

Submission  
No 09

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

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27 August 2008

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

Attention: Catherine Watson

**RE: SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY CBD**

Mid-Western Regional Council is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. The following is partly in answer to questions specifically asked in your letter to Council dated 24<sup>th</sup> July.

Mid-Western Regional has a Cultural Plan that was adopted in November 2006. As a consequence of this Plan, Council introduced a Cultural Development Committee as a Section 355 Committee of Council. This Committee draws on the significant experience of local people in the arts and cultural areas and provides some direction and recommendations to Council in the area of cultural development.

Council has some experience with the State grants process. One current project that we are examining is a new Regional Library. Our investigations would suggest that there is very little funding opportunity for an infrastructure project such as this and the maximum available would be up to \$200,000 through the Library Council of NSW's Library Development Grant Program. This is likely to be a \$6-7 million project and a State Government contribution to this of 3% seems inadequate.

In recent times, the concept of convergence appears to be more predominant. While this may be an admirable ideal in larger regional centres, for areas such as Mid-Western it can be impractical. In reality, one significant facility at a time can be developed and with a widely distributed population with only 40% of our community residing in the major population centre, it can be stifling for the arts and cultural development of other parts of the region for funding opportunities to be focused on convergent facilities.

Council spends a limited amount on arts and cultural facilities but strongly supports local organisations and groups through our small grants programs. For 2008/09, Council will spend approximately \$795,000 on its library service. Of this, \$84,000 (10.5%) will come from the State Library subsidy and grants. Council also supports the Kandos Bicentennial Museum and undertook significant work in replacing the ceiling and the lighting in the main display room. The cost of this work was approximately \$30,000.

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Council does not employ an arts or cultural officer or have dedicated staffing for arts and cultural development. The need for this staffing is highlighted in Council's Cultural Plan and assistance with this from the State Government is needed.

The Cultural Plan highlighted a number of areas that were of vital importance to the future cultural development of the region and the needs in our community for a range of new and refurbished arts and cultural infrastructure. Mid-Western Regional Council has a number of pressing arts and cultural infrastructure needs, including the lack of an appropriately sized and functional regional library, the lack of a regional art gallery, the lack of an appropriately sized and functional performance space, and the lack of cultural and artistic workshop spaces across the region.

The other aspect to the idea of arts and cultural infrastructure is the idea of a network of people as infrastructure. This is also highlighted in our cultural plan and, while there are many cultural projects, initiatives and activities taking place, there is not a coordinated and focused approach to the sharing of information. The addition of cultural development staff to Council, who can work with the community sharing information, providing advice and guidance and ensuring an overall sense of direction, may therefore improve the arts and cultural infrastructure of the Mid-Western Region.

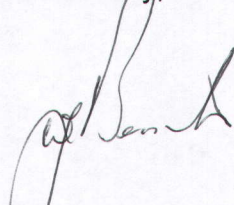
The State Plan calls for an increase in visitation and participation in the arts and cultural activity by 10% by 2016. It also highlights the need to build stronger partnerships between State and local governments to promote and improve access to cultural events. It is hoped that these goals would include rural and regional NSW and that the resourcing and funding to increase and improve cultural facilities and participation is delivered equitably across New South Wales.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of the community and to continue to foster and develop the arts and cultural fabric of our region, greater support is needed from the State Government and the Federal Government. This could be in the form of the following:

- Additional funding for the operation of public library services;
- Additional funding for the development of new arts and cultural infrastructure buildings, such as libraries, galleries, performance spaces and workshop spaces;
- Additional funding for the transformation of existing premises into better equipped libraries, galleries, performance spaces and workshop spaces and
- Funding for cultural development staff.

Mid-Western Regional Council appreciates the opportunity given to make a contribution to this inquiry.

Yours faithfully,



WARWICK BENNETT  
GENERAL MANAGER