

Parliamentary Committee Hearing Inquiry into the State Records Act 1998

Request to provide additional information in response to the final hearing of Mr Adam Lindsay on Thursday 30 July 2020.

I would like to respond to something Mr Lindsay said in his original appearance before the Committee and again in his concluding remarks on Thursday 30 July.

Mr Lindsay emphasised that the proposed merger or amalgamation of the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA) and Sydney Living Museums (SLM) is a joining together of equals and not a takeover.

This may be his stated intention, but what is happening *is* a takeover, by a Macquarie Street-based institution of a Western Sydney-based one.

In 1987, when he opened the new Reading Room at Kingswood, the then Premier and Minister for the Arts, Mr Bob Carr said he was proud that the State Archives would become the first of the State's cultural bodies to be based in Western Sydney.

It took time but it happened, with the Director and most staff moved to Kingswood by 2002 and the city Reading Room and exhibition space finally closed in 2012. No other cultural institution in the State has its Headquarters away from the CBD. SARA has embraced its unique location and the advantages that come from being embedded in a community.

Since Mr Carr's proud announcement, the Archives have submitted multiple Business Cases to Government to expand the services we could offer to those who live, work and study nearby. These proposals focused on providing exhibition and educational facilities so that we could interpret and present our own collection onsite, host travelling exhibitions from other institutions, and provide access opportunities for local residents, school groups and tertiary students from the neighbouring Western Sydney University. These Business Cases were all knocked back, consistent with the fact that funding for cultural activities across the State has always been strongly Sydney City-centric.

Now Mr Lindsay is arguing the very lack of these facilities justifies the administrative and legislative merger of SARA and SLM.

He says this merger is not a takeover. If so, then try to imagine the opposite to what is actually happening now. Try to imagine SARA taking over the management of SLM; the Executive Director, specialist professional staff such as exhibition designers, as well as support and administrative staff of SLM (including accounting, H.R. and facilities) moving to Kingswood in the far western suburbs. This would be unthinkable for the integrity and morale of SLM. Yet this is how the amalgamation of these two organisations is already proceeding - in reverse.

Mr Lindsay said the move of accounting and H.R. functions to Macquarie Street, for example, did not involve the loss of positions or people at Kingswood. This is not true. These positions may have been paid for by cluster/shared services but they were occupied by long-term members of staff located at Kingswood, who lived in western Sydney, and who lost their jobs, replaced by people in the city.

He says the amalgamation of backroom operations will make as yet unquantifiable savings, but the example he gives, of savings in ground maintenance at Kingswood by using SLM resources from Rouse Hill, appears highly dubious - especially when the sale of one third of the land at Kingswood has already reduced maintenance costs.

The SARA site at Kingswood, with buildings valued at \$60 million housing a collection valued at \$1 billion, and all the GRR's industrial-scale records repositories distributed across the Penrith area, will now be run from Macquarie Street. This may be convenient for the Management of the new 'merged' organisation but you couldn't imagine the opposite happening – that the people who handle the SARA portfolio would have the arrogance to think they could run SLM's specialised properties. This illustrates my point, that this so-called merger is only moving in one direction.

To push my argument to its logical conclusion, if one of the benefits of the amalgamation was to make significant financial savings, the new Management would definitely consider moving the multiple senior SLM positions not involved in day-to-day museum operations to Kingswood, and then lease out the prime office accommodation in Macquarie Street thereby made available.

But of course no one is suggesting that, as it would be totally unthinkable.

Yet Mr Lindsay is already doing the opposite by hollowing out SARA and consolidating Executive, specialist professionals, administrative and support functions in the Macquarie Street offices of SLM.

That is a takeover.

Rather than see the lack of access to its collection as the justification to downgrade SARA and its legislation, may I suggest your Committee consider the benefits to be gained from the construction of these missing exhibition and educational facilities at SARA's site in Western Sydney. Yes, it would involve spending Arts money away from Macquarie Street. But it would allow SARA to showcase its collection and also host exhibitions from other sources, such as the Museum of Sydney. SARA could work with SLM to develop content that was site-specific, giving them access to an audience they currently do not reach, while granting students from western Sydney access to these experiences without having to travel outside their region.

Mr Lindsay says the merger between SARA and SLM would be a bold vision.

I suggest that actually providing the exhibition and educational facilities SARA currently lacks, so that the State can truly have a cultural body located in far Western Sydney, would be a far bolder and more beneficial vision for the future.