

Submission
No 17

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

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Re: Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD

New South Wales is unique in Australia in having a network of nine writers' centres offering literary programs across the state. The centres in regional and rural locations provide the only infrastructure in the field of literature outside metropolitan Sydney. The LitLink network is an excellent model for literature infrastructure in terms of structure, attributes, operations and efficacy. It satisfies all the needs of a cultural and community capital/assets development and delivery program.

The LitLink writers' centres are Booranga Riverina (Wagga Wagga), Broken Hill Regional Writers Centre, Central West Writers Centre (Orange), Hunter Writers Centre (Newcastle), New England Writers Centre (Armidale), Northern Rivers Writers Centre (Byron Bay), NSW Writers Centre (Sydney), South Coast Writers Centre (Wollongong), Varuna - the Writers House (Eleanor Dark Foundation, Katoomba).

LitLink writers' centres fulfill the priorities of the New South Wales State Plan, particularly

- Priority E8: More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity
- Priority R4: Increased participation and integration in community activities
- Priority P6: Increased business investment in rural and regional NSW.

During 2006-2007, LitLink writers' centres received less than \$500 000 from the Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation, but generated more than \$1.8 million through grants, sponsorship and earned income plus over \$300 000 of in-kind support.

Public and private funding and allocation of resources

Provision of public infrastructure is vital for regionally located writers centres. All writers' centres have tight operating budgets, with a critical need for sustained support for operational costs. While LitLink writers' centres are highly successful at attracting funds and revenue for programs and projects, it is very difficult to secure support to meet ongoing operational costs.

Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life

The LitLink network, and the individual writers' centres that make up LitLink, are examples of organisational infrastructure that requires long term commitment to build on successes and to continue to deliver literary programs in rural and regional New South Wales. Without the LitLink network of writers' centres, there would be no literary infrastructure outside the Sydney metropolitan area.

LitLink Writers Centres negotiate individual arrangements for premises. Some are housed in facilities owned by NSW Government, local government, universities, or philanthropic foundations. While some Centres are in excellent locations with security of tenure, other Centres are in regions with a lack of 'bricks and mortar' cultural infrastructure. Including writers' centres in state and local planning for arts and cultural infrastructure is vital to the success of such planning.

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

While some LitLink writers centres have residency programs where a quiet and secluded location is most appropriate, others benefit from a central location in a cultural hub. All LitLink writers' centres work in partnership with cultural, community and educational organisations, often in the context of local government cultural plans, and LitLink writers centres have an important audience development role, attracting visitors to cultural precincts. Locating Centres in cultural hubs, where appropriate, is highly desirable.

Accessibility of cultural and arts education

LitLink Writers Centres are located all over New South Wales. At present, LitLink writers centres are the only infrastructure supporting Australian literature outside the Sydney metropolitan area, and they play a vital role in formal and informal educational opportunities. Many LitLink writers' centres have formed partnerships with Universities, schools and libraries to extend the capabilities of these institutions, using the expertise and experience of writers' centres to provide high quality literary programs that could not otherwise be made available.



Economic impacts on communities

As noted above, LitLink writers' centres are proven economic generators, with an investment by Arts NSW of less than five hundred thousand dollars across the whole network attracting over \$2 million in cash and in-kind support through grants, sponsorship and earned income.

LitLink writers centres have direct economic impact on regional communities. They attract funds that are spent in local communities, support local writers in professional and career development, and attract audiences to cultural precincts that are shared by retail and hospitality sector businesses. Supporting regional writers in telling the unique stories of regional Australia, also has long-term outcomes in place-making and developing unique regional identities.

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

Many regional communities do not have adequate infrastructure in place to exploit the potential that arts and cultural activity offers for economic development, place-making (with associated benefits for tourism) and community development.

While many rural and regional communities have been successful in raising funds and lobbying for development of cultural infrastructure, a state-wide plan for arts and cultural infrastructure in rural and regional NSW, developed in consultation with rural and regional arts organisations, local government and local communities has the potential to identify gaps in existing resources, to foster cooperation amongst local government areas in maximising the benefits of resources across a region, and in improving the integration of other services, such as transport, with cultural infrastructure.

LitLink writers centres play a key role in regional and rural communities, and it is critical that LitLink is included in arts and cultural planning for New South Wales.

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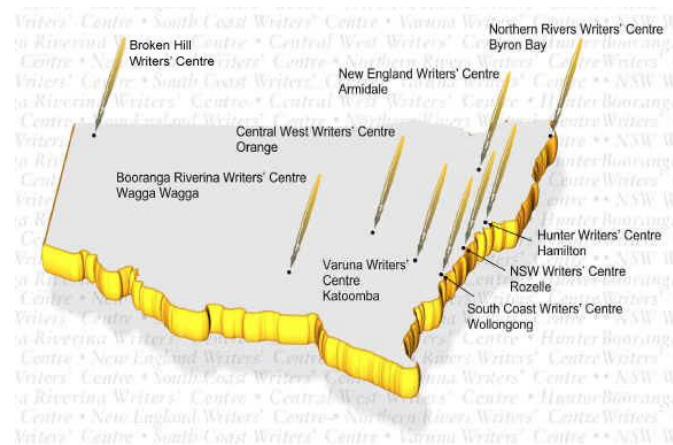
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Booranga Riverina
Writers Centre

