

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

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

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**At Lismore on Friday 27 February 2009**

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**The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.**

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**PRESENT**

Mr N. Khoshaba (Chair)

Mr A. J. Ashton  
Ms M. T. Andrews  
Mr C. A. Baumann  
Mrs D. E. Fardell  
Mr G. E. McBride  
Mr D. A. Page

**PAUL CLARK**, Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University, P.O. Box 157, Lismore, P.O. Box 517, Lismore,

**ROS DERRETT OAM**, Office of Regional Engagement, Southern Cross University, and

**JAN DAVIS**, Associate Professor and Artist, Southern Cross University, P.O. Box 157, Lismore, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I welcome representatives of the Southern Cross University. I thank you for appearing today before the Public Works Committee Inquiry into Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a copy of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders 291, 292 and 293, which relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

**Professor CLARK:** Yes.

**Dr DERRETT:** Yes.

**Ms DAVIS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Could you restate your full name, your occupation, a business or private address for the Committee, and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

**Professor CLARK:** I am Professor Paul Clark. I am the Vice-Chancellor of Southern Cross University, and I appear in that capacity.

**Ms DAVIS:** I am Associate Professor Jan Davis of the Southern Cross University, and I appear in the capacity of an academic.

**Dr DERRETT:** I am Dr Ros Derrett, and I am the head of the Office of Regional Engagement at Southern Cross University.

**CHAIR:** I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and that you are protected for legal or administrative action that might otherwise result in relation to the information you provide. I should also point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute contempt of Parliament. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Professor CLARK:** Yes, Mr Chairman. I would like to put Southern Cross University into context for you, because I think we are a very significant element in the whole of northern New South Wales, so I will start from there.

Southern Cross became a university in its own right in 1993, after a short period of working with the UNE, and over that time has grown to be what is still one of Australia's smallest universities but, on an international scale, is a middle-size institution, with 15,500 students. We have a footprint that runs from Port Macquarie to the southern end of the Gold Coast. We are headquartered in Lismore. We have major campuses in Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads. We have an operating location in Byron Bay.

Because we are a university of the region that we are in, the academic profile of the university reflects the interests of the region itself. That means that we have a relatively strong arts element within our whole academic profile. We cover areas which include the visual arts, creative writing and right across the range from there, media and music. We have relatively leading-edge programs in contemporary music, in visual arts and so on.

The university always wants to be part of the region that it is in. Therefore we have very strong relationships with quite a lot of organisations, including most of the local government authorities in our region. We have a memorandum of understanding with Lismore City Council, for instance, as we have with quite a number of other councils in our region.

We closely link with the arts organisation units around, and we have a role as a sponsor also in a number of activities. We sponsor the Byron Bay Writers Festival, we sponsor NORPA, the local performing arts agency and so on. So we have a number of roles in this region. We produce graduates in all those discipline areas, and we do that up to PhD level. Quite a lot of those graduates, by their nature, stay within the region, and so we are in a sense continuing to develop the cultural resource in the region.

Because of the visual arts students that we have, we have a need for appropriate gallery and display space for all of the work that our students produce. We have a small facility on our own campus. But, in the nature of university campuses, not everybody comes to a university campus. Our view is that everybody goes to the centre of the city that they live in, and so does every visitor to the region. So, from our perspective, we have been wanting for some considerable time to have a seat or a place in a facility that is central to Lismore, and I think that is quite central to the development of this part of the Northern Rivers.

We lease a space in the city centre itself, so that we can have regular displays of students' work and also for our own visual arts collection. But we have for some time been very supportive of what Lismore City Council wants to do to revitalise the city centre and to add to it an art and culturally based facility. We have been working on a whole range of things in there, but core to the whole development, it seems to me, would be the development of a substantive gallery and display space with all of the suitable appurtenances around it. The university would want to be part of that. The university's capital budget has a long-term commitment to providing support where it can for that. We have allocated something of the order of \$500,000 for the time when that fund can properly be used to complete and complement that fine facility.

That is the opening statement, Chair. I would be quite happy to answer your questions or expand on anything.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I would like to open the examination. Firstly, could you tell us about the current status of the proposed Margaret Olley Art Centre and the partnership with Southern Cross University to provide a community-focused cultural education program? What are the reasons for this partnership and proposal?

**Professor CLARK:** As I have said, we want to work very strongly with our local government areas. We want the location where the university is headquartered to be as vibrant a location as it possibly can be. We have a very strong interest in the arts, including the visual arts, and therefore what we want to see is a gallery of substance in Lismore. We want that for a whole variety of reasons which relate right from what it is that we can

provide for our students, and what advantage they can take from it, right through to the university wanting to be in a vibrant part of New South Wales, and anything that can contribute to that vibrancy we are supportive of. As I have said, we have made a financial statement of commitment to try to assist the process.

**CHAIR:** Apart from the funding from the university, and obviously from Lismore City Council, what other funding do you expect to receive for this project?

**Professor CLARK:** I think some of those questions are probably better directed to Lismore City Council, rather than to ourselves, in that basically we are wanting to support an action that is strongly driven by the city council itself. We are super supportive of that. We do not see our role as being the assembling of the resources to do that. We see our role as contributing to it.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** You have mentioned that you have a responsibility for the Byron Writers Festival.

**Professor CLARK:** Yes.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** As the leading agency in the region what other sorts of activities do you have in regard to the arts?

**Professor CLARK:** We have the Byron festival. I will ask Jan Davis to pick up all the ones that I missed. We have a longstanding connection with Northern Rivers Performing Arts [NORPA], and have been a sponsor of their program, and in particular elements of performance of their program, for several years. We have a strong connection with the regional arts board, Arts Northern Rivers. We are a member of the Creative Industries Consortium, which put a lot of effort in over what must be now four or five months ago in an attempt to secure for the region one of the Commonwealth funded creative industries consortium centres. In the end, unsurprisingly—it never fails to surprise me at all—it went partly to UTS in Sydney and partly to QUT in Brisbane. So the continued focus in capital cities is something which I guess regional institutions do not want to learn to live with but we do learn to recognise.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** We are aware of that from other inquiries about the disproportion in funding in the sense of capital city universities. Could I direct a question to the artist—because I note that Jan is Associate Professor and Artist. Can you tell us something about the role you play as an artist?

**Ms DAVIS:** I am a visual artist of some years practice. I have been at the university for 21 years, and I was appointed here on the strength of my arts practice. You will find my work in major national collections, including the National Gallery in Canberra. I am strongly committed to the arts of the region. In fact, I do exhibit in the region as well as in the capital cities. I have always believed in my teaching that it is important that those of us who are academics lead by example and lead through exhibition or performance. I have to say that the staff at Southern Cross in the creative arts do have national reputations in their practice. This area is known, as you would already know, for the strength of its arts. That plays out regionally, as well as in the national and international forums.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** My question might be best directed to Dr Ros Derrett. Could you tell the Committee more about the university's involvement in the Art in the Heart project?

**Dr DERRETT:** For ten years Jan and I have represented the university, in conjunction with the Lismore City Council, exploring the opportunities for collaboration and initiatives through the community and the council. We have worked hard to engage the university.

The Art in the Heart project, I guess, is motivated by recognising the skills that are already in the community, that is, professional practice as well as community development. This was an opportunity to showcase practice, and to upskill people as well, so that is the connection with schools and TAFE and universities. The allocation of the site in the CBD led us at the university and the community to recognise an opportunity for revitalising the CBD.

In relation to the connection with tourism, we have a very substantial school of tourism and hospitality management. Our interns have been working with the tourism unit of the council over the years to look at opportunities that will enhance the experience of visitors to the city. So the Art in the Heart project, which ultimately is a cultural precinct that will house a variety of activity but will focus essentially on visual arts, gives us an opportunity to have a national and international profile as well. The university sees, for example, an opportunity to bring international artists to work with our students and our community and have them based in a cultural precinct. We look at research that we can do within the university to support initiatives of people in the community and professional artists in the region.

We also view Lismore as the regional hub. If we look at the notion of cluster, we were really interested in the development of Art in the Heart as having a business element too, so that we are looking at creative industries and how we could help grow the business capacity of people who want to earn their living from the creative arts. This is particularly important for our graduates; we want to keep them in the region. Of course, many of them will want to stay in the region, and we think that the Art in the Heart is what it says: it is in the heart of the city, it is in the heart of the region, and it is about putting art in everybody's daily lives.

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** With the exhibitions that you do hold, what venues are you currently using, what is the cost of producing an exhibition, and what is the source of that funding?

**Dr DERRETT:** The university has an exhibition space in a downtown venue, which is a rented shopfront. The funds to run that come from central funds in the university. The university is well connected with many of the commercial galleries of the region, and so there are business relationships going on there between our current students or our graduates and those commercial galleries. I think that is all I can say. I think that is the short answer.

**Professor CLARK:** If I could add one thing. The university's graduating students each year have a major exhibition in which the university's art teaching facilities are painted up and tidied up, and they have become probably the largest gallery in the area. That is open to the public, and it runs for quite a number of days.

**Dr DERRETT:** It runs for a fortnight, and on opening night we draw crowds of between 500 and 700 people. It has been described by some members of that audience as the highlight of their cultural year.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Page?

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** My question is to Paul. The Committee is interested in improving the links between Arts NSW, universities, the Department of Education and Training, and the Department of Technical and Further Education. You are an aggressive university in the sense that you have at Coffs Harbour, as I understand it, a campus that has a relationship with TAFE and the Department of Education and Training.

**Professor CLARK:** Yes.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** Firstly, does that involve the artistic side of your endeavours? And, secondly, are there any lessons that you could pass on to the Committee as a result of that experience that you have had at Coffs Harbour, or anywhere else? Have you done that outside Coffs Harbour or only at Coffs Harbour?

**Professor CLARK:** That particular approach is Coffs Harbour based. Let me explain. The university's Coffs Harbour campus is actually a tripartite campus, and with the North Coast Institute of TAFE, with which we have a generic memorandum of agreement, we collaborate in quite a lot of areas, most strongly I think in the health area, but there are certainly opportunities in the arts area, and a senior secondary college co-locate. The way of operating there is that each partner provides facilities into what is essentially a capital pool for the whole campus, and we seek to operate the campus so that everybody can access pretty much everything that is around there.

If I can, I will give an example of where I think regional New South Wales has an issue point. Because of the way we link our campuses, we need a very strong broadband link between those campuses. When you are a university you can do that because there is a special national network by which you can do that. We can connect the whole of the campus of Coffs Harbour as a consequence.

But we are also a distance education teacher, and that includes quite a number of our discipline areas. As soon as we get outside our core backbone, we are down to pretty poor broadband connection in regional New South Wales. I have to say, my view of the way that visual arts in particular will go over the next while is that increasingly it will be very large files moved around the country. They are not going to get here. I think there is a fundamental underpinning infrastructure that needs to be addressed.

Now I will get back to Don's question. We, as a university, have quite formal links with North Coast Institute of TAFE and an ongoing connection with a whole set of schools in our region. We have quite a capital resource in the visual arts. We have studios for visual arts, we have recording studios for contemporary music, we have television studios, we have creative writing facilities, and so on. Part of my objective over the while for the university has been to use what resources we can to enhance those connections. But there is a limit to the one-way traffic that you can handle in that sort of circumstance. Nevertheless, we see ourselves as pretty core.

**Ms DAVIS:** Might I add to that, in response to Don's question? The university also has a very strong and ongoing relationship with Arts Northern Rivers, and has just received an invitation to consider joining the board of Arts Northern Rivers as a member of the board. That grows out of the development of the Northern Rivers creative industries

strategy and the consortium of creative industries partners that are across the region. The university's connection to that creative industries community is very strong.

**CHAIR:** We will have one more question. Mr Ashton?

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Has the university got a relationship, either formal or informal, regarding indigenous art?

**Ms DAVIS:** Perhaps it is a question for both Ros and me. I will speak about the visual arts part. We have, again through Arts Northern Rivers, very strong relationships. One of our graduates is now the indigenous arts project officer at Arts Northern Rivers, a funded position there. She has developed some major projects that you probably will be hearing about as you move around the region today.

**Dr DERRETT:** The indigenous element to our cultural heritage is really important to the university, and over time we have been involved with a number of projects within the regional community. In fact, with Lismore City Council we worked on the development of an open air museum, the River Bank. We have worked with indigenous elders and linguists to create something. It was in collaboration. I guess that is the point that I would make about any of the things that the university is engaged in. It is about collaboration. We have been able to work with our visual artists, with our students, with our indigenous students as well as members of the indigenous community who are local Bundjalung leaders. We have had things like what we call the Wilsons River Experience Walk. If you have an opportunity to go and have a look at what happens there down by the river.

As well as that, we have had heritage projects that we have worked on with Arts Northern Rivers through their museums officer. That is a regional project. We have looked at that. As well, on the Mid North Coast, because of our Coffs Harbour campus, we have worked with Arts Mid North Coast, the equivalent agency, on their research into indigenous infrastructure and arts practice. So we try to keep quite a solid connection with that indigenous heritage.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you all very much for your time today and for your evidence. If there is any further information that you feel may benefit the inquiry, the Committee would be more than happy to receive that in writing. We do appreciate your time, and thank you.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**JENNY DOWELL**, Mayor, Lismore City Council, P.O. Box 23A, Lismore,

**PAUL O'SULLIVAN**, General Manager, Lismore City Council, P.O. Box 23A, Lismore,  
and

**STEVEN ALDERTON**, Director, Lismore Regional Gallery, P.O. Box 23A, Lismore,  
affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I would like to welcome representatives of Lismore City Council. I thank you for appearing today at the Public Works Committee's Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a copy of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders 291, 292 and 293, which relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

**Ms DOWELL:** Yes.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** Yes.

**Mr ALDERTON:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** For the *Hansard* record, could you please restate your full name and a private or business address for correspondence from the Committee? Can you also state your occupation and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

**Ms DOWELL:** Councillor Jenny Dowell, Mayor of Lismore City Council, P.O. Box 23A, Lismore, and I am appearing as Mayor.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I am Paul O'Sullivan, the General Manager of Lismore City Council, and my address is the same as that of the Mayor, and I am representing the council from the position of General Manager.

**Mr ALDERTON:** My name is Steven Alderton. I am the Director of Lismore Regional Gallery. My address is the same as that of the General Manager and the Mayor, and I am appearing here as the director of the gallery.

**CHAIR:** I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and that you are protected from legal or administrative action that might otherwise result in relation to the information that you provide. I should also point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute a contempt of Parliament.

Would you like to make a brief statement before we proceed to questions?

**Ms DOWELL:** Yes, thank you, Chair. I thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Bunjalung people. I have about a page that I will read.

There is no doubt that Lismore is the centre for arts and culture in the Northern Rivers. We are blessed with a university with a strong visual and performing arts faculty; we have the Northern Rivers Conservatorium, the North Coast Institute of TAFE and its



strong arts department; the Adult and Community Education; Northern Rivers Performing Arts [NORPA], one of only three performing arts organisations in regional Australia; two public, indoor performing arts spaces; a regional museum; an innovative and well-stocked library, including Australia's first and only permanent living library, and all of these have a strong presence in our unique CBD.

In addition, there are many small private galleries, a long-established Art in the Cafes exhibition schedule, the open space at Riverside Park for performance and outdoor cinema, and of course Lismore is the home of the iconic Lantern Festival. Lismore sustains all of these because we have a rich and vibrant creative economy in performing, literary and visual arts, and new media, as well as high participation rates in arts and cultural activity.

Arts and culture are a major part of what sustains us. It is a strong focus for tourism, as is obvious in our new tourism guide, just released two weeks ago, with the cover focussing on arts and culture in our region. Lismore also has a regional gallery with an inspiring and dedicated director, staff and volunteers. We mount exciting, well-attended and varied exhibitions, and currently have the 2008 Archibald finalists alongside the evocative work of a much loved, talented, young local artist, who sadly died last Saturday.

The gallery was established in the 1950s and is clearly inadequate. It has literally paper over cracks in the walls, inadequate security and atmospheric controls and wall space. Although I said we have had the exhibition of the finalists for the Archibald, not all finalists could be displayed because there was clearly inadequate space, although all of them could be displayed in the galleries on which it also toured.

The situation is not all grim. Margaret Olley is one of our patrons. The council has committed \$3 million. Fundraising is well on its way towards contributing another \$1 million. The university has contributed or assured us of \$500,000, and we are ready to lobby for the remainder of the money—for a modest \$8 million project. Can I say that that has been scaled down considerably in recent years from what was to be a project approaching \$20 million. We realise that is just not achievable, and we really want to get this happening.

There are many good art-based reasons to build a new gallery in Lismore. There are sound economic and social reasons too. A new Margaret Olley arts centre, as part of the Art in the Heart, will revitalise our struggling CBD and contribute to urban regeneration. The plans will also give the community an open green space for informal gatherings and outdoor artistic and cultural events that combine to develop a strong sense of place. Lismore City Council and our community need assistance to bring this plan to fruition. This Art in the Heart proposal is based on strong partnerships and a commitment, and with Federal and State help we can, and we will, make it happen. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** With regard to the Margaret Olley art program, how long do you expect it will be before the council could put that in place?

**Ms DOWELL:** We have a commitment from our council for \$3 million. That will have to be funded by loan borrowings, but we have made the commitment to have that happen. It is our plan to have this happening within the next three to four years.

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** Could you explain your Living Library to me?

**Ms DOWELL:** The Living Library started in Scandinavian countries, and it was to address cultural difference where people from perhaps different cultures and experiences did not have the opportunity to meet, so barriers were being built up. So Living Library is an opportunity for Lismore residents once a month to borrow a book who is a person—to sit down with a book with a dust cover on, called book, and they can borrow that book. Thomas George, who is sitting here, is a patron of the Living Library. They can sit down over a cup of coffee, in safe and secure surroundings, and have a conversation with that person. It might be a radical lesbian feminist, or it could be an organic farmer, or it could be a Buddhist monk. Thomas George has been a book. It could be a Sudanese refugee—or anyone. We have 60 to 70 living books, and that operates out of our library on the first Friday of the month, and has been operating for more than twelve months.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Who was the driving force behind the Art in the Heart project, and what was the aim of it?

**Ms DOWELL:** I will ask both the General Manager and Steven to comment. This has been a community push for many, many years. I was elected in 2004, and it was well on the plans then—perhaps not in concrete terms. I would estimate about ten years, but I would defer to the General Manager's comment to clarify that.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I will add my knowledge, because I have not been here for the full period. We will say it is about ten years. It really got momentum with the council committing itself to purchase the site that we refer to as the Art in the Heart, which is the old high school site in the heart of the city. I think that happened in about 2001. Right from the outset there has always been more than the Lismore City Council involved. It is a community-based push. The university of course, as you have already heard, was central to the plans because of its extreme interest in developing cultural life and the arts generally in Lismore. So there has been broad support for this concept right from the start.

There was a written submission presented to the Committee in August last year. I want to correct something, so that there will be no confusion. The mayor referred to the project, in stage 4, as a \$8 million project. That, of course, is correct. The written submission, at page 3, refers to a \$5.5 million project. My explanation is that we have had three or four iterations of how the project will be taken forward. At that time we saw it as perhaps achievable for that \$5.5 million. We have looked at it harder since then, and now know that it would not deliver, and what is required is a staged approach, so that we have now revised our costings and we talk about a \$8 million project for the first stage. That is just to clarify that aspect of it.

**CHAIR:** Mr Ashton?

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** That answers my question.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** The reality is that it was not possible for the city council to fund a \$8 million project in the short term. We will require partnerships if this is to go forward, and I would have to say with government, because whilst we certainly expect to tap into the private sector, again we think we will fall short in regard to the time frame referred to, three to four years. That is realistic if we can get the partnerships that we need to make this happen. We are very optimistic. We are lobbying hard. Frankly, I thought this was an opportunity for us to put our case to the State Government one more time, to see what can be achieved in that forum.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Page?

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** I think my question is directed to Steven. The Mayor has figures, reiterated by the General Manager, in relation to the capital cost of construction of this new gallery. I am interested to know from you, Steven, firstly how your current regional gallery is funded on a recurrent basis, and how the new facility would be funded on a recurrent basis.

**Mr ALDERTON:** We currently enjoy annual funding of \$400,000 from the Lismore City Council. This year we received \$14,000 in funding from Arts NSW. So you can see it is funded mainly by Lismore City Council. The future operation also will be funded by Lismore City Council. We have developed a business plan and have factored in staffing and extra costs for exhibitions, programs and such. So the council not only will be committing \$3 million but also will be taking on board an extra operation cost.

In saying that, if we can develop greater cultural infrastructure, we will also attract greater donations through shop sales. Our shop will be wholly for cultural tourism; it will be selling only local arts goods. We see that as an engine room for driving creative industries in our region.

Only yesterday the General Manager signed off on a \$750,000 project that we are developing called Splendid, which is funded \$600,000 over three years by the Australia Council. So, as we grow the creative industries here and we grow our cultural infrastructure, we can attract greater funding. That project is a partnership with NORPA and Arts Northern Rivers and is funded by the Australia Council.

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** From your original \$20 million project you have scaled back to \$8 million. Are you still working on the original plans, or have you had to draw up new plans? Or do you intend to have an \$8 million plan for now and perhaps in the future look to reaching your original target?

**Mr ALDERTON:** I have actually got here drawings of the site. With the permission of the Chair, I will pass these round.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr ALDERTON:** That is the whole site, and you can see where we are going to put the gallery. We have drawn up plans about four times over the last three years. Our greatest issue is funding. We have great intent and the social infrastructure and community support here in Lismore. It is just that the funding mix is letting us down. That is why we have had to come down from that \$21 million to \$8 million. So, yes, we have redrawn the plans. Initially the \$21 million site was over several floors. This one is over one floor and a mezzanine. I would also add that we have extenuating circumstances that are far greater than have most other local governments in that this site also floods.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** I wonder whether one of you could tell the Committee what support you receive from private enterprise—private companies and so on in the area? Are they very strong supporters?

**Ms DOWELL:** Considerable. We have good partnerships with private groups within the community, and volunteers and small benefactors. But the emphasis is on the small. I will pass over to Steven to talk more about that.

**Mr ALDERTON:** We have had probably about \$800,000 in art work donations in the last three years, that is, people gifting art works to our collection. We have significant partners, such as Philip Bacon, who donated considerable amounts of money to exhibition projects like the Margaret Olley exhibition. Philip Bacon and Margaret Olley have committed several hundred thousand dollars in funds to the new building. So we have looked at a broad funding mix for our current programs and our future infrastructure. We are looking at local government, the private sector and State and Federal support also. A couple of people, like Wilson Solicitors and Andrew Binns and many other community partners support the gallery.

**CHAIR:** Can we include this plan that you tabled as part of your submission?

**Mr ALDERTON:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** We will include that as part of your submission. Mr Ashton?

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Councils change and mayors change, so I ask the question: Is there a long-term commitment that you sense from a previous council, this council and a future council that this is still an important project, reflecting that artists are an important part of Lismore and the wider regional area? Secondly, I am not being overly critical, but given what is happening now in the world, will there not be some pressure on councils to continue to focus on what was once thought of as their core business, which is roads, rates, rubbish and so on? Is that something that might interfere with this project? Steven spoke about private funding. I think at the moment a lot of that private funding for areas like arts might dry up, unless they can see the value still being there in having their names associated with good works like that.

**Ms DOWELL:** That is a good question, and it is something that every local government has to deal with, particularly in times of economic difficulty. We do have a new council; 6 of the 11 councillors are new. The new council has not debated this issue since September, but I am confident that this will get support. There will certainly be a lot of debate, because there are on council people who believe we need to spend more on roads, for example. But there are more people who either have a higher commitment to the arts and artistic endeavours, or who have a high commitment to the longer-term economic viability of our city, and particularly our CBD. Whether you have a commitment to the arts or not, the need to enhance and enliven our CBD is of prime concern to all councillors. So I am confident that this current council will support further proposals that come before it, even in this difficult time.

**Mr O'SULLIVAN:** I would like to add something to that, though I have not organised this with the mayor. This comes from the practical side—the dollars. In answer to the question asked by Don Page, we have done the financial modelling as to how we can handle this. Sure, you can build something, but you have to service it in the future. We could have gone down the path of saying that the council commits \$6 million or \$8 million; yes, we could handle that, but we would not be able to run it. So that is why we have to take a realistic approach to this. We know what we can handle in terms of capital. Then, of course, we expect that the activity and the operating cost in due course will be greater than it currently is, that is, greater than the \$400,000 that Steven now works with.

So we have got to have a reality check here. So our financial modelling is such that we get the building built within three years, and then we will be in a position to actually

service it, without having to look for handouts along the way, although we will not knock anything back. The reason I can say that with confidence is that the council is just about to open its biggest project ever. It is a recreation centre in the suburb of Goonellabah, which is above Lismore itself. Again, we have covered the cost of that ourselves. We have built this ourselves, with no assistance. But that is the last really big project that the council has in its forward plan. This is the next one. So we have got our time frame, about three years, so that we can gather our resources and we are able to build this with the assistance of support and operate it and have it function effectively for the community. So that is the forward plan. It is achievable, but we will rely on government support for its building.

**CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee, I take this opportunity to thank you for appearing today and giving evidence. If there is any further information that you would like to forward to us in writing, we would welcome that as well. So thank you again for your time.

**Mr ALDERTON:** Chair, could I table this paper about the arts centre?

**CHAIR:** Yes. We will note that that has been tabled.

**Document tabled.**

**Ms DOWELL:** Chair, would it help if my address was forwarded by email?

**CHAIR:** Yes. Can we have a copy of that booklet as well?

**Ms DOWELL:** I will leave those.

**CHAIR:** Perhaps we could note that as tabled as well.

**Document tabled.**

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**KATRINA LUCKIE**, Executive Director, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, P.O. Box 148, Lismore,

**DELIA O'HARA**, General Manager, Northern Rivers Performing Arts, P.O. Box 225, Lismore, affirmed and examined, and

**JULIAN LOUIS**, Artistic Director, Northern Rivers Performing Arts, P.O. Box 225, Lismore, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** I welcome representatives of the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board and Northern Rivers Performing Arts. I thank you for appearing today at the Public Works Committee Inquiry into the Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a copy of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders 291, 292 and 293, which relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

**Ms LUCKIE:** Yes.

**Ms O'HARA:** Yes.

**Mr LOUIS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** For the *Hansard* record, could you please restate your full name and a private or business address for correspondence from the Committee? Can you also state your occupation and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

**Mr LOUIS:** Julian Louis, Artistic Director, Northern Rivers Performing Arts, P.O. Box 225, Lismore, and I am appearing before the Committee in that capacity, as a director of NORPA.

**Ms LUCKIE:** Katrina Luckie, Executive Director of Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, P.O. Box 146, Lismore, 2480, and I am appearing here in my professional role as the board's executive director.

**Ms O'HARA:** Delia O'Hara. I am General Manager of Northern Rivers Performing Arts, and my business address is P.O. Box 225, Lismore, 2480, and I am appearing here in my professional capacity as General Manager of NORPA.

**CHAIR:** I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and that you are protected from legal or administrative action that might otherwise result in relation to the information that you provide. I should also point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute a contempt of Parliament. Would you now like to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Ms LUCKIE:** I would like to give a brief statement on the economic nature of this particular region. This is probably in reference to some of the questions that were asked at the end of the last session.

This region is characterised by small business and fairly high levels of unemployment. It is a lifestyle and learning region, but we have been very successful in growing our arts and creative industries sectors in recent years. In fact, we have probably had the highest rate of growth in regional New South Wales over the past ten years or so, growing at about 67 per cent, as opposed to the Hunter, whose growth rate is about 45 per cent. So there has been a quite high level of growth in this area. Our creative industries sector is also growing faster than any other industry sector. The creative industries are growing at about 3.9 per cent, rather than 3.1 per cent of the rest of the economy. I think that is important contextual information for this part of the world.

We also have a fairly rich infrastructure that does support that growth but, because we have high population growth and high unemployment and under-employment issues, it is quite a challenge to maintain and support that infrastructure. I am most concerned about the soft infrastructure, which is what I regard as the “glue” that holds things together. Coming from a development perspective, we are particularly interested in things like how we maintain the support for industry associations and bodies that can help grow and drive development in the sector and investment within the sector.

The other point I want to note in the context of that—and the university mentioned it as well—is that, because of the range of industry players in this region, we formally established a creative industries consortium in 2006. That is a group of all the regional development bodies, industry associations and education and training associations in the creative industries sector. It has been very proactive in terms of working on things like the arts and the creative industries strategy, which has been referred to. I am sure that Arts Northern Rivers will be tabling that this afternoon, if the Committee has not already received a copy.

I would also highlight that we are a region of villages. We did some research—and I will table this as evidence for the Committee—in about 2003, looking at infrastructure to support villages as viable and well-connected social communities. You will note from the research that we identified levels of infrastructure that were relevant at different sized villages. If we start by looking at villages of the size of about 100 to 1,000 people, it is essential that there be some form of community meeting place, but some small-scale arts-type or cultural-type facility is quite important to try to instil arts and culture in that size of community. If you would like further information regarding that background research, I can provide that.

**CHAIR:** Ms O'Hara, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Northern Rivers Performing Arts?

**Ms O'HARA:** Yes, thank you. Julian and I might do this together, but I will start with just a very short introduction to what NORPA is and what we do in the community. We are one of the few professional performing arts companies in the region. In fact, we are one of only a handful in the State or even Australia that produce original work. So, while there are lots of venues that tour, we also produce our own work, which provides opportunities for local artists as well.

We also have another role. We are managers of two theatres in the Lismore City Hall. We have a contract with council to manage that on behalf of the council, and also the Star Court Theatre. Both of these are flexible spaces. The city hall has a main auditorium that has a capacity of about 680 people. It also has a dance studio, and another multipurpose space, which is good for meetings, conferences et cetera. The city hall is very widely used

by the community. Star Court Theatre is privately owned. We have a lease on that building. It is an old movie theatre. It has a capacity of 390. We use it for light performance and for film.

Each year we present a program of work that has several elements to it. By way of being a performing arts company, we are modelled on the State Theatre Company model in a way in that we produce a subscription season of shows, with up to 15 shows a year. I would like to table the brochure for evidence.

**Document tabled (Model of Tiers of Infrastructure and Service Provision for Villages).**

In addition to the subscription season, of course we present a number of shows that hire the venue. There are around 40 productions or events each year, plus those two venues. That is quite a lot for a town the size of Lismore. In addition to the subscription season—where the performances are a range of styles—we produce theatre, music and dance. We also present film at the Star Court Theatre. So there is quite a range of performing arts activity.

We also have an education program. We provide access to shows for children. Some of our programs are specifically aimed at young people. We also tour some shows into schools, and we provide access to the local community for other touring projects such as the Bell Shakespeare Actors at Work. That comes through their association, along with us, in presenting their Shakespeare shows in our season. We present school holiday workshops in performing arts and, through sponsorship relationships, we are able to offer the cost of admission to children from disadvantaged schools so that they can actually come and see the shows. So there are a whole range of activities there.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Through the Chair, I notice that you have got a show coming up called "Lying, Cheating Bastards"—which I am sure you did not base on Thomas's behaviour up here or on our creative activity!

**Ms LUCKIE:** You might also enjoy "Deeply Offensive and Utterly Untrue".

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Yes, that sounds like you have the right targeted audiences to get bums on seats.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Yes, Ms O'Hara?

**Ms O'HARA:** As well as the educational program, one of the major activities for us is what we call Generator. That program is all about creating new work and opportunities for local artists. That is very dear to our heart, and is an example of the way in which we interact with the community in so many ways. We advertised just this week for two residencies that will be available for artists to come to Lismore and spend a fortnight with us developing their work. Out of that, we hope to produce new, original work, created by us, that would then tour the country.

We interact with the community in many ways. Through our shows, we provide access to performances and touring productions of the calibre that you would see in any capital city. Also, we provide people with any opportunity to act, direct and design here. It is very difficult for artists to find those opportunities. We provide direct support for local events. For instance, every year we second our technical crew to work on the Lapre, and



without that they would probably find it difficult to achieve everything they achieve. We auspice small companies. There are probably about 100 examples I could give you.

In regard to the comment that Katrina made on the soft infrastructure, our basic submission is that we feel we are an integral part of the soft infrastructure, if you like, of this region, and that is working well. As Steven Alderton commented, the community is very supportive and very actively involved. Our main issue is that a lot of our work is tied to buildings. Not all of it though. A lot of our Generation work is not tied to buildings; that can happen out in the field. But, where it is tied to buildings, obviously that is where people come together to attend a performance. I guess the major issue for us is access to funding for these two buildings, which are quite old and both in need of fairly major works, not very major works in the case of the Star Court; it really just needs airconditioning and disabled access. But with the Lismore City Hall, there are plans and council has done work on that. It does require some major renovation work.

**CHAIR:** Might I first note that both of these documents have been tabled, Model of Tiers of Infrastructure and Service Provision for Villages, and also your pamphlet for NORPA for the 2009 season. We thank you for that, and will include that as part of your evidence.

Ms O'Hara, you mentioned that one of the major difficulties that your organisation has is access to funding. Could you explain the various funding that you receive at the moment, whether it is from local, State or Federal bodies? What type of funding do you receive, how often do you receive it, and is it continuous?

**Mr LOUIS:** Chair, if I might answer that question. We receive funding from the local council to the tune of \$40,000 for cultural activity or artistic endeavour. We also have an agreement with council to manage the city hall, and that provides us and staff with \$150,000 annually. That includes maintenance, staff hire, the whole lot. We are very lucky and privileged to work very closely in partnership with Arts NSW. We received this year \$215,000 for our artistic program. With that, as you have heard, we do a very extensive program, which is across community, education, and new work making. So it is fairly extensive.

We have recently also been successful with the Australia Council, at a Federal level, to receive funding for a new position for an emerging creative producer. That is a young person, under 30, who will work very closely with us, in a kind of mentorship, as a creative producer to activate and stimulate local creative activity, as well as make their own work. That is to the tune of \$130,000 over two years. So that is a salary. These are our major government sponsorships.

We have tremendous support from local business, and we have private sponsorship. The rest is ticket sales, really. We generate a fair bit of income through that means. Because we operate these venues, we also earn income on touring shows that are not part of the season that we have submitted to you here. But they are shows like the Flying Russian Czars, or Men in Tutus, or whatever the show is. They hire the space, so with that comes some income as well. So we have some entrepreneurial opportunities through that means.

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** You referred to subscription shows. Is that well subscribed to? Do you have quite a large membership in the area?

**Mr LOUIS:** We do. We are finding that single-ticket sales are on a major increase. I have been in the job for two years, and we have noticed a trend of, luckily, an increase in ticket sales. Our subscriber base is probably about 150 people who buy a majority of the season. But we are finding that our shows are selling out. Interestingly enough, and pleased to say, is what happens when we locally create something. I directed a show last year called "The Bloody Bride", sitting around a caravan in the Northern Rivers, and it was a sell-out success. So I think people are responding to locally made work. You have probably experienced that in your own areas and councils, that there is an interest by the community.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** I was interested in the development board's involvement in encouraging art in the region. Where I come from, mostly the development board is involved in getting companies to move from the city up to the Central Coast. So it is refreshing to hear that the development board is involved in a different type of activity. Are you very much involved in helping to get the Art in the Heart project up and running?

**Ms LUCKIE:** Generally speaking, our role is slightly more at a macro level. We do not tend to do a lot of hands-on business relocation types of initiatives. But in the late 1990s we identified that this industry sector of the creative industries was a growing sector, and we commissioned some research to understand what this meant to our economy. That was some seminal work that had not really been done anywhere else in Australia. I am aware that the Committee is aware of some of the work by Cathy Henkel. It was actually the first piece of work that Cathy Henkel did in this area, and she did some other benchmarking work in 2005. Basically, in the last three censuses we have been tracking the growth in our industries sector.

So our involvement has come more at that industry development level. We do provide areas of support and that sort of research and information towards any sorts of major projects on which we are approached. Basically, we would be advocating and supporting various opportunities like the Art in the Heart. The Clarence Valley Council also is taking quite a proactive process with their economic development framework, to start looking at cultural precincts. We are staying in close contact with that, and linking into other areas where there is some private sector investment occurring. You may or may not be aware that in Byron Bay there is quite a significant creative industries development occurring to provide affordable work spaces as well as showcasing and gallery space and things like that as well.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Could you tell the Committee how many are on the board and how they are appointed?

**Ms LUCKIE:** There is a bit of a change going on in that space as well. Would you like me to cover both the current situation and what I understand the changes to be?

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Yes.

**Ms LUCKIE:** It is quite interesting to think about the relationship to the regional arts boards as well. The regional development boards have been established by the New South Wales Minister for Regional Development. The members are ministerially appointed, on a two- or four-year term. We operate under a contract with the Department of State and Regional Development, but we are actually an incorporated body, so that we are one of those qangos, or quasi non-government organisations.

Our current membership is nine members, who provide reasonably good geographical representation. I am a bit disappointed that we have not got anyone strongly from the business side of the creative industries who has been on our current board. We do have strong tourism, education, agriculture, forestry and finance sector representation, and we have some local government representatives who have been quite tuned into the arts and cultural development area.

The change that is being foreshadowed is part of an arrangement between the State and Federal governments. It is looking at bringing together the functions that have been provided by area consultative committees and regional development boards and forming new committees called Regional Development Australia. My understanding is that regional development boards will not exist come 30<sup>th</sup> June this year, and we will be replaced by Regional Development Australia committees. I am not quite aware of the appointment processes or anything like that at this point of time.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Page?

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** One of the things that the Committee has discovered in its deliberations is that there is an imbalance in the funding between the CBD of Sydney and regional areas, very much in favour of the CBD and against the regional areas. I noted that Julian said that Arts NSW provides \$215,000, which is the biggest amount I have heard so far going to any regional organisation. So that gives me a little bit of heart. My question is probably directed to Delia. What is the history of that money? How hard is it to get? Is it of an ongoing nature? What commitment is there for next year, for example? How does all that work?

**Mr LOUIS:** This company was formed in 1993 with Lyndon Terracini and Liz Terracini, and together they ran this company for 15 years. They were skilled and loud in their advocacy for the region and for their company. The funding has remained fairly consistent for some time. This has been a threat, in a way, particularly over the last three years. I believe that before my time it was being reviewed as to its outputs, and I believe that we are passing all of those reviews, and that we have the faith of Arts NSW. The more partnerships we form in the region with local councils, not just Lismore City Council, the stronger we feel we will remain a very strong entity in this region. I feel that the funding will be consistent in the future.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** At the moment, it is only a year-by-year commitment, is it?

**Mr LOUIS:** It is a year-by-year commitment. One of NORPA's goals is triennial funding, so that we do not spend two months of a year writing applications and to enable us to get on with the business of creating arts and cultural activity in the region.

**Ms LUCKIE:** The Arts and Creative Industries Strategy documents funding that has come into this region over the past three years. If Lois Randall of Arts Northern Rivers does not table that this afternoon, I can forward that on to the Committee, so that you can get a sense of what is coming in from different funding sources.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** I want to ask two things. Could you define just how far the Northern Rivers goes before we hit Queensland, because geographically you have all these different communities? What is the number of people we looking at in terms of average punters out there, and how can you serve them? The other question has been asked before, but it is important, and it relates to security of funding. We appreciate that, because we

made that point yesterday as we visited Byron Bay, Mullumbimby and other places, that year-to-year funding is very difficult because you spend so much time writing up next year's request, not knowing whether the government, councils or private enterprise will continue to fund and whether volunteer people will continue to help. So, in a sense, I am repeating Don's question: three-year funding would be better.

**Ms LUCKIE:** There are several different definitions of the Northern Rivers. The ones that all the creative industries bodies and art bodies that I know of tend to operate under is the seven local government areas from Clarence Valley to Tweed—so that is Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley, Ballina, Byron, Lismore, Kyogle and Tweed shires. That population is about 250,000 to 270,000, with a quite significant growth rate, particularly in the older age sector; our older population is growing at about 16 to 18 per cent, whereas the State average is about 13 per cent.

**Mr LOUIS:** To answer your question about the punters, and how they move around: most of our patrons who come to the theatre are outside the 2480 post code, which is outside Lismore. So we think Ballina, Casino, Kyogle—or we know, because we have a database that is tracking this—are coming into town to see work or to partake in workshops.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** I am interested in your success in terms of quality of facilities and productions. I am interested because at some stage we had a very successful period, and all of a sudden that dropped off again. It seems to me that mass is critical in terms of whether it is a success or not. Our big issue is the question mark over funding for the arts over the next so many years. I was wondering how you target increasing your income through actually providing entertainment. What is the secret to being successful?

**Mr LOUIS:** It is a good question. Our entrepreneurial work is limited, in a way. Our spaces are good spaces; they are a medium-sized space, the Star Court Theatre, and a large venue. You would say that a 680 seat venue is a large theatre venue. We had Bell Shakespeare come here and say it was the biggest house they have performed to, because the Opera House is 500 seats. So some of these houses are the biggest houses they have played to.

However, they are limited in terms of lights, and in terms of the fact that we do not have a loading dock. We have six guys hauling sets up the old-fashioned way, up what is just a drop; or stairs up which they must carry walls that are as big as that wall there. So these are the shortfalls of the spaces. I feel that in the future, in the long term, ten years or twenty years time, these spaces will become substandard to the major touring works that we are seeing there. We already have a certain number of companies who will not turn up here.

I will note for your interest that one of them is Bangara, which happens to be the front of our tourism. They will not bring their big shows here because there is no backstage area. These limitations are a concern to us. But the soft infrastructure, i.e. the people who are attracted to the region, are driving with a passion the arts and culture, and I guess that is a plus; we are providing the best we can with the empty spaces. And these empty spaces have huge potential for a whole range of activities, not just a play. We have conferences, talks, workshops and so on. I feel the future is bright in that sense, but there is a limitation around the building, the bricks and mortar.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** The hard infrastructure, rather than the soft.

**Mr LOUIS:** Yes. The second part of your question, the secret to the success, I think is in attracting people who want to work there. The big part of that, speaking personally as an artist, is opportunities to make. If you have that in the area then, with some support, the artists will come, and that passion translates to activity and that activity translates to income.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** I take your point. At Mullumbimby there is poor backstage access yet they still get some very good productions.

**Mr LOUIS:** Absolutely. We tour to those spaces. In our season there are shows going to Mullumbimby and Bangalow and they are professional productions that they welcome.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** So do you actually produce a show up here and then tour with it?

**Mr LOUIS:** We are actually doing that. We are Northern Rivers Performing Arts, so we have projects as far as Woodenbong. We are doing an indigenous project with a group there, a dance work over three years. We work to Byron Bay, Mullumbimby. We do have a presence in the region. That is why I mentioned earlier about wanting to have a little bit more collaboration with the other councils, because I think there is the potential there for more partnership.

**Ms O'HARA:** I would like to add comment on the question about the economic viability of the company. NORPA is a little different to a lot of other regional theatre companies in that we began with a very strong program of our own work. And we are venue managers, and that is an advantage to us in that we have an income stream from the venue management activity. DUTE, for instance, in Cairns, has a venue that the council provides, but the main performing arts centre in Cairns is another building. So DUTE is a theatre company producing their own work, but they do not have the opportunity to include in their season all the touring shows that we can include.

If you look at Wollongong, for instance, the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre has a theatre company attached, Merrigong, but my understanding is that the performing arts centre was there first and Merrigong has grown in connection with that venue. But, again, I do not think the Merrigong season is identified as including all the other shows that come in, whereas we have the advantage of all the fantastic work that we bring in and the fantastic work that we produce is all the one season, and that is very attractive to our audiences.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** We heard yesterday of problems that a lot of the performing arts people have in relation to equipment, with lights blowing and those sorts of things that need to be repaired and so on. You have just spoken about the limitations of some of the stages and venues and what have you. The Committee, I think, is coming to a view that it might not be a bad recommendation for us to make, for example, in the same way we support sporting groups with dollar-for-dollar grants—in other words, the government provides a dollar for every dollar that the local organisation provides—that such a scheme might work quite well in the arts also. I assume, from your nodding, that that is a good idea.

It is probably a hard question to answer off the top of your head. It occurs to me that if we go down that route we may have to develop some criteria for determining who would be eligible for such grants, and you would have the obvious difference between those who want to put equipment into a venue, to improve their lighting so that they can have more performances, and the smaller groups, not like yourselves, not so professional, who want to do a local production and need five thousand, not necessarily for equipment, in order to be able to put on that performance. Do you have a view as to the criteria that should apply should such a scheme be implemented? Where is the greatest need?

**Mr LOUIS:** I think it is a great idea, and I think it would be welcomed and supported by our company. Certainly, I can speak for our company. I think really you are talking about amateur groups and professional groups. I think there may be an opportunity to fund the professional companies where you are confident in the output and the quality of it, but that you have resources to perhaps hire our gear, or lend gear, or manage the gear. I mean, that is another way to go. Off the top of my head, that is one way to ensure proper use of that equipment.

The other thing is that you need trained technicians. We have staff who are highly experienced. Our operations manager's sidekick is a trained technician, and Karl is a trained operations manager. Between them, they have 30 years experience in the theatre in rigging lights every day. So I would be wary of those issues.

**CHAIR:** Can I take this opportunity on behalf of the Public Works Committee to thank you all for your time and for your evidence. If there is any further information that you wish to provide to us, the Committee would welcome that in writing. I take this opportunity to acknowledge that the member for Lismore, Mr Thomas George, has been with us today. We thank him for being part of this hearing.

**Mr THOMAS GEORGE:** Could I make one comment? NORPA is very successful, and has been very successful, but that is due to a lot of hard work by the likes of Delia and Julian and the people prior to them. It is the same with Katrina and the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board. These are very strong bodies that have kept working at maintaining representations to achieve this year's funding. It just has not turned up, I can tell you. There have been difficulties, and they have worked very hard to overcome those.

However, Lismore is now faced with the need to have a proper entertainment centre. The Star Court Theatre, whilst it has 650 seats, was previously a picture theatre. That is why it does not have the facilities upstairs. We will continue to pursue that.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**JUDE McBEAN**, Director, Grafton Regional Gallery, locked bag 23, Grafton, and

**RUTH TSITIMBINIS**, Gallery Co-ordinator, Roxy Gallery, Kyogle Council, 143 Summerland Way, Kyogle, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the representatives of the Kyogle Council and Roxy Art Gallery and also the representative of the Grafton Regional Gallery. I thank you for your time in appearing today at the Public Works Committee's Inquiry into Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside Sydney CBD. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference, and also a copy of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders 291, 292 and 293, which relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

**Ms McBEAN:** Yes.

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** In the same order, could you please restate your full name and a private or business address for correspondence from the Committee? Could you also state your occupation and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

**Ms McBEAN:** Jude McBean. I am the Gallery Director at the Grafton Regional Gallery, locked bag 23 Grafton, 2460.

**CHAIR:** And you are appearing in the capacity as director?

**Ms McBEAN:** Yes, I am.

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** Ruth Tsimbinis. I am the Gallery Co-ordinator for the Roxy Gallery, Kyogle Council, 143 Summerland Way, Kyogle, 2474.

**CHAIR:** You are appearing in that capacity?

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and that you are protected from legal or administrative action that might otherwise result in relation to the information that you provide. I should also point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute a contempt of Parliament. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Ms McBEAN:** No, I think I will start with questions.

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** I also will start with questions, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Jude, could you tell us a little bit about your organisation and what it does?

**Ms McBEAN:** The Grafton Regional Gallery is one of the main cultural services of the Clarence Valley Council. It was formed in 1988. In 2007 the first cultural plan of the

council was created for the Clarence Valley Council, a new council amalgamated in 2004. The gallery has a very active program based in the arts and in the community. We work with the council on its economic development and strategic plan. At the moment, the council is forming up a cultural infrastructure plan and contract to put together a strategic plan created by the end of June this year to cope with the issues arising through the infrastructure both for community and cultural purposes in the Clarence Valley.

The demand of the community is increasing. We have an ageing community and an increasing population. Our population has 6 per cent of indigenous people, and that is a significant focus for the gallery and for much of our community. There are plans in the council and in the gallery to develop infrastructure through the cultural plan that was created. Adding to the Grafton Regional Gallery was one of the ways of developing those, and the council has purchased land directly adjacent to the gallery in future preparation for that.

The gallery is always planned in four stages. It has now done three stages. That was to finish the particular footprint on that site. That involves creating adequate storage for the collection. The gallery has one of the largest public collections on the North Coast of New South Wales. It is an active and developing collection, and has been attracting quite a few bequests and gifts over the years. One of those gifts was the John William Lindt photographs in 2004. Those were 37 photographs, valued at around \$146,000 at that stage. That skewed the direction of the gallery a bit, but in a very positive way.

Our collection facilities are very poor, and they are below flood level. We need to get them above flood level. It is quite unsuitable to look at relocating the gallery because it is close to the CBD and it is close to all the other cultural facilities. So we are looking at building something just above 100-year flood level, the level that we came very close to in 2001 when Grafton had to go into evacuation. Also, we need to build a main gallery that meets State and national standards for museums and galleries. We can cater for most touring exhibitions. We take the Archibald, we take National Archives, but we have great difficulty taking exhibitions from the Art Gallery of New South Wales and from the National Gallery because of their very high requirements on climate control. So we need to build something that is more adequate in that way. That would finish off the site.

The other infrastructure that the gallery is looking forward to working with, in collaboration with the museums and performing arts groups, is a passive space, preferably located in the lower Clarence area, in Maclean or Yamba, where we can access it but also artists and performing groups and performing artists can access by a booking-in stage. So it could be the local quilters, or it could be the pipe band, or it could be artists putting installation in. It would be a passive space attached to something like a library, so that you do not have to have a volunteer program. The gallery would administer it.

One of the main things that we face with our artists is practice space—space where artists can practise. Most metropolitan areas have artist spaces operating where artists can book in and learn how to put on exhibitions, or do whatever they want to do. The Clarence Valley is in need of that. So those are the main areas of infrastructure for the Grafton Regional Gallery. We put about 40 exhibitions on a year and about 74 events. We are very active. But we are operating at full capacity in our current situation.

**CHAIR:** What type of funding do you receive at the moment? You mentioned the council land, but can you give us some specifics with regard to the funding that you receive from local, State or Federal governments to assist?



**Ms McBEAN:** Our funding is predominantly from the local council. Our budget is about \$540,000 a year, and we get about 25 per cent, or \$120,000, as income. We have two full-time employees and two part-time employees as well as three or four casuals. We have a volunteer program involving about 85 people. That is a significant program. We were formed out of the community; we are there because of our community. Some of the people who are on our Friends of the Gallery and advisory committee were part of the Jacaranda Art Society, which started in 1961, and it ended up forming the gallery.

We do apply for funds to Arts NSW. We have always found it very difficult and have ended up staying on more or less the same amount ever since. That is the history of the gallery for 20 years. We get around \$20,000 on average from Arts NSW. This year we did not receive any, with the new style of funding afoot. That was very disappointing. We always question the amount we receive because the grants are quite onerous to apply for and then to acquit. It is always very debatable whether we should do that, because if I went out and worked the community for sponsorship I feel sure we would get equal that amount of money. But it is very important for us to have that funding for our profile state-wise and national-wise.

We have a grant at the moment for \$15,000 a year for a part-time position as a curator, and that will be our funding from Arts NSW. In the past, we have attracted funding for various touring exhibitions. At the moment, we have one exhibition on tour, the Jacaranda Drawing Award, which is a flagship of the gallery. It is sort of like the Archibald of the North Coast. It is a \$30,000 drawing award. We tour that. This time it is going to eight venues in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales. That takes Grafton and the Clarence Valley all around Australia.

We are into prizes like the Clarence Valley Indigenous Art Award, which we launched two years ago and are holding again this year. It is held every second year. We attract private sponsorship of about \$6,000 into each of those awards. The Friends of the Gallery contribute \$15,000. Sponsorship comes from CountryEnergy, then stepping down to very smaller sponsorships. But it is still only \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year in that area.

**CHAIR:** Ruth, could you give us some more detail about the Roxy Gallery, and what experiences Kyogle Council faces when it comes to supporting programs like that?

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** I work 17 hours a week as a part-time gallery co-ordinator. The Roxy Gallery has existed for about ten years in the Kyogle shire. It developed as a joint initiative between the Kyogle and District Arts Council and the Kyogle Council. It was housed, in its first life, in a council-owned building called the Roxy Theatre. Council then decided to sell that building, and to some extent thought that the community need for the gallery would fall away. Our community took on the need and the want for keeping the Roxy Gallery alive, so council then negotiated with a private landholder to rent premises, which are in the main street of the CBD. Those premises started as one building. Then the shop that was next door to that building became vacant, and under the same landholder, council organised some modifications to incorporate that space as well into the gallery.

The gallery is the home for myself, as a council worker, but also for the community projects officer. Council uses a portion of her funding to go towards basically the rent and the space. Council, to my knowledge, does not receive any funding for my position. The gallery has not received any grants as yet. Most grants that are applied for, for events in the gallery, usually happen through the Kyogle District Arts Council.

The gallery operates a 12-exhibition program a year, primarily focusing on local and regional artists, and also highlighting community groups. We run programs of exhibitions that are from small schools within our region, from indigenous communities within our region, and from artists who have not had opportunities to exhibit their works within a professionally run gallery space. We provide opportunities for them to exhibit at the gallery and skill themselves up for the bigger art world.

We operate primarily on an opening basis that is supported by volunteers from the community and from Kyogle and District Arts Council. Approximately 400 people come into the gallery every four weeks. The community has taken on great ownership of the Roxy Gallery. It is also used by a number of other community groups, such as the Kyogle Economic Development Committee, for a meeting space. It is also used by a number of local musicians as a place to rehearse, but to rehearse to the public. The gallery engages in that because we are primarily about supporting the creative cultures in our region, and if we can provide services like this we feel that we are doing the community a good service.

Because of Kyogle's demographic layout, our shire extends to the western part of the range, which incorporates Bonalbo, Woodenbong and Tabulum. Because my position is relatively focused within the gallery, I try to service, from a council perspective, those regions, addressing issues of cultural needs. Currently, council is working on a cultural policy and a cultural strategy. In November 2000 council commissioned a person by the name of Pip Cotton to develop a cultural implementation strategy, which was done. But council never adopted it, and never worked that document. So, basically, my role has now been consumed with organising and developing a working party to re-ignite this document. Hopefully, within the next twelve months, council will have a cultural policy and a cultural strategy.

Currently, issues in council are forcing council to look at culture. We have in Kyogle a longstanding historical society, which has been poorly supported by council, although throughout its life it has been promised the world and has delivered very little. Council is now negotiating with the historical society, looking at proposals for building or finding a location to house a museum. Council is hoping that the historical society would like to engage with the Kyogle and District Arts Council in doing a joint building so that it becomes a museum/gallery space. That has just really started.

As for the western part of the range, they have a lot of issues in regard to support for their culture. A lot of communities west of the range tend to be proactive and do things for themselves, without engaging council support.

The biggest problems within our shire are related to public transport. We are a very low socioeconomic environment. However, we have a new wave of people moving to our area, and some of those people are internationally renowned artists, in each of the visual, performing and the film industries. Some of them are retired and are now taking on positions, in a voluntary capacity, within the community to help develop their areas of expertise within our shire.

We also have issues with education, particularly if we look at education within the cultural sector. We do not have access to tertiary education within our shire other than extending to the Lismore area. We have an adult community education service that operates out of Kyogle. We do not have any TAFE sector or tertiary education sector.

As Jude stated, we also have issues with working space and access to working space. A lot of artists who live within our shire work in isolation, and usually work from a small space, lacking in facilities. They do not have the opportunity to access those facilities without having to travel a long distance. Many of the people who live within our shire have learnt to make do and accommodate the lack of many services and access to services within our shire. So they are very diversified people.

The Kyogle Council is currently working in partnership with the Tweed Council and the Beaudesert shires in support of the Caldera 09 Art Awards. This year, Kyogle became part of the Caldera, and we see that as an opportunity for us to market not only our pristine environment and our world heritage area, but also the quality and skills of the creative talents we have living within our shire.

It is very difficult from my perspective to inject within council an interest with regard to culture because I am the sole person employed within our council representing any matters of culture. I service a population of 9,000, in an area that is split in the middle with the Richmond Valley. I support and work very strongly with the indigenous communities in our region, and I am very happy to say that a number of indigenous artists within our shire have gone on to bigger and better things for themselves within the arts world.

Our main problem is lack of funding. A lot of funding within our shire is still consumed in our roads and in our wooden bridges. We have a phenomenal number of wooden bridges within our shire and quite a large kilometre-base of dirt roads within our shire. So culture really becomes less important as far as council is concerned. However, with my position, I have lifted the standard of the Kyogle council culture to quite high levels over my nearly 12 years of employment within this position.

I fight a very long and hard battle trying to obtain recognition for some of the infrastructure within our shire that is being under-utilised. We have in our main street a memorial institute, which has a beautiful top-storey area that houses one person and which is the head office of the Rural Fire Service. Kyogle District Arts Council also auspices a group called KATS, the Kyogle Amateur Theatre Society. The Kyogle Amateur Theatre Society is pivotal, along with the arts council, in assisting council to get funding from the Federal Government to refurbish the memorial institute. My concern is that only two stages of the three-stage refurbishment have been carried out and nobody is driving the third stage. Our building is very close to being 100 years old. My concern is that once it does get to 100 we will not be able to turn a screw without it being the right screw, and it will cost us a lot more to get any of the refurbishments done to that space.

We also have quite a number of halls throughout our community which are largely looked after and supported by the direct community around them, and council basically oversees them. But the community maintains those halls at their cost. Also, at their own integrity, they apply for funding to refurbish their own halls.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** I direct a question to Jude. You mentioned that you get support from CountryEnergy and from some businesses. Is the support given to the gallery from the private sector substantial, or do you feel it could be improved?

**Ms McBEAN:** It is always a difficult question. In contrast to metropolitan areas, regional areas have not got the large corporate systems that metropolitan areas have. It would be interesting to do research into businesses in regional areas because, if you asked them how many times they have given and how much they have given throughout the year,

they would probably say they get requests at least twice a day. The Clarence Valley is an incredibly busy community, with a very diverse and varied life in sport and recreation. We do not have the same resources available to us as have galleries and institutions located in metropolitan areas. So we do not have that same resource to call on. What we get is okay, and it is fairly good in comparison with what some other people get, but it is not very much; it is only 2 per cent to 5 per cent of our income.

In the past, the centralist model is one which we sometimes fight against. I had to drive 1½ to 1¾ hours just to get here. You cannot locate facilities here and expect people in the Clarence Valley to be able to access them. Often, it is not like living in Parramatta and being able to catch a train to a gallery in Sydney. I know I have been talking about the development of a regional cultural plan, to try to get the cultural planning done on a regional basis. That is good, because we are not repeating ourselves, and we are working in tandem with each other.

But in the past I have seen the results of applying a centralist model in a region. It is no use locating something in Lismore because if you put together all the people on the North Coast that might be able to support and service in Lismore that model which normally operates within the city, but because people cannot access it that model struggles to survive. People do not support it. I have been advocating that you cannot apply a centralist model for all arts activities because of the pursuit of excellence. People want excellence. So you cannot spread it all over the place; it just does not work.

You can get centres of excellence where there is a population to support that. With transport and information systems now, regional people go to the cities. People in Grafton drive to Brisbane, or fly to Sydney, which they never would have done before, because we have low-cost air flights and access to information about what is on through the Internet and through our media services. So they are not trying to find that same type of service in our area any more. What we are trying to find is that, if you are an artist living and working in the Clarence Valley, you want to be able to access a certain level.

One of the major strategies of the Clarence Valley Council plan is their creative industries strategy, and one of those strategies is to get low-cost studio or workshop provision. This is something in many cities throughout the world. The Committee probably is quite familiar with the models that are around. If you can provide low-cost studios, you can transform communities. If you bring in creative people, other people follow. We have creative strategies being developed. An Internet hub is the first part of that, and the next part is to find and provide low-cost studios for artists to work in. The gallery works in with that strategy quite well.

Getting back to the centralist concept, I have seen it in theatre. They put a lot of money into theatre in one place. Because we are an hour north of Coffs Harbour and nearly two hours south of Lismore, we have geographical isolation. We have 50 per cent of the land mass of the North Coast, but we have only a small proportion of people. So we have to deal with distance quite a lot. The regional galleries were located in each of the three valleys, and now and then we have worked on various collaborative projects.

Arts Northern Rivers has been one of the best things that has been developed for us as a gallery, because it took on the role of professionally developing our artists, and we were able to focus more on our core programs. That has been incredible support for the whole development of core artists in our region. They have been running programs that are very responsive to the input that we all put in. They tend to provide what people ask for,

and so it has been very successful in that way. Raising money from private business is always on the table, but we just have not got that same access that metropolitan galleries have.

**CHAIR:** Just a couple more questions, and we will have to move on. Mr Page?

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** My question is more to Jude more than to Ruth, although Ruth might like to comment. It relates to this issue of access to art, particularly at regional galleries. Even the Lismore regional gallery at the moment has the 2008 Archibald exhibition, they are not actually open for people to access on Sundays and Mondays. When I had a conversation with the art gallery director at morning tea this morning, he indicated to me that that is because they cannot afford to pay the wages of the people who staff the gallery.

When I suggested to him that maybe there would be an army of volunteers out there who would be more than happy to give up their time to make sure that the gallery would be open seven days a week, particularly while the Archibald was on, he indicated to me that it was not as simple as that; that the OH&S requirements made it necessary for all employees to be paid employees, and presumably there must be some training or something that occurs in relation to that. It seems to me that that is a fairly fundamental issue in relation to access. I am wondering whether you are able to open, for example, seven days a week at Grafton. Do you use volunteers? If so, are they trained specially so that they can meet OH&S regulations? Or is there something that we could do at the State level to enable volunteers to be able to staff these galleries—not to be paid, but to meet OH&S regulations?

**Ms McBEAN:** Each gallery varies quite a lot. It has got a lot to do with the physical layout and also the particular needs of the council. Some galleries, like at the Tweed, have their staff rostered on so that there is somebody there over seven days. At Grafton, we have staff there for five days a week. We are closed on those days to enable cleaning, maintenance and repairs. Sometimes we cope with those things while the public has access, but we tend to stay closed on Mondays. We do open for schools, and we open for anybody who books in, but not for general access.

On Saturdays and Sundays, it is an issue we have looked at and queried a few times, because I got quite concerned about it. We have always had volunteers helping to run the gallery, being in reception, in the shop, receiving visitors and giving them information and helping them out. But we have also got a café on site, so there are other adults there who volunteer; we try to have two volunteers on site for the two shifts, Saturday and Sunday. In a way, some of those models are just sheer tradition. That is how we traditionally evolved. Other galleries require you to work Saturdays and Sundays. I have resisted bringing that model in; we want to make sure that what we have got is all right.

Our volunteers are trained. We train them. They go through, first of all, Valley Volunteers, which is a fantastic organisation. Usually they are located in each region. If you are interested in being a volunteer, you can go to a place where they orientate you into volunteering, taking you through the basic OH&S and duties and expectations and roles involved in volunteering. Then they come to us and we do on-site training. We even get some of our volunteers to get RSAs in responsible gambling if they are running a raffle, or in safe food handling, and any other training, such as manual lifting. These are things that we know we need to train our volunteers in.

We have two volunteers with the gallery open on Saturdays and Sundays. We have had the Archibald, and we do open on Mondays with the Archibald if we have booked-in people because of the demand. The Archibald is all about access. Go to Sydney and you have got to pay \$15 to get in. Come to Grafton, and it is free. Our admission is by donation. We could charge. Some galleries do, like Port Macquarie and others. It is a very individual thing. But, when you look at our community and some of our schools, you see that 75 per cent of parents are on some form of income support. We are not in a super rich area. People come into the gallery. That is what the Archibald attracts. Our main aim is to get them in and get them back. Once they start coming, they realise it is not too hard to come again, and they do. We have people who come from Brisbane, Moree and other centres two or three hours away to come to the Archibald. Steven would be experiencing that now. Many people just cannot get to Sydney.

I was saying before how a lot of people do get to those places now more than ever, but there are still many people who have no access to those metropolitan services, and that is why regional galleries develop—because people want contemporary art in their community. The contemporary performing arts have one major problem—lack of facilities in the Clarence Valley. On the North Coast there is a call for big entertainment centres, and they can often be very difficult to justify because, sure, they will operate for two or three weeks of the year but the rest of the time they are hard to keep going.

Our local picture theatre is getting redeveloped and will be the largest arts centres on the North Coast when it is opened. So that will be a very exciting development for us. For young people in our area, infrastructure is one of the major problems because they drive down to Coffs Harbour or to Yamba to go to the bowlers club or the golf club because they have got facilities. They can go there and listen to live bands that make a lot of noise. So they have facilities where noisy things can happen and they do not upset the locals. Grafton really needs to develop that, and we have not got that in the local hoteliers. It should be in the private industry, because it obviously makes a quid for them in other places.

**Ms TSITIMBINIS:** I would like to comment on that. The Roxy Gallery is open Tuesday to Friday from 10 till 4, and then Saturday from 9.30 till 12 o'clock. All of those hours, amounting to about 38 a week, are personed by volunteers. Our volunteers within the Kyogle sector are an ageing population. As the gallery co-ordinator, it is a bit disappointing that sometimes we cannot person our space to be open because we might have a shortfall in volunteerism, or a sick volunteer and the apple cart has gone. That does not look good from a business perspective. If you say you are open certain hours, you should be open at certain hours. But, from a community perspective, we hope that visitors to our region understand that we operate purely in a volunteer capacity.

I have a lot of issues regarding relying on volunteers because they can administer only a certain percentage of the management of the gallery, because some things need to go through council, which is what my position is to do. Because we have a large percentage of unemployed people within our region I have made sure that the gallery is registered with the Department of Social Security to allow people to come to do their mutual obligation stints at the gallery for unemployment benefits. As far as I am concerned that is a service that I offer, because a lot of those people cannot find anywhere else to volunteer.

**CHAIR:** If there are no other questions, I take this opportunity on behalf of the Committee to thank you both for your evidence and your time. If there is any other

information that you wish to provide to us, we would welcome that in writing. Thank you again for appearing here today.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**JOANNE GAIL PETROVIC**, Community Project Officer and Social Planner, Richmond Valley Council, corner of Walker Street and Graham Place, Casino,

**WAYNE STANLEY HALCROW**, Director, Corporate Services, Richmond Valley Council, corner of Walker Street and Graham Place, Casino, New South Wales,

**LOIS RANDALL**, Regional Arts Development Officer, Arts Northern Rivers, 1/5 Bruxner Highway, Alstonville, and

**JOAN KELLY**, Regional Museum Development Officer, Arts Northern Rivers, 1/5 Bruxner Highway, Alstonville, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I take this opportunity to welcome representatives of Richmond Valley Council and Arts Northern Rivers and to thank you for appearing today at the Public Works Committee's hearing of the Inquiry into Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside Sydney CBD. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a copy of the Legislative Assembly's standing orders 291, 292 and 293, which relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

**Ms PETROVIC:** Yes.

**Mr HALCROW:** Yes.

**Ms RANDALL:** Yes.

**Ms KELLY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** For the *Hansard* record, could I ask you, in the same order, to restate your full names and a private or business address for correspondence from the Committee? Can you also state your occupation and the capacity in which you appear before the Committee?

**Ms PETROVIC:** Joanne Gail Petrovich, Community Project Officer and Social Planner for Richmond Valley Council, corner of Walker Street and Graham Place, Casino, New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** And you are appearing in that capacity?

**Ms PETROVIC:** I am appearing in that capacity.

**Mr HALCROW:** Wayne Stanley Halcrow, Director of Corporate Services, Richmond Valley Council, locked bag 10, Casino, 2470. I appear in that capacity.

**Ms RANDALL:** Lois Randall, Regional Arts Development Officer, Arts Northern Rivers, 1/5 Bruxner Highway, Alstonville, and I appear in that capacity.

**Ms KELLY:** Joan Kelly, Arts Northern Rivers, and I appear in the capacity of the regional museum's development officer, 1/5 Bruxner Highway, Alstonville.

**CHAIR:** I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and that you are protected from legal or administrative action that



might otherwise result in relation to the information that you provide. I should also point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute a contempt of Parliament. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Ms RANDALL:** How brief?

**CHAIR:** A few minutes.

**Ms RANDALL:** I would like to give an overview of the Northern Rivers and the issues relating to this inquiry. Arts Northern Rivers is one of 13 regional arts boards across regional New South Wales. We are a partnership between the State Government, through Arts NSW, and the seven local governments of the Northern Rivers region. So, in that capacity, I speak for the region as a whole.

The region has the highest concentration of professional artists outside the capital cities; the highest number of accredited screen practitioners outside Sydney and Melbourne; the nationally renowned cultural festivals, such as Byron Writers Festival and the Blues Festival; a creative industries consortium, and the highest creative industries growth in New South Wales. It has a significantly higher growth rate than Sydney, and the second-highest creative industries employment density in New South Wales.

The region is also faced by challenges, including the population explosion, with the highest growth in the State outside metropolitan centres; high levels of unemployment and youth unemployment; high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage; and very diverse communities, with different cultural and cultural infrastructure needs. So that is the context for a unique opportunity, which has recently emerged through the Northern Rivers creative industries strategy, which I table for this inquiry.

#### **Document tabled.**

Between the 2001 and 2006 census, employee in the arts and creative industries in the region grew 25 per cent faster than the rest of the regional economy. That is very unusual for a regional area. Northern Rivers is a key hot spot for the State's creative industries beyond Sydney. The arts and creative industries strategy for the Northern Rivers is influenced by several factors, including the strengths that I have just outlined, the opportunity to address both cultural development and economic development, the need to address a number of gaps and weaknesses in infrastructure, high-speed broadband access, and resourcing and access to markets, and the many opportunities which exist to stimulate employment, economic growth and healthy communities in the context of rapid population growth.

The regional strategy which I have tabled includes detailed strategies, under six key goals. Two of those are very relevant to this inquiry. They are access and lifestyle, being access to the arts through strategic facilities, including regional and community galleries, museums, performing arts facilities, arts trials, et cetera, as well as festivals and programs, and another key goal of infrastructure and finance. So there are detailed strategies under each of those goals in the overall regional strategy.

I am not sure whether you are aware that on 5 February the New South Wales Government released the state-wide New South Wales Creative Industries Plan. It is very relevant to this inquiry. It shows that the Richmond-Tweed area has the highest creative

industries growth in New South Wales and the second-highest density of creative industries workers after Sydney. The growth rate in the region increased by 64 per cent, relative to 23 per cent of all industries. The growth rate in Sydney was 28 per cent, against a total employment increase of 13 per cent. That is New South Wales Government data.

I would make a couple of key points for this inquiry. Arts Northern Rivers would support a New South Wales cultural plan if it is a genuinely state-wide plan, rather than a Sydney plan. The New South Wales Creative Industries Plan had something like 84 pages, of which one and a half were dedicated to outside Sydney. I have a number of other points, but I think they will come out in response to the questions.

**CHAIR:** Would anyone else like to make an opening statement before we go to questions? If not, I will start by asking whether the funding for these types of programs, or the number of programs available, has decreased or increased over the years.

**Ms RANDALL:** For infrastructure?

**CHAIR:** Infrastructure, yes, for the council itself.

**Mr HALCROW:** The problem for the councils is, as you well know, a funding problem. For example, Richmond Valley Council has only 17 per cent of its total income from rates. We are competing with other community needs. So it is always a battle to try to get some funding for that. It is a problem, particularly for a council area such as Richmond Valley Council. As has been touched on by my colleague, the population growth that we are expecting is substantial. It has had the highest population growth in the Northern Rivers region for the period 2001 to 2006—and that is sourced from ABS data.

It has also been identified under the New South Wales Department of Planning regional strategy as one of those areas that will experience substantial growth. We currently have approximately 8,900 residences, and they are telling us we need to plan for another 9,900 by the year 2031. What that indicates—if you do some figures based on 2.5 persons per residence—is a 138 per cent increase in population. What we have to do therefore is not only plan for the infrastructure but for the fact that those people will be looking at the cultural aspects of our communities. I believe it is important that we consider these funding options into the future.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to add to that?

**Ms RANDALL:** If I could. There has been a trend, in terms of funding of cultural infrastructure, in the region of decreasing State Government investment and an expectation from the State Government through the New South Wales Cultural Accord that the lion's share of the budget for capital infrastructure in regional communities be footed by local government. So what we have seen increasingly is the State Government funding being used as seed funding, to kick-start other funding partners coming in. That works well in well-resourced local government areas, and so we have seen a large amount of capital infrastructure development in the Tweed. But in the smaller or more economically challenged local government areas that are not able to put in millions of dollars themselves towards infrastructure, there is no infrastructure being developed. The Federal Government has generally been the equal funding partner with the State Government, and often in this region the State Government contribution has only been about 10 to 20 per cent of the overall budget.

**CHAIR:** In our discussions with other groups and organisations, they have expressed concerns that you have to apply for grants and funding every year, and they would like that process extended beyond a year with longer contracts, over maybe a three-year period, whereby they are guaranteed certain amounts of money. Would that assist your programs?

**Ms RANDALL:** Yes. I would strongly support that. That is a real challenge. Also, through Arts NSW, there are funding programs enabling you to go back, year after year, for up to three years. There is always that up-to-three-year cap. I think the museum program that Joan has been running to support 21 volunteer-run museums in the region is a great example of that, as we have managed to get up to three years funding by applying each year—never knowing whether we had a future. But we have been successful. But now we have reached the end of that three-year period, and we are facing a precipice. So I would also like to recommend that: yes, definitely an ability to apply for more than one year's funding at a time, but also the possibility for more ongoing support, not limited to three years, for strategic projects.

**CHAIR:** Ms Kelly, could you give the Committee a brief description of the regional museum advisory program? What does it do, how long has it been running for? Ms Randall mentioned that you have 21 volunteers assisting you in the running of the museum.

**Ms KELLY:** The Regional Museum Development Project operates across 20 museums and 7 local government areas in the Northern Rivers. I work with the volunteers in those museums, running training programs, workshops, strategic planning, and exhibition design and implementation. There are a few special needs that the museums are after, and in particular many of them want memorandums of understanding with their councils where they are in council buildings.

One problem that many museums are facing is that they are in council buildings. They appreciate that they are in council buildings, often assisted by council, but they are then too scared to say that the building is actually falling down, or that it needs a bit of refurbishment, or needs a ramp for disability access—in case the council becomes a bit overwhelmed and says, "We can't assist you with what we are doing any more."

One of the advantages that I have found while I have been working in the position is that as a regional person it is easier to get funding. When I first started we got funding from museums and galleries—top of the list, we were told, because we produced a brochure that has all our museums in it. Most recently, we have received funding for a regional exhibition trail. So, rather than have a touring exhibition with objects from all the museums touring so that the exhibition would really be in one museum at a time, we are doing an exhibition whereby each museum has a display.

With that, we have developed an oral history training program. Just to show everyone that that program is a constructive program, we are actually making those interviews into DVDs, which will run with the program. We applied to the Australian National Museum for funding for making the DVDs, and they gave us \$10,000, which is the highest grant they have ever given—because it is a regional project and affecting more than one museum at a time. So those are the sorts of benefits that the regional project can bring. It is very frustrating that it has gone on eight months at a time, and I have been wondering whether I have had a job for pretty much the whole time I have had the job, from one stage to the other. So longer-term funding would be very beneficial.

Could I also say that it is very difficult to get professional museum staff in the regions—all arts workers, I would say. So we really need to be working towards infrastructure for those people who often are moving their whole lives out to the regions.

**CHAIR:** What is the role of transport infrastructure in relation to arts and culture development in your local government area, or in the regional centre, and how do you think this should be addressed?

**Mr HALCROW:** From council's perspective, transport is a real issue within our region, particularly public transport. There is a shortage of access, and it relates not only to cultural and arts activities but right across the spectrum. Some of our elderly people who do not have transport find themselves in a situation where they cannot get to a regional centre or a town to participate in cultural and artistic activities. So it is certainly a problem in our area.

**Ms PETROVIC:** One of my roles at Richmond Valley Council is to convene the Transport Working Party. Also, I wrote the Facilities Needs Review, which is a council document that reviews all council owned or managed properties. What became really obvious from that is that almost every one of the 240-odd facilities that we have has a bus route past it, but all of those are school bus routes. So there is some capacity there within the school bus system, except we are struggling to keep that operating in regional areas, and it limits the times that are available. So we need to think more creatively, especially for all these little towns—Rappville and Broadwater and so on—about what facilities we already have within that space, and how people can use those facilities to the best of their needs and then meet at those facilities to travel collectively to other places.

If every single one of our halls were associated with a bus, we would have a completely different looking series. I can understand why people do not want to have a bus stand at every hall, but it would be much cheaper to do that than to run constant, ongoing services to try and guess at the right times that people go, because the distances we are talking about are huge. In Casino itself, where the Ministry of Transport requires that there be a bus route, often they transport air. Their services are under-utilised; they transport air.

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** We identified in my Electorate regional transport area over 30 smaller community buses, and whoever applied and got that funding actually had a bus for themselves. When anybody comes in my door now and asks for another bus I say, "Hang on, there's 30 in the area we should be using." That was the idea of the funding. Have you looked at the number of smaller vehicles that you have for transport? We have turned things around by freeing up all those buses.

**Ms PETROVIC:** Many of those smaller buses are connected with the school bus routes. Outside those school bus routes we probably have about 10 to 12 smaller buses. Three or four are associated with aged care homes, two or three are associated with Aboriginal community groups, and the rest of them would be associated with the transport systems that run school bus routes. So they are only available when they are not running in school bus hours. But it would be a very smart thing to do. But when I try to get hold of it during those hours I will be charged for them. For example, I wanted to take a group of 12 people from Casino to Coraki for a meeting, and I was using what was a normal bus service in the middle of the day, and I think that cost me \$400. My transport budget for the year is \$1,000, so it took nearly half my budget. That is how those companies try to address losses that they are making.

**Ms RANDALL:** For cultural events throughout the region, the lack of public transport in the region is a major issue. If we are going to look at increasing access then we need to look at public transport and some sort of shuttle system or other way of addressing that. That is an absolutely critical issue for the indigenous community in the region. There are whole communities which have only a handful of licensed drivers. We have found from working with the Aboriginal community on cultural programs that we have to provide transport and we have to pay private drivers or beg, borrow or steal from other community transport providers to get those people to the activities. So, if we are looking at improving access, obviously public transport is a key issue.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** My question is addressed to Lois. In your Northern Rivers Arts and Creative Industries Strategy 2008-2012, under the subheading of "Gaps and Needs", at page 38, under the marketing and market development side of things, the first point you made was that the current regional branding beyond Byron needs to emphasise and build upon other strengths. You and I know what happens in Byron, but an awful lot happens outside of Byron. In practical terms, have you given any thought to how the region as a whole might be able to market itself beyond Byron? I mean, Byron has the reputation because of the Byron Blues and Roots Festival, Splendour in the Grass, the Writers Festival and so on, and the fact that Byron itself is some sort of international icon really. I think it is one of those things that is easier said than done. I am wondering what your thoughts are on how it might actually be done, given that the whole region is very strong in the arts.

**Ms RANDALL:** It is a tricky issue, and it is one that some people feel quite passionate about. I think the creative industries strategy shows really clearly that there are many pockets of creative industries and arts development happening throughout the region and that there really is a need for regional branding. We have talked about using some sort of brand, like Northern Rivers Creative. But, obviously, in the descriptions we have to always use Byron to drive traffic in order to capitalise. Basically, we have a unique opportunity in the fact that Byron is known internationally as a creative centre. I think there is no way around it, that we have to do it, and there are opportunities to be developed from that.

We are looking at a web portal as one way of doing that, and that would then link to a range of opportunities in all the different arts and cultural organisations. That would basically be the Northern Rivers creative web gateway, and then the Writers Festival and all the different arts organisations would link to that. Also, a lot of the local governments are developing arts and cultural plans for their own local government areas and they could all link in to that centralised gateway. It would be about directing traffic through a regional gateway. Does that answer your question?

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** I think so. It is a difficult question.

**Ms RANDALL:** Yes.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** Obviously you want the benefit of Byron.

**Ms RANDALL:** Yes.

**Mr DONALD PAGE:** Byron Bay itself is subject to a lot of pressure because we have limited infrastructure and a lot of people, and we are in the happy circumstance really, in many senses, of Byron being happy to share some of their people who are

interested in art and culture with other sections in the region. I think a unique opportunity arises there to give the benefit of Byron to the rest of the region, but exactly how you do that is a little problematical.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** What are the links with the local TAFE, and do they provide courses that might assist students in the creative arts and the arts industry in general?

**Ms RANDALL:** I have been on the industry council of TAFE for the past three years. I have just completed my term and stepped down. However, I have been replaced by another person who has an arts background. That is for the North Coast Institute of TAFE. TAFE has a region-wide arts and IT program which is very strong, and it has particular clusters through the area, such as in Kingscliff it has a really strong graphic design program and it has a really strong arts program based in Lismore. We are also working with TAFE.

The head of the arts and IT faculty is actually based in Coffs Harbour, because the North Coast institute covers what we call the Northern Rivers and the Manning River region. He is a member of our creative industries consortium, where we work together with education and industry organisations. He has also been involved in developing an arts and education roundtable, which we are developing at the moment, which is basically TAFE, Southern Cross University, the Department of Education and Training and Arts Northern Rivers, to look at better differentiating career pathways and training pathways for people interested in arts careers.

**Ms KELLY:** Could I add to that?

**CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Ms KELLY:** When I first came here I approached the Southern Cross University to set up internships for the museums, and while they were not able to help me last year they have gone ahead and developed an interpretation course, a vocational course, which they developed last year and is going through accreditation this year. So that will be an enormous benefit to the museums. I am also running a How to Find Volunteers and Keep Them workshop in a couple of weeks. Southern Cross University, a representative from the internship program or the liaison program is coming to see how they can match their students with our museums. So it is one direct thing that is actually happening in the area.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** I have just two questions, and I will leave them open. But before asking those, I would make a short statement. I have been very impressed over the last two days with what I have seen in arts and culture and also resources, be they buildings or galleries, and other activities compared to where I am, on the Central Coast.

My first question is on the issue of public transport. Availability of public transport is an issue that we all experience. A lot has been done to try and address the problem, and there has not been a successful model. At every meeting I have been to every group has raised the issue of public transport. What we need is a solution in terms of public transport. I do not think there is one at the moment. The second thing is, could you tell us a bit about what you think are the driving factors, given the tremendous growth that you referred to earlier, in terms of arts and culture, and most importantly in terms of employment related to that as well.

**Ms KELLY:** Did you want us to comment on public transport?

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** Yes, please.

**Ms PETROVIC:** I guess that is what I was alluding to in my comments that maybe we should attach buses to halls, because if you considered public transport as trying to have a transport service run throughout the whole of the Northern Rivers, and stopping at all the places where there might be something, it is a very long trek and people probably would not want to stay on a bus for that long to get from one place to the other.

The Aboriginal co-operative in Casino has a bus that is associated with their service. They run CDP, and they run an arts shed in two different places, one in New Italy and one in Casino. They have this one bus. Basically, people just go to the person who is in charge of the board there and ask for the bus. The elders utilise it as well. The trick is that you see that bus running 24/7, so transport associated with central hubs that can then be booked out. A number of halls, for example, literally have a bus almost all week round: Monday nights ballet and Tuesday nights kick boxing, and Wednesday nights the women's CWA meeting. If the bus is associated with that hall, it can be running round picking up all those people for all of those different things. It is a completely different model of transport from saying, "We need a bus that goes from Casino to Coraki to Evans Head and then back again." Simply travelling the distance of our local government area takes even council staff two hours, to get to a meeting on the opposite side and back again—and that is without stopping to pick anybody up.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** If we had a booking system with a hub where buses are located, you want to book out the assets everyday. But in a lot of cases demand is so random that it is very hard to manage. The idea that you have talked about is one that is being considered. If activities there drop back for whatever reason, the bus allocated to that location may have to be relocated. Then we had different service providers, and all that sort of thing. It ended up like booking a cab; you had to have a system where you rang a number and inquired about the availability of some sort of vehicle. Again, that did not work well; in fact, it collapsed. If you come up with something, please let me know.

**Ms PETROVIC:** It does work better with indigenous communities because they are better connected to one another. It does not work so well with communities that do not know each other.

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE:** And that is the situation we are dealing with.

**Ms PETROVIC:** Yes. In the North Coast, for the indigenous communities it works beautifully.

**Ms RANDALL:** I would like to address the second question. I just had a wild idea that maybe the regional arts boards that exist in each region should have an arts and culture bus. We use the Buyinbin bus as well, and we are about half an hour's drive away. It is a community bus that is available—with a friendly driver! So that is a good example.

I would like to address the second question, which is the reason for the arts growth and high employment in this region. I guess there are a lot of historic factors that are unique to this region. They include the fact that it is a beautiful part of the world, and it is a very attractive place for people to come and live. That has to be said, first and foremost. Other factors are the historic factors of the Nimbin Aquarius Festival, which brought a lot

of arts people to the region who then stayed and have had an ongoing effect permeating the whole of the region.

Another factor is the university being based here. First it was a teachers college, but it then became a university, which has always had strong arts programs. The alternative culture and the beautiful natural environment together, I think, started that first wave, and increasingly it has been known as a region where creative people come, and that has attracted more and more.

As far as the employment factor goes, I think a strength of this region is that there are a lot of very well established arts industry people who have moved here from other parts of the country because they can afford to; they have an existing clientele that might be national or international. They come here for the environment and the lifestyle, but basically operate on an international level and are well enough resourced to employ other people and create hubs of employment.

Another factor I think is the growth of the screen industry in the region. It also is an industry that employs large numbers of people on productions. I have been the line producer of the TV series "East of Everything", which as far as I know is the first TV drama series ever to be fully produced in a regional community in Australia. Generally, they are produced from a capital city, and they then go out for periods of time to the location. But the main production office is central based, and they take their crews with them from the cities, whereas "East of Everything" employed more than 200 people, and the huge majority of those people were from this community; they were local people who live here.

Those are just a few examples that illustrate the growth and the employment. A lot of the artists who work here and show up in that employment data are self-employed. They are people who really could base what they do anywhere in the world now that we have the Internet and communication facilities that make that possible, or they run small businesses that employ a couple of people.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** What are the broadband facilities like for that purpose?

**Ms RANDALL:** They are patchy. It is a need that comes up over and over again, particularly in relation to discussions on infrastructure. Generally, there is not much high-speed infrastructure here, and there are still black spots in this region where there is no broadband access. There are significant black spots, including most of Kyogle shire, parts of the Richmond Valley, parts of the Clarence, where there is no broadband access at all. So that is a major infrastructure issue in the region.

**Ms PETROVIC:** If I could add something to what Lois said about the reason for the large number of artists in the North Coast. I think the other thing is that we have a high indigenous population, possibly the highest in New South Wales outside the capital cities of Australia. Indigenous people have their own unique forms of art and they are really well practised and celebrated in this area.

**CHAIR:** If there are no further questions, we might wrap it up. I take this opportunity to thank you all for appearing today and for your evidence and submissions. If there is any further information that you would like to provide to this Committee, we would be more than happy to receive that in writing. Did you want to make a quick comment, Ms Randall?



**Ms RANDALL:** I would like to table a couple of documents.

**CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Ms RANDALL:** And I would like to make a couple of concluding points, if I may. In discussions regarding infrastructure, I think it is really positive that the Committee is obviously considering more than bricks and mortar. That is essential. For any cultural development or infrastructure development to happen, there need to be people on the ground as brokers. So plug for the regional arts network. It is a vital role as brokers.

I want to pick up on Joanne's point: the huge lack of resources and infrastructure to support indigenous cultural development in this region and across regional New South Wales. At the moment, there are only two Aboriginal arts workers in regional New South Wales. That is a disgrace. A year ago, both of those people were not employed. A year ago there were none. There is one indigenous cultural officer who works within Arts NSW who is supposed to look after the whole State.

Of the two that exist, one is in the Northern Rivers and one is in the Mid North Coast. Recently they have been funded through Federal Government project funding, which is time limited. Again, there is the old scenario of applying year after year. If there is to be any indigenous cultural infrastructure developed, there need to be skilled people employed to support that development. Throughout this region there are many communities who want to develop indigenous cultural centres. They all need help with writing the funding applications, doing the business planning, and putting the models together. There is no-one to support those developments. I just wanted to make that point in conclusion: I think that is a critical gap in the State's cultural infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We will note that you have tabled those documents as part of your submission.

**Ms RANDALL:** Did you want me to state the names of the documents?

**CHAIR:** No, that is fine. We will include those as part of your submission. I thank you all again for your time.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**(The hearing concluded.)**