

**Submission
No 26**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc
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Lithgow state mine heritage park & railway

THE CITY OF GREATER LITHGOW MINING MUSEUM INC

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NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries

Submission on behalf of the City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc.

Having noted the terms of reference of the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries I am making this submission on behalf of the City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc.

Our mining industry collections

I note the particular focus of the inquiry on the heritage of science and technology and the comments made in regard to the role of small museums in this area. Our museum has an all-volunteer base and community focus operating on the site of the former Lithgow State Coal Mine. We also maintain a special focus on the industrial and mining history of the NSW Western Coalfield. Our role as a specialist collecting organisation has led us to become a focal point for collections relevant to the history of coal and shale mining in New South Wales.

During the life of the museum we have taken on collections and parts of collections that became redundant following various NSW Government restructures and downsizing. In the mid 1990s The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc took charge of the former Mineral Resources Department historical mining collections that had been located at its Llandilo facility. We also took custody of some specific items from the former Earth Exchange in Hickson Road, The Rocks. We have taken custody of larger coalmining artefacts from the Illawarra and Newcastle areas as neither had the capacity to store or manage these items

During 2001 I undertook a comparative study of coalmining collections held by museums in New South Wales and Victoria. This study, funded by the Mine Workers Trust, was based on a similar study conducted in Wales during the 1990s. Among other things it revealed that The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc has the most comprehensive and representative collection of coal and shale mining artefacts in either New South Wales or Victoria. I have included a summary analysis of this study with our submission.

Our community funded, not-for-profit status has placed particular challenges on our capacity to manage our extremely important collections. Much of the past ten years has been spent developing strategies for stabilisation of cash flow and survival rather than on managing our collection. These strategies were rewarded in 2013 and 2014 when we were awarded Museums & Galleries of NSW IMAGinE awards for Exhibitions and Sustainability.

We would not have been able to achieve these accolades without the support of partner organisations such as CFMEU Mining & Energy, The Mine Workers Trust and Biogas Energy.

Our struggle for organisational sustainability has largely been overcome at the cost of our collections. We have been unable to obtain funding to build adequate storage and/or display areas for many of the large machinery items in our collection and are only now able to tackle the very real issue of providing stable storage areas for smaller items.

I fear that if we are unable to find the resources for construction of at least one large shelter building a number of the very rare and significant machinery items in our collection will be placed at severe risk. At this point in time I can see no funding program that supports such works.

The valuable role of Museums & Galleries of NSW

Much of what we have achieved in recent years has only been made possible with the support of Museums & Galleries of NSW. This organisation provides valuable advice in collection and museum management, and also administers a number of small but extremely valuable grant programs that assist museums such as ours to improve our capacity and facilities. These programs include:

- Volunteer Museum Grants – We have recently been provided with a small grant under this program, to purchase archival standard shelving and cabinets for the long-term conservation of small artefacts.
- Building Improvement Grants – Funding was provided in 2014 to repair the 90 year old roofs of two of our three large buildings. This was invaluable in providing stable interior conditions for museum management.
- Museum Standards Program – This program has provided us with an external assessment and new strategies for effectively managing our museum.

All of these programs are extremely valuable to small museums such as ours, yet we believe that they are currently under-funded and could be applied more widely across the state if budgets were increased.

We are also concerned at the budget pressures on organisations such as Museums & Galleries of NSW. Any loss of capacity in Museums & Galleries of NSW could be potentially catastrophic for small museums across New South Wales.

Support for curation and administration of science and technology heritage

There are currently no funding programs that provide funding for curation and administration of significant collections. We note that there are advisory services such as the Museums Advisor program yet these must answer to the priorities of local government and the sound of many voices.

In the past we have been beneficiaries of the very professional regional outreach service formerly managed by the Powerhouse Museum. We regret the demise of this service.

We can see benefit in resources being applied to the provision of professional advice and ongoing support in the following areas:

- Curation of collection items,
- Cataloguing and administration of collections.

Priority for the provision of these services should be provided on the basis of assessed significance of collections or individual items.

Summary and recommendations

In summary we believe that the interests of scientific and technological heritage could be better served by:

- Providing support to the identification, assessment and registration of state significant collections and collection items held by small museums such as ours.
- Ensuring the ongoing viability and capacity of museums sector organisations such as Museums & Galleries of NSW.
- Enhancing the budgets of programs directed at small museums, such as;
 - MGNSW Volunteer Museums Grants.
 - MGNSW Building Improvement Grants.
- Reinstatement of regional museums services such as those formerly provided by the Powerhouse Museum.
- Providing funding specifically focused at the construction of storage and display facilities for small museums holding state significant collections.

Yours faithfully

Ray Christison
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The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc