

Submission
No 38

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

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PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE, LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY CBD

Submission from:

SOUTH WEST ARTS REGIONAL ARTS BOARD

Incorporating Murray, Deniliquin, Conargo, Wakool, Hay, Balranald, Carrathool, Murrumbidgee and Balranald Local government areas.



Brief History of Organisation:

South West Arts Regional Arts Board is the peak body for arts and cultural development in the south west of NSW. Funded by Arts NSW and the 9 local government areas of the region, we have been operating since 1983. Managed by an 11 member community board, the annual program varies in response to the needs within the region as identified by the board and its members.

In a snapshot, South West Arts:

- Is a strong advocate for the benefits of arts and community cultural development, moving between community, local, state and federal government to broker relationships that deliver a broad range of arts opportunities to the local area
- We deliver touring performing and visual arts, host film festivals, community training and skill development workshops and other locally driven arts initiatives.
- We work strategically with local government stakeholders to develop relevant planning and cultural policy within the cultural programs and projects they deliver these include public art, streetscapes, management of art collections and developing cultural infrastructure.
- We undertake community referrals and assistance, providing specific information for community groups eg: finding an artist for a workshop, insurance options, funding advice.
- We promote arts and culture in the region through regular e-bulletins, media releases, newsletters and our webpage.

Snapshot of Region:

- 9 local government areas
- Region Size ~ 81,659km²
- Regions Population ~ 80,569
- 725 km west of Sydney / 437 km north of Melbourne
- Region stretches from Moama in the south to Hillston in the North, Berrigan in the east and Balranald in the west.
- South West Arts covers a vast open area of dispersed villages and towns with a wide distribution of people.
- South West Arts employs 1.9 staff including an Executive Officer, Project officer and Finance officer.
- Based at the Hay Railway Station in Murray Street, Hay NSW, with subsidiary office in Deniliquin.

Growth Trends

The region's growth statistics are varied. In the Murray Shire, Moama boasts the title of the 'fastest growing inland community'. Other shires such as Hay and Carrathool are experiencing significant downturns in growth. Many of the South West's communities are still classified under the "Exceptional Circumstances" title in drought status, and in all likelihood will not recover in the short to medium term. This will see significant challenges in the maintenance and potential growth of these smaller rural communities.

Regional Characteristics

- The South West is a true 'outback' region, remote and isolated. No one community considers itself a part of a provincial city. Geographically the region is spread out, with pockets of villages throughout each local government area.
- Much of the region's working activity is focused on agricultural and rural industries, including rice-growing in the south east and grazing in the north.
- It is difficult to find similarities among the diverse communities across the region, although each is endowed with a few dedicated community development champions and development workers who ensure that communities keep functioning in a time of fluctuating regional priorities and adverse economic circumstances.

Snapshot of Region by size and population

LGA	Population	Size of Area
Balranald	2,938	21,419 sq km
Berrigan	8,148	2,049 sq km
Carathool	3,100	18,976 sq km
Conargo	1,448	3,737 sq km
Deniliquin	8,208	130 sq km
Hay	3,703	11,438 sq km
Murray	5,832	4,328 sq km
Murrumbidgee	2,642	3,408 sq km
Wakool	4,789	7,549 sq km

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The South West Arts region has an significantly low level of professional or community based cultural infrastructure, perhaps one of the lowest in the state, highlighted by the lack of a regional theatre, art gallery or arts education facility.

The low level of professional touring performing and visual art demonstrates this fact, as many minimum standards such as stage size, running metres for visual arts, temperature/moisture control, professional (skilled) staffing.

- **Performing arts**

Drama

With no regional theatre, the region experiences significant challenges in presenting inwards and outwards professional touring performing arts. Outback Theatre for Young People; the only professionally staffed Theatre company in the region, do not have a professional theatre space to work from or present work, the closest being Griffith Regional Theatre outside of the region and some 270km from their Deniliquin base. School gymnasiums (where they exist) are often used for performances in several centres such as Finley, Deniliquin, Hay, Balranald Coleambally and Hillston. Whilst these are venues are moderately adequate, their physical aspect with poor acoustics, is often inflexible to accommodate a variety of performing arts product.

In recent years performing arts tours have included productions by Hothouse Theatre, Mainstreet Theatre, Co_Opera and MonkeyBaa Theatre for Young people, all predominantly chosen for their ability to perform in non-traditional theatre spaces. In the last month, South West Arts were forced to present a childrens theatre performance in a motel conference room; the most suitable in the town of Moama at the time of performance.

Musical theatre

Amateur Community theatre ensembles are active in several communities, usually operating from local government owned community halls. The only group owning their premises; Deniliquin Dramatic Society has recently shut its doors due to deteriorating, unsafe premises.

Local government halls of varying repair, size and functionality are dotted through the region, (see venue audits attached). The most recently developed facility is the Theatre Royal in Balranald with significant funding input from Arts NSW, Regional Partnerships and Balranald Shire and officially opened in the last 18 months. This facility is a shining example of how local, state and national partnerships have enabled a historically significant community asset to be upgraded to the best within the region.

Music

South West Music; the only professionally staffed music organisation in the region operates from within the Deniliquin Town Hall, a historically significant facility that is in serious need of upgrade for music tuition and general community usage. Adequate toilets, seating, heating, cooling are barriers to broad community usage. The Multi-Arts Centre; a converted church hall and church in Deniliquin is highly used precinct that is unsuitable for larger audiences and is cost-prohibitive for some groups.

A network of commercial venues such as Golf Clubs, Services Clubs and sports clubs present commercial product that are usually cost-prohibitive to hire for community organisations.

Dance

No professional dance organisation exists within the region, with private dance tuition being undertaken in local government halls on a commercial basis in Deniliquin only.

- **New media arts**

Radio, digital arts, computer generations

None in the region, other than basic photo manipulation, and IT courses offered at TAFE.

Film

South West Arts undertakes an annual film festival where short films are created and screened by local young people. 'In the Bin' is primarily utilised as all equipment is supplied and operated as part of the buy-in fee.

- **Literary arts – scriptwriting, poetry, prose;**

None in the region- One creative writers group operates in Deniliquin from the local government owned Multi Arts Centre. A strong network of libraries exist within the region, the most recently opened during July in Berrigan and a significant upgrade in Deniliquin.

- **Visual arts – mixed media; painting; printmaking; sculpture.**

No dedicated visual arts creating spaces are present within the region other than general use community halls. 3 community galleries exist in privately rented premises. 1 commercial gallery has recently opened in Hay, with one other in Coleambally. 2 local government owned visual arts spaces are present in Hay (with Shear Outback Museum) and Deniliquin (within the Peppin Heritage Centre Museum and Visitor Information Centre)

- **Cinema**

None in the region. South West Arts has recently presented St Kilda Film Festival in 3 centres in Peppin Heritage Centre Visual arts space, Balranald Theatre Royal, and

Coleambally Golf Club. Most other cinema is presented digitally outdoors with little regularity. Deniliquin Film Society Movie show films once a month in the Community Neighbourhood Centre.

- **Museums**

The region is well represented with community museums across the region with the most significant being Shear Outback-Australian Shearers Hall of Fame in Hay, the only professionally staffed in the region. Ongoing resourcing remains a challenge as local government decreases its role as a primary funding source.

High Need Areas:

Built infrastructure

- Upgrading of key existing Performing and Visual arts facilities that could incorporate multi usage such as visual arts workshop space, meeting rooms, gallery space, dance, music tuition and cinema facilities.
- Expanded use/refitting of existing Libraries to encompass broader cultural activity.
- Arts Education Infrastructure-TAFE, University and upgrading of South West Music to Regional Conservatorium status.
- Financially viable and visible office space for the 3 professionally staffed cultural organisations within the region.

Human and organisational infrastructure:

- Regional Arts Boards and associated staff, currently challenged by the incredibly large geographical area and large number of shires and lack of regional theatre and gallery
- Regional museum officer
- Programs that support accessibility to regional touring
- Support for arts related Events and Festivals

With specific regard to the Public Works Committee Inquiry

1. Issues of public and private funding and allocation of resources

The South West Arts region has highly limited opportunities to access private sector support to develop the funding base required to build or refurbish cultural facilities. The ongoing drought has had significant financial impacts on local government income as well as broader town economies' capacity to generate capital, making it nearly impossible to argue for local funds to be directed towards cultural infrastructure.

The only significant cultural infrastructure upgrade in the region that benefited from the Federal Government's Regional Partnerships program and the Arts NSW Capital Infrastructure Fund/ NSW Library Fund, is the Theatre Royal in Balranald & the Community Library Facility in Hay

We look forward to the potentially positive outcomes for infrastructure funding in relation to the new Regional & Community Infrastructure Fund announced by the Federal Government, particularly for small regional communities such as ours. South West Arts will be contributing to the consultations in relation to this new funding program and the establishment of Regional Development Australia.

Whilst the Arts NSW's Capital Infrastructure Program provides a much needed source of funds, it is limited in its total pool of funds, and is challenging to access when competing against large regional institutions. Small and financially challenged councils are always challenged by the dollar for dollar funding ratio. A 75/25 ratio would be much more accessible for councils within the south west. The current ratio often completely prevents councils moving ahead with upgrades.

2. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life

The cultural infrastructure within the South West Region, all bar two built facilities- Theatre Royal in Balranald and Shear Outback in Hay are grossly inadequate for the desired cultural activity strongly identified by local communities. Current activity is constantly compromised by the physical limitations of current infrastructure and will only continue to do so into the future. See high need list in first section.

3. The desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to create hubs

South West Arts strongly endorses the co-location of all cultural facilities where appropriate to create a focus for activity, central pool of volunteers and cross fertilisation of creative expertise. The South West Arts region suffers from a lack of a central focus from which to tour visual or performing arts in particular. The only three professionally staffed cultural organisations within the region would greatly benefit from being based within a 'hub' such as this.

4. Accessibility of cultural and arts education

The South West Arts region has very limited access to arts and cultural education such as:

1. DET- Primary/Secondary school-Very few dedicated dance, drama and visual arts teachers within the region.
2. TAFE and Community Education – rarely with cultural based courses

3. Regional Music Organisation-funded by DET- minimally funded to cover part time staff and has difficulty attracting professional music skills to the region but with high demand for music tuition throughout the entire region.
4. No local university

5. Economic impacts on communities

Cultural infrastructure development will continue to decline within the South West region in line with the agricultural fortune if significant measures are not taken to make funding more accessible to our local governments and community groups.

Arts and cultural activity is an effective tool to help combat the oppressive effects that serial drought can cause on individuals as well as communities. It is crucial that our communities remain strong, and the arts has always been a way to bring isolated communities together to express their real issues, both locally as well as more broadly to a wider state and national audience.

Poor cultural infrastructure also contributes to population drift to larger regional centres, particularly by young people and young families, as well as creating another hurdle to attract a skilled workforce to the local region.

High quality cultural infrastructure helps support the social fabric of towns.

6. 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 Master Plan and other relevant planning strategies

The South West Arts Business Plan works mainly in line with Goal E8 of the State plan, but recognises the much broader benefits of cultural development through social, economic and cultural tourism development. We are very willing to assist in the development of a NSW cultural plan that includes tourism and other relevant aspects of the state government service delivery.

7. Any Other Relevant Matters:

Other relevant matters include:

- The support and cultivation of volunteer related support services and operational models that support community activity without the burden of meeting governance requirements.
- The need to preserve buildings and facilities that have heritage value, often owned by shires without the necessary reserves to maintain or upgrade. Funding could be directed to upgrade these facilities so they are eco friendly (energy & water efficient) which in turn could encourage the broader community to adopt eco friendly initiatives.
- 1 of 9 contributing shires have an adopted and implemented Cultural Plan.

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