

Submission
No 30

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

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Ms Heidi Kunz (HD:FA)
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Ms. Catherine Watson

27 August 2008

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

Dear Ms. Watson

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

Thank you for the opportunity of addressing cultural infrastructure in regional NSW. The following comments are submitted for your consideration

Past / Present / Future Funding patterns for Cultural Infrastructure / Venues / production / promotion

PAST – In the 1980's and 1990's the Cooma TAFE art department and fashion courses were run to full capacity. These popular courses were gradually downgraded because they were considered non-vocational. The TAFE facilities are fully equipped and suited to a wide variety of art disciplines from ceramics to print making. The courses were taught by professional practicing artists. Most production of art was done at TAFE. Monaro Art Group and Monaro Community College (then known as Monaro Continuing Education Group) organized extra workshops with visiting experts.

The Snowy Monaro Arts Council was established as early as 1950, with the aim of delivering high quality touring performances in both music and theatre. Cooma Little Theatre was also established in the 1950's

In the past, Council relegated most art-related issues to the Raglan Gallery and Cultural Centre. The secretary of the Raglan received information from Council and the expectation was that the Raglan would deal with it. This changed a little when Katrin Hackney (Deputy Mayor) was elected to Council, with Katrin having more input. Council also gave a few donations to arts prizes when requested.

In 2000, South East Arts Region (SEAR) was established in south-eastern NSW, as part of Regional Arts NSW, and Council contributes an annual fee to this organization. SEAR was expected to take over art- and cultural-related activities. While SEAR was

very active in the coastal regions, the high country shires were left behind. A Project Officer was appointed to the Monaro Region and Cooma is currently having a cultural plan written and many more arts projects are being funded, with the support of SEAR.

- **Past funding** – TAFE and individual groups - some grants were applied for by individuals, some participants paid their way and tutors often donated their time.
- **Past venues** – TAFE art rooms, The Raglan Gallery and Cooma Little Theatre are all well-established venues that are sustained predominantly through self-funding. Suitable venues for workshops and concerts were at times difficult to find.
- **Past production** – individual organizations produced what they needed with little outside support. Cooma commissioned a Mosaic Time-walk, which still serves as a major tourist attraction.
- **Past Promotion** – again, mainly individual groups with some help from Council's Visitors Centre

PRESENT – Today Council is more aware of Art and Cultural issues. The failed attempt to establish a Regional Gallery on the Raglan site helped Councillors appreciate the importance of the Arts to a community and the social and economic benefits of a healthy cultural identity. There is still very little arts infrastructure. The Raglan Gallery, Cooma Little Theatre and the TAFE art rooms are the main available venues, but their use is sometimes limited and expensive.

- **Present funding** – Council contributes to SEAR and donates to organisations when requested. The Project Officer appointed by SEAR for CMSC and SRSC is supported with office space and facilities. Many of the organizations have applied and been successful in receiving funding through the traditional arts funding at both Federal and State levels.
- **Present venues** – TAFE, Cooma Little Theatre, the Library and Raglan Gallery are still really the only venues. TAFE will continue to offer limited art courses next year; while the Ceramic department will be closed. The Monaro Art Group hires the TAFE art room but the rate is very expensive. The Raglan has adequate display areas but no workroom facilities. They are discussing the possibility of developing work areas now that the Regional Gallery development is not going ahead. Cooma Little Theatre is a dated yet successful facility and many other musical performances are held in various church halls. The Cooma Correctional Centre Museum is operated and maintained by inmates and is highly successful rehabilitative project.
- **Present production** – these are generally organised by the individual organisations
- **Present promotions** – these are partly organised by SEAR in conjunction with the Cooma Visitors Centre both of which have web-based calendars, which support art and cultural activities. Individual organisations do their own promotion with the support of local media, which usually has to be paid for by the organisations.
- **FUTURE** –
 - Other than the TAFE art room, with all its uncertainties, there is no suitable community workspace for producing artworks.
 - The Raglan Gallery is possibly planning to develop such an area.
 - As a result of preliminary community consultation for the Cooma-Monaro Shire Council cultural plan, there is the consensus for a central community

cultural centre, which could incorporate the library, performance centre and exhibition space.

- **Future funding** –
 - Continued support for SEAR is essential.
 - Grant funding is available through traditional arts funding sources and arts organisations will continue to seek funding for art and cultural projects in the region.
 - Further skills development is necessary for groups to help write grant application and continue to seek funding from various government sources. Cooma's Cultural Plan will give a clearer, targeted direction, which will focus funding opportunities.
 - Individual groups and businesses will continue to help with funding.
- **Future venues** –
 - The Raglan's plan for work space should be supported, as should the upgrading of the library.
 - A Cultural Centre that could include spaces for a theatre and a museum as well as library and Regional Gallery.
 - Council's Multifunction Centre is much under-utilized and this should be addressed.
 - The Cooma Correctional Centre will continue to operate and become a highly-visited museum and gallery outlet.
 - Cooma Little Theatre will continue to operate with plans to rebuild a modern theatre in the future.
- **Future production** – It would be great to employ a Cultural Officer to support community groups in this role. However, at this stage it is still mainly the responsibility of individual organisations.
- **Future promotion** – Cooma is the Regional Service Centre. If Council develops into the Cultural Hub of the district, it would attract many economic benefits. We have a stable population of artists and good infrastructure would enhance further cultural tourism.

Funding options / infrastructure

PRESENT – Most cultural organisations in our shire are self-funded by their activities and sometimes seek funding through arts grants. The Raglan does receive some maintenance funding, as it is a Council building. The Monaro Art Group receives financial support in the form of subsidized rent on their gallery space. With a SEAR project officer now located in council many arts organisations are coming together to network and seeking funding with help of SEAR.

FUTURE - Infrastructure needed is a community artwork space, this could be located at the Raglan. A Cultural Centre incorporating a regional gallery, library, museum, meeting rooms, etc, would be a great asset for the community. Funding options would include grant funding from State and Federal Governments, fund raising activities by cultural organisations, contributions by business and the community.

Equitable spread of arts funding across regional / rural NSW

The closure of the TAFE art department and the dissolving of Monaro Continuing Education courses have a much bigger impact on the rural and regional population because alternatives are not usually found within a reasonable distance. These courses have an important role in the health and well-being of a rural population. There are no public transport options, which restrict movement through the region. As does the increased cost of petrol. Audience development is a continual challenge with smaller populations. It costs more to attract experts into regional areas. Infrastructure is often limited and there are not as many available to choose from. All small halls in the region are in need of upgrading to become functional facilities. Therefore, equitable funding for regional and rural areas is essential.

Equitable infrastructure

Infrastructure needs to be more versatile and limited facilities can add pressure when venues cater for many dissimilar uses.

Plans for large scale infrastructure outside Sydney

Infrastructure that is regional and versatile is a must in regional and rural areas. Our regional library is another example. Smaller rural populations add pressure to development and continued maintenance of these facilities.

Implications / availability and priority of cultural infrastructure funding / regional strategies.

Smaller populations potentially = smaller audiences. If appropriate infrastructure is not available then some opportunities for high quality performances and exhibitions are limited, this limits educational opportunities as well. The Cultural Plan will clarify what our shire needs and will assist with funding availability. Our priority should be to support the organisations we have and to work towards better infrastructure such as a Cultural Centre.

Audit of Cultural venues / infrastructure outside metropolitan Sydney.

SEAR's SEARch Map is an audit of what was available a few years ago. While it is dated, it is still a very valuable guide to what infrastructure, galleries, artists, etc exist in the region. Cooma's Cultural Plan will also clarify what infrastructure our shire has and what is needed. There are a number of needs that will be identified.

Support to ensure importance of art & cultural activities in lives of people, taking local identity into regional centre planning

Art is a very valuable and 'safe' way to address community issues. Examples of projects in the region which have been funded through government departments and are community projects are:

- the 'Beyond Roundabouts' film and photographic exhibition featuring young parents on the Monaro;
- The Threatened Species project comprised of an exhibition and development of a children's book, highlighting the endangered flora and fauna of the region;

- a touring performance of ‘Farmer will Swap Wife for Combine Harvester’, which addresses issues such as domestic violence, rural depression and isolation in a comical but effective way.

Creative initiatives can address social issues and are of benefit to rural and regional communities where people are isolated by drought, depression, distance and other issues. Non-vocational courses often provide benefits to people that do not fit course criteria and expected outcomes. Local identity develops when people work together on cultural and community projects for the benefit of all the broader community. Diversity of venues and activities makes a community a vibrant place to live in and visit, thus enhancing cultural tourism potential as well.

Arts NSW support

Funding for Arts NSW is under pressure but is an essential area that helps to provide regional and rural communities with the financial resources in order that they can develop their own community art and cultural projects and further develop a sense of place. The projects highlighted have benefited from funding made available by The Australia Arts Council and Regional Arts Fund as well as receiving funding from FRR and SRCMA. While our communities do much to help themselves, grant funding for projects eases the burden and results in high quality art and cultural project with lasting results.

Integrated cultural planning for infrastructure development.

Cooma’s Cultural Plan and CBD plan are necessary to achieve integrated results. There is a desire for a cultural precinct that includes a theatre, regional gallery, museum, library, new council chambers and community meeting rooms. The Raglan gallery should continue as a community gallery and workspace. The Multifunction Centre is an under-utilized facility. Council is currently exploring possible locations for this precinct within the Cooma CBD. An example is the old Civic Centre, which had the best acoustics in town before it was sold and redesigned. Careful planning and detailed contracts are important for projects.

Effectiveness of Cultural Accords / partnerships / cultural life

Potentially, SEAR can develop these accords with neighboring council areas. This has been slow to develop. Council’s Cultural Plan will also give good direction. Public art will enhance the sense of place of the community. Social networks in our region are strong and many cultural groups already support each other and work together regularly.

Federal Funding to Local Councils - directly or through Arts NSW

Where it comes from is not as important as how much there is and what conditions are attached. Arts funding has not increased over last the few years. The whole community benefits from an active art and cultural community in particular the emotional health especially when other pressures of drought, isolation, etc play a part. Better infrastructure helps cultural communities grow and local government has very limited resources for these development needs.

Private sector role in funding and infrastructure outside Sydney Metropolitan area

Private sector funding is very valuable and must be sourced. Most businesses in small communities are constantly asked to support every organisation in town and are usually very generous, so exploring private funding opportunities elsewhere can get results.

In conclusion -

This Council would like to explore all avenues for funding arrangements with the NSW Government to enhance and further develop Arts & Culture Infrastructure in Cooma. State Government funding is essential to reduce the economic impact on smaller communities, whilst still providing accessibility and diversity of cultural and arts education and venues to regional areas.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely

**JOHN VUCIC
GENERAL MANAGER**