

Submission
No 23

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

Organisation: Southern Councils Group
Name: Ms Lesley Scarlett
Position:
Telephone: 02 4232 3200
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The NSW Public Works Committee Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD

Submission by Southern Councils Group

29th August 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Southern Councils Group (SCG) is the peak organization representing Local Government in the Illawarra and South Coast regions. Member Councils include Bega Valley Shire, Eurobodalla Shire, Kiama Municipal, Shellharbour City, Shoalhaven City, Wingecarribee Shire and Wollongong City Councils.

Southern Councils Group maintains a Cultural Partnerships Group, which meets on a regular (quarterly) basis, and has been established since 1998, and has a strong regional presence, also including the adjoining two RADO's. The current group has representatives from all member councils (cultural development and youth workers), the Department of Premiers and Cabinet, Film Illawarra, local theatre companies, University of Wollongong, Illawarra Area Consultative Committee, Department of Education and Training, and local practicing artists. This rich and broad based mix of skills and experience is considered a substantial support for the new RADO role for regional engagement and directions.

NB: The Inquiry timeline for submissions fell between meetings of the SCG Board. SCG will be asked, at its meeting to be held 5th September 2008, to endorse the following submission to the NSW Public Works Committee Inquiry to examine and inquire into the development of an arts and cultural plan for NSW and the alignment of this plan to broad government planning strategies for the development of arts and cultural infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD, including regional areas. Until that time the responses remain the views of the Executive Officer, based on 16 years experience within the region.

RESPONSES

- **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.**

SCG's Cultural Partnerships Group has developed a distinct lack of faith regarding State attitudes to arts and cultural planning and development in this region. Staff of member Councils and representatives of numerous organisations have suspended belief in any justification of current methods of delivery, and there is totally inadequate identification of the matter in the State Plan or its Illawarra SE regional components.

Regional representations, submissions, deputations and delegations have elicited nothing more than requests for further consultations and applications. We organise, hold meetings, minute them, and then these are written up into further submissions, submitted and outcomes awaited. As we have a sophisticated and advanced level of cultural planning and development servicing compared to other regions, our member Councils have not requested the more grass-roots development positions required in other parts of the State. Months later we are informed our applications have been placed in holding patterns, further reviews are announced and we get feedback that we did not represent what the Department believes we need, (ie. the same

one-size fits all model as everywhere else has) despite our applications being what our region requests.

The result is that any cursory glance at the map attached will show a blank hole for regional arts development where the Illawarra sits, while the rest of the State basks in a multicoloured rainbow of Regional Arts Development Boards and staffing resourced by the State Government which we would use to support interconnections with tourism, State Planning initiatives etc.

The following excerpt from SCG's most recent funding application illustrate the linkages that the "forgotten" part of our region sees as desirable.

"The four LGA's of Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven are seeking to jointly employ a RADO. This has been pursued for several years, and the region would greatly benefit from the improved status, coordination and potential influx of funding opportunities which a RADO would stimulate.

It is envisaged that the vital role of the RADO will be to develop regional arts initiatives across a wide spectrum of the arts, improve the foothold in Arts Development, and be backed in these diverse activities by the strength of the skilled board.

The proposed activities of the RADO will underpin regional initiatives that support the NSW State Plan, and its delivery by regional State Agencies and other partners.

All the councils are supportive of the position being based within the Southern Councils office, in Kiama, although some provision for the incumbent to have a peripatetic role may be advantageous at different stages of the development of the role. The range of Regional priorities in which the RADO's role will be to develop and implement are perceived as:

- Film and Multi Media Arts Development, which appears to be a neglected area, but one in which local 'pockets' of expertise have been identified. An example would be the current limited youth radio programs being undertaken with Artstart funding, in Shoalhaven and Wollongong, which, with a broader coordination could be available to a wider section of the regions' youth, and possibly the training materials which will be developed in these projects could be more widely disseminated.

- * Develop systematic regional approaches to applying for arts- cultural funding, assistance and grants from a variety of sources including Arts NSW, Commonwealth Agencies and private foundations, both local, regional and National.

- * Develop cultural industry skills and opportunities to enhance local employment and training, and maximise training opportunities by seeking to maximise opportunities for training in new and emerging cultural education, media industries, in partnership with local educational, arts cultural and relevant industry organisations, to include marketing skills, and potential to link this vital area with the regions expanding tourism industry where appropriate.

- Regional Cultural/Arts Branding and promotion, as there is still little training or enhancement of marketing skills in the region which can so constructively support arts development. This would have the potential to stimulate both a broad range of arts initiatives regionally and also potential funding for this essential and neglected aspect of arts and cultural development.

- Inter-Arts Collaborative Projects, for instance in support at regional level for a variety of festivals and travelling visual arts projects which will provide a better coordination with other similar events in the region, greater regional participation, and allow for increased marketing of local skills on a regional basis.

- Development of a Regional Cultural Plan, which identifies 'gaps' and provides linkages for all regional works, and guides the work of the RADO in collaboration with the existing initiatives.

- Informing the regional plan which is being prepared by the Department of Planning

- Interaction with the two neighbouring RADO positions for the benefit of the entire SCG area.”

- **Issues of public and private funding and allocation of resources;**

What resources? Our region is consistently funded in a piecemeal fashion to partially support individual sectoral interests only, leaving the development of a comprehensive strategic approach, seen as the desirable model by local government, as a voluntary exercise.

- **Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life;**

Local Government is the provider of the majority of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life in regional areas. Please refer to the numerous recent reports on cost-shifting to local government and the ability of local government to maintain, let alone develop, suitable public infrastructure. This said, SCG Member Councils have been proactive in the development of some major new public infrastructure and have plans under their Section 94 Contribution Plans, for further appropriate development as and when the community needs them.

- **The desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to create hubs;**

Yes. Highly desirable.

- **Accessibility of cultural and arts education;**

Basically, places in training facilities in arts and cultural institutions are akin to gold dust and only the most talented, and well resourced applicants stand a chance. SCG has delivered Artstart every second year since inception of the Program, working closely with TAFE on its delivery as is a requirement of the Program. We have never been able to ensure placements of promising students from disadvantaged target groups identified through programs such as Artstart however as the number of places in the region is far too few to meet existing demand in this highly competitive environment.

- **Economic impacts on communities;**

If we had a Regional Arts Development Officer in place SCG could accurately respond to this point, as one of the identified areas we believe that such a position would work on is building and maintaining the close links to our Regional Economic Development Board, Agencies and Tourism initiatives. See excerpt above. In the meantime we simply do not have the resources to keep tabs of these matters accurately.

- **Any other relevant matters.**

See above. SCG is weary from responding, when we receive no tangible outcomes.

SUMMARY

SCG welcomes the current Inquiry but is sceptical of outcomes when it has been seeking to adopt a strategic structured and integrated approach to the development of arts and cultural infrastructure (both “soft” and hard infrastructure) for many years but has received little support from State Government to underpin such initiatives.