River or Cooma Monaro Shires.

Community Colleges and Regional Conservatoriums are also funded through DET, but through the Strategic Projects Division. Regional conservatoriums are facing funding challenges and there is demand for a new conservatorium to service the fast growing LGAs of Kempsey, Hastings, Greater Taree and Great Lakes. There is no music education apart from private studio teachers between Coffs Harbour and Newcastle.

Community Colleges offer arts courses, mainly at a hobbyist level, but still provide a valuable educational resource in country areas. They are also facing funding challenges and closing down in a number of places.

Arts and cultural education providers need to come up with new ways of servicing remote communities, either by introducing a circuit for specialist teachers to regularly travel to remote communities or to utilise web conference technology to stream interactive educational programs.

Arts organisations are also part of the educational programs in regional NSW. Grants are available for professional artists to act as mentors or to deliver workshops and seminars. There could be greater support for public programs and outreach to satellite communities surrounding regional centres, perhaps in tandem with the mobile libraries program.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES

The economic benefits for a community that has a strong and healthy arts and sector have been well documented in the literature.

In NSW the emergence of creative industries in regional areas has been documented by Cathy Henkel in her report on screen and creative industries in the Northern Rivers region (*Imagining the Future 2, 2006*). This report has led to the foundation of a creative industries development consortium of arts, business, education and regional development agencies to build a sustainable regional economy on an industry that has low environmental impact and builds on the competitive advantages of the region, the arts and the environment. They are currently developing a Northern Rivers Arts and Creative Industries Strategy to guide future development.

On the other side of the state in Broken Hill, a report compiled by Lisa Andersen and Jane Andrew, *Quality of Light, Quality of Life 2007* examined the arts and cultural industries sector in Broken Hill and towns in the Central Darling Shire. The recommendations included micro-enterprise training for artists in marketing and business training, building and sustaining partnerships between the creative businesses, tourism sector, and all levels of government with interests in economic development, greater investment in marketing and developing cooperative marketing strategies, and greater use and access to new information technology and e-commerce facilities. These recommendations are currently being implemented by West Darling Arts in partnership with the Far Western Development Board.

The other side of the coin for sustainable regional communities is the development of social capital, also described as community well being. A healthy cultural sector is a key component of a community's ability to retain population and services and the social impact in regional communities dealing with drought, bushfires, isolation, changing economic bases and changing demographics is broader than can be simply measured by the number of active participants.

THE ADEQUACY OF THE NSW STATE PLAN AND DESIRABILITY OF A CULTURAL PLAN FOR THE STATE TO MAXIMISE DIVERSITY OF ACCESS, WITH REFERENCE TO THE TOURISM MASTERPLAN AND OTHER RELEVANT PLANNING STRATEGIES.

Programs, projects and activities of the Regional Arts NSW Network deliver more outcomes for the NSW State Plan than just **Priority E8, Environment for Living: More people participating in the arts and cultural activity**. As discussed above the value of the arts in regional areas is more than just a number of active participants. In addition, the stated measures for evaluating the delivery of this priority are seriously flawed due to the complex nature of the arts sector. There is no standard methodology for measuring participation in the cultural sector. There is data available for audience numbers and participants from the acquittals of state and federal arts grants, but community and volunteer managed programs do not report this data. In addition, much of the data that is gathered is not shared across different agencies and there are different motives for collecting data.

The tourism industry collects extensive data to inform the travel and accommodation sectors, but this does not feed back into the collection of arts data. Collection of imperial evidence is problematical for events where there is no admission fee, that is a volunteer managed event, that is funded by non-arts agencies or the private sector. Using ABS statistics to measure increased participation does not give the complete picture of the NSW population's engagement with arts and cultural events.

In addition, the arts and cultural sector in regional NSW contributes substantially to ***Growing Prosperity across NSW, Stronger Rural and Regional Economies Priority P6: Increased business investment in rural and regional NSW*** and ***Rights Respect and Responsibility, Building Harmonious Communities Priority R4: Increased participation and integration in community activities***

The partnership between arts and tourism is also challenged by conflicting priorities. Regional festivals and the professionally managed museums and galleries have greater synchronicity with tourism priorities than the performing arts and community arts events. Museums and galleries have regular opening hours that fit into the concept of 'attractions' used by the tourism sector. Thus the attendance figures at the Western Plains Cultural Centre will be reflected in tourism statistics. Regional festivals such as the Tamworth Country Music Festival or the Byron Bay Writers Festival are well recognised as tourism 'product'. There is potential to further develop regional festivals that attract tourists, but there is a gap in the arts and/or tourism funding programs for seed funding for the establishment of a regional festival.

The Regional Strategies 2006 – 2031, produced by the NSW Department of Planning contain no reference to provision of arts and cultural infrastructure, beyond ensuring that Aboriginal cultural and community values are considered in future local government planning, that existing lists of items of heritage significance are reviewed and included in local environment plans and that cultural heritage is protected. Nowhere do these strategies identify plans for arts and cultural infrastructure in terms of regional urban renewal projects.

Local Government in NSW has a voluntary requirement to produce a cultural plan which is sometimes incorporated as part of the social plan. Rather than develop a state cultural plan, to meet the diversity of regional NSW, this should become part of the essential planning requirements of local government and should be incorporated in regional planning strategies produced by the NSW Dept of Planning.