

Submission
No 11

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

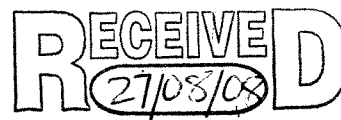
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Arts Mid North Coast Inc

Submission to the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales Public Works Committee

Inquiry into the development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD

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



Background

Arts Mid North Coast is a Regional Arts Board located in the Mid North Coast region of NSW covering the local government areas of **Great Lakes, Greater Taree, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour**. This area has approximately 290,000 in population, one of the highest growth rates in regional Australia, the highest regional Aboriginal population in the state and according to professor Tony Vinson, a very high level of social and economic disadvantage.

Arts Mid North Coast was established in 1996 as a Regional Arts Development Program and as an independent Regional Arts Board in 1999. Arts Mid North Coast is funded in partnership between the NSW Department of Arts Sports and Recreation (Arts NSW Division) and the seven Local Government Councils that constitute the Mid North Coast region.

Arts Mid North Coast's Vision:

A region with a vibrant, innovative and skilled arts community that reflects the regional culture and natural heritage in the various art forms, community arts and creative industries on the Mid North Coast

Arts Mid North Coast's Mission:

Arts Mid North Coast aims to engage with all relevant sectors of the regional community to promote, facilitate and advocate for excellence in arts and cultural development across the Mid North Coast region.

Arts Mid North Coast works with local, state and federal government and communities across the Mid North Coast to assist cultural infrastructure development. This involves both 'bricks and mortar' and the development of ephemeral infrastructure such as networks and creative industry associations, as one of six key objectives in our Strategic Plan.

Introduction

Arts and cultural development generally, and the allocation of significant resources to this sector, is essential to assist the development of vibrant, creative and sustainable communities. It is also essential in high growth, regional areas like the Mid North Coast (also with a high aged population) to retain our young people and to attract a younger demographic to the area to sustain regional growth and development.

With respect to arts and cultural infrastructure, the Mid North Coast has new and older venues, often developed through collaboration between the community and local, state and federal funding bodies, (some examples are listed below).

Councils have also, in some cases, provided funds to support a person who, within their job description, directly or indirectly manage the operations of the facility (eg Libraries, Regional Galleries etc). It is imperative that these venues remain functioning through professional or well resourced volunteer

management and can access expertise and affordable, diverse, touring product, both of a visual arts and performing arts nature.

Arts Mid North Coast has worked with councils and communities in the development of venues in the region capable of presenting local and touring performing arts, amongst other cultural activities, including festivals and events, local and regional exhibitions, local and regional productions and performances, workshops, seminars and networking industry or community based forums.

Local Government owned public venues in the Mid North Coast include (but not limited to):

- The Jetty Memorial Theatre
- The Bellingen Memorial Hall and Regional Cinema
- The Bowraville Theatre and Regional Cinema
- The Bandbox Theatre
- The Port Macquarie-Hastings GlassHouse Arts Conference and Entertainment Centre
- The Manning Entertainment Centre
- The Tuncurry Memorial Hall
- The Tea Gardens Arts and Crafts centre
- The Manning Regional Gallery
- The Hastings Regional Gallery
- The Gladstone Gallery
- The Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery
- 28 Museums
- 23 regional and branch libraries
- Numerous School of Arts facilities

Community based owned and rented infrastructure is also a significant component of regional arts and cultural infrastructure

The venue operators are communicating regionally through a performing arts and exhibitions touring network and liaising on upcoming tours and exhibitions. The issues raised have related to their ability to access affordable high quality touring shows; questions concerning the absence of Railway Street Theatre Company touring shows over the past two years; the need for an overall strategy regarding access in regional areas to professional touring performing arts productions; visual arts and crafts exhibitions, and the lack of co-ordinated support for smaller venues involved in presenting local and touring products.

Arts Mid North Coast is concerned that, without a clear understanding by government about the needs of the regional communities in regard to performing arts and visual arts touring, and without the development of a resourced strategy to respond to these needs, the extraordinary investment of time, money and volunteer hours contributed by councils and communities into facilities that are designed to provide access to touring and cultural activities, will be wasted.

Arts and Cultural Infrastructure needs on the Mid North Coast

We believe that regional arts and cultural infrastructure in the Mid North Coast fall into two main categories:

1. Built infrastructure, such as:

- Performing arts facilities eg Theatres, Performing Arts Centres, Music Venues, Stages etc
- Galleries
- Museums
- Council and volunteer run cinemas
- Libraries
- Indigenous Arts and Cultural Centres
- New technology centres (new media)
- Arts and Cultural Teaching related infrastructure eg DET/TAFE related, University related and particularly Regional Conservatoriums

- Festivals and Events related infrastructure
- Community based arts workshop spaces and artists studios
- Creative Industries related infrastructure eg Incubator spaces and support services for new and emerging businesses

2. Human and organisational infrastructure, such as

- Regional Arts Boards and associated staff
- Regional museum officers
- Regional gallery resources and staff
- Programs that support accessibility to regional touring
- Creative industry related Associations
- Related Regional Networks and Regional Peaks
- Support for arts related Events and Festivals

In regard to the Public Works Committee Inquiry

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

Arts Mid North Coast believes that regional NSW currently has limited access to public and private funding of any substantial nature for arts and cultural infrastructure.

The Mid North Coast has a very limited industry base (mostly small to medium businesses) and a corresponding difficulty in access to private investment, philanthropy, sponsorship or other private sector support for the arts.

In recent years the previous Federal Government's Regional Partnerships program (and its predecessor the Regional Solutions Program) provided a substantial amount of funding for cultural infrastructure in the Mid North Coast region.

It is unfortunate that the Regional Partnerships program received such bad press, primarily due to the way in which it was distributed (claims of political bias) rather than the need for the program or something similar. The limited access to regional infrastructure funds in the first year of the new government has been a substantial issue and a submission has recently been lodged by Arts Mid North Coast regarding the need and structure of the Federal Governments approach to Regional Development Australia, part of Minister Albanese's portfolio.

At the state level, Arts NSW's Capital Infrastructure Program has provided a much-needed source of cultural infrastructure funds to partner local government and Regional Partnerships funds.

It is unfortunate that:

1. The total pool of available funds within this vote is so limited;
2. That the maximum available (within funding round) for any given project has been \$250,000 on a dollar for dollar basis. The average grant is considerably less than \$100,000;
3. That Local Government Councils in high growth areas and small Local Government Council's aren't eligible for up to a 75% x 25% split (or some other financial break) that recognises their limited ability to fund this sort of infrastructure within the context of a variety of other competing demands;
4. That there are many examples in this region where Local Government and the community has had to provide the full costs associated with the construction of arts and culturally related infrastructure.
5. That there are very limited alternatives at the state level for access to arts and culturally related infrastructure funding.

Recommendation 1: That consideration be given to a substantial increase in the funds associated with Arts NSW Capital Infrastructure Program.

Recommendation 2: That Arts NSW provides a higher proportion of funds to Councils in high growth areas or with populations under a designated population;

Recommendation 3: That the State Government recognise the major contribution to regional economies through the provision of cultural infrastructure and consider developing other options for funding arts and culturally related infrastructure in the regions.

2. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life

In the Mid North Coast region of NSW, the provision of cultural infrastructure has not been able to keep pace with the high growth rates and the increasing demands that this kind of population increase creates.

A good example of this is the Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium, currently renting space in a commercial retail precinct and limited in growth, despite the demand for its services, due to infrastructure limitations. This Conservatorium has lobbied the State Government for some considerable period seeking a significant allocation of funds to address this crisis.

Another example involves the GlassHouse Arts Conference and Entertainment Centre in Port Macquarie. This excellent facility is extremely well designed and is eminently suitable to cater for the cultural needs of the Port Macquarie and surrounding areas for the foreseeable future. Apart from a very minimal state government contribution, this facility is almost entirely funded by the Council, associated Section 94 contributions and Council loans.

It is also of note that there is no Indigenous Keeping Place or major Indigenous Cultural Centre on the Mid North Coast, an area with the highest regional population of Indigenous people in the state.

Further to this, the high growth in the Creative Industries across the Mid North Coast has created increasing demand on existing infrastructure and as a key developing industry sector (identified at the local, regional, state and federal levels) requires a significant injection of cultural infrastructure funds so that the industry can grow into the future.

It is essential that, if the basic tenets are accepted: that cultural development is as essential for successful, functioning communities (as well as the social, economic and environmental), that regional communities are properly resourced for the provision of cultural infrastructure.

Recommendation 4: That the State Government consider the development of a specific regional cultural infrastructure fund.

Recommendation 5: That the State Government provide a Cultural Infrastructure Fund exclusively for access by Local Government.

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

Arts Mid North Coast would endorse the co-location of cultural and creative industry related facilities in regional centres to create regional hubs and cultural nodes for the development of creative communities.

The Port Macquarie GlassHouse Arts Conference and Entertainment Centre is again a best practice example of this in our region. The facility will have a major state of the art performing arts centre, a smaller 150 seat theatre space (providing for local/regional as well as major touring product); a three story Regional Gallery, Museum interpretive space, display of convict ruins, conference facilities as well as facility for restaurant and private enterprise development. All of this located in the CBD area of Port Macquarie, projected to inject millions of dollars into the local economy.

In Coffs Harbour (a local government area approaching 70,000 pop) the 600 seat Civic Centre was demolished in the mid 90's to make way for a car park. No replacement facility has been constructed to date

however, Coffs Harbour City Council has floated a concept plan for a co-location of cultural facilities, including a 650 seat Performing Arts Centre, new Regional Gallery, Regional Library and Regional Museum on Brielsford Park, a flat walk from the main CBD area of Coffs Harbour. The projected costs of this development are largely beyond the capacity of the Council to fund and without State and Federal Government support, this concept will remain just a concept.

Recommendation 5: That the State Government support the creation of cultural hubs in larger regional centres with due consideration for the provision of multi-purpose cultural facilities in smaller rural towns and villages.

4. Accessibility of cultural and arts education

In the Mid North Coast there are currently four tiers of access to arts and cultural education:

1. DET curriculum for primary/high school students (often with limited facilities)
2. Adult and Community Ed or Community Colleges and Regional Conservatoriums (supported by DET) providing short, fee for service, often accredited programs in the arts and culturally related education;
3. North Coast TAFE
4. Southern Cross University

Although the North Coast TAFE provides a number of arts based programs from multiple outlets, there are limited University level programs available on the Mid North Coast (mainly available from the Lismore Campus of SCU) with the exception of Multi-Media and a distance ed program: Bachelor of Arts (with some creative writing component).

Of great concern and priority at present is the lack of a Regional Conservatorium to provide access to quality, accredited music educations and associated programs for the Port Macquarie-Hastings, Greater Taree and Great Lakes Local Government Areas. Given the documented population growth, high level of music related activity and demand for these services, and the lack of a cohesive Regional Conservatorium Strategy in this state, this needs to be addressed in the short-term.

It also needs to be stressed that there is very limited access to public transport in this region, often requiring long distance travel and expense to attend courses.

Recommendation 6: State Government to develop a needs and growth related strategy for the provision of Regional Conservatoriums in this state.

Recommendation 7: Provide infrastructure funding for the Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium and infrastructure and recurrent funding for 'Conservatorium Mid North Coast Inc'

5. Economic impacts on communities

The provision and access to arts and cultural infrastructure (or the lack of it) has a major impact on the economies of regional centres and the associated satellite towns and villages. Although there is some major cultural infrastructure in the Mid North Coast, due to high growth rates and high arts demand, this has not kept pace with need.

This then impedes the various sectors of the Creative Industries opportunities for growth and development as cultural infrastructure provides major opportunities for employment, sale of product, as well as a significant contribution to cultural tourism.

Creative Industries have been identified as a key industry area of growth and development on the Mid North Coast. Initiatives in this sector require a sound research base from which to grow, and funding and other support for related infrastructure and creative industry initiatives.

Aboriginal cultural enterprise specifically has great potential in this region and requires major government support.

Recommendation 8: State Government to consider increase support for Creative Industry related infrastructure, research and development.

Recommendation 9: State Government to consider the development of a specific Indigenous related, cultural infrastructure and enterprise fund.

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

In terms of the Arts, the key performance indicator is E8 essentially around participation. Although this is important, there are many other aspects of arts and cultural/creative industry development that need to be considered that fall into many other areas of the State Plan and the associated portfolio areas listed as the 'Drivers'. These areas include (but are not limited to):

- Creative Industry development (Dept of State and Regional Development);
- Cultural Tourism (Tourism NSW)
- Festivals and Events Development (DSRD/Tourism NSW)
- Indigenous Cultural and Enterprise Development (Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Dept of Environment and Conservation: National Parks and Wildlife Service amongst others)
- Arts and Culturally related Education (Dept of Education and Training)
- etc

Recommendation 10: Arts Mid North Coast would strongly support the development of an 'integrated' state cultural plan to be considered in collaboration with the current NSW State Plan and the individual plans of other related State Government portfolio areas.

7. Any Other Relevant Matters:

Other relevant matters include:

- The provision of infrastructure for major Festivals and Events in the region
- The provision of volunteer related infrastructure and associated support services
- The need to engage the NSW Department of Lands that own a significant amount of community arts and other arts related infrastructure in the regions
- The need to preserve buildings and facilities that have heritage value (often under considerable pressure from developers)

Recommendation Summary:

Recommendation 1: That consideration be given to a substantial increase in the funds associated with Arts NSW Capital Infrastructure Program.

Recommendation 2: That Arts NSW provides a higher proportion of funds to Councils in high growth areas or with populations under a designated population;

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25th August 2008

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