

Hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Issues 24 August 2021

Review of the Heritage Act 1977

Post-hearing responses: answers to supplementary questions By Cr Linda Scott, Local Government NSW

Question:

1. *Would creating video documentaries encapsulating the history of heritage items add to the online promotion & heritage tourism activation of collections held in libraries, museums and galleries?*

Answer:

Yes. Video documentaries and digitisation more broadly would likely increase visitation and online promotion, among other benefits. The Australian Local Government Association's Arts and Culture Policy¹, to which LGNSW contributed, states that 'the visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene... and local government has the capacity and capability to enhance 'experiential travel' as a key component of economic recovery'.

On the basis that heritage items encapsulate stories, the more accessible these stories are (including through increased digitisation and video stories) the more people will connect with the story of the item and want to visit its location. This is why the LGNSW submission to this Inquiry calls for a heritage activation strategy and for heritage tourism to be a focused goal of the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy.

LGNSW also consulted with Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&GNSW) to respond to this question. (M&GNSW supports small to medium galleries, museums and Aboriginal cultural centres in NSW to maximise their impact and help create strong and thriving local communities. Many of the recipients of M&GNSW's support are local government museums and galleries.) Brett Adlington, M&GNSW CEO, contributed the following response:

Museums & Galleries of NSW is currently developing a new platform, Collections & Stories, to highlight and promote items of significance in collections throughout NSW. With funding through the Regional Cultural Fund, six digitisation projects will deliver an innovative hub and spoke model whereby digitisation equipment will be shared between larger organisations and smaller partners, and objects in their collections digitised and uploaded to the website. Digitised objects will then have their stories told, through a variety of means, with the engagement of professional Storytellers.

The intent is for the digital platform to be used by researchers, students and cultural tourists. The platform is scheduled to be made live in December 2021, with stories and objects to continue being added throughout 2022.

The six regional digitisation hubs for the Collections & Stories project are hosted by Albury City Council, Lake Macquarie City Council, Maitland City Council, Shoalhaven City Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council.

¹ <https://cdn.alga.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/ALGA-Arts-and-Culture-Policy-Position-1.pdf>

For council public libraries across NSW, the State Library of NSW has published Introduction to Digital Practice Guidelines which assist public libraries through digitisation projects, providing access, and digital preservation. During the pandemic's stay-at-home-orders, libraries have seen a significant boost in their online engagement and increased use of digital collections and resources.

Question:

2. What initiatives/funding would be required to rollout digitisation and video documentation programs for these heritage items?

Answer:

Last year I appeared at the September hearing of the Inquiry into the Government's Management of the Powerhouse Museum and other Museums and Cultural Projects in NSW. At that hearing I stated that councils would welcome guidance on digitisation, and access to a more consistent technology solution that would enable sharing of collections, but that the critical aspect to digitisation is funding. Both the total amount of funding and funding eligibility need to be broadened so councils can more easily apply for funding needs other than for cultural infrastructure. Councils have told LGNSW that funding is lacking for ongoing operations including curatorial development, and training and equipment for digitisation. Some councils may have thousands of items to digitise and this is knowledge, time and technology intensive. LGNSW welcomed the Digitisation Round of the Regional Cultural Fund which closed early this year, funding councils to become digitisation hubs and partner with smaller cultural collections organisations. LGNSW stresses that given the important of local government cultural institutions right across NSW, councils should be explicitly eligible for more arts, culture and heritage grants provided by the State and Federal Governments.

LGNSW was pleased to award Bathurst Regional Council a Leo Kelly OAM Arts and Culture Award in 2019 for its RE-ORG Bathurst Project. The winning project was a focused reorganisation of the collection storage areas at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery. In addition to the systematic audit, organisation and preservation of each item in storage, the project also included the photographing of every item to update the database. This was Australia's first documented pilot of the RE-ORG project which is a methodology developed by UNESCO and other international organisations. The project was conducted in collaboration with post-graduate students from Melbourne University. Now that the methodology has been piloted, it is recommended that a funded roll-out to other collections in NSW be supported by the NSW Government. Further information on the project is available at the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material: <https://aiccm.org.au/network-news/re-org-bathurst/>

LGNSW is also aware that the Australia Council for the Arts has recently released (in July 2021) a *Digital Culture Strategy 2021 – 2024*. The State Government should roll-out digitisation strategies in-line with their Federal counterparts.

LGNSW also consulted with Museums & Galleries NSW to respond to this question. Brett Adlington, CEO, contributed the following response:

The Collections & Stories project is funded to the end of 2022. Part of the funding will be to develop a strategic plan for the ongoing development and management of the site, so that collecting organisations throughout NSW can be included in the platform.

A minimum of \$300,000 annually would be required to staff the ongoing development of the site, overseeing digitisation of objects, and story development.

More information can be found here: <https://mgsw.org.au/articles/six-regional-nsw-hubs-funded-to-bring-collections-to-life/>