

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council

Date received: 11 August 2016



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Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Chair
General Standing Committee No 4
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Borsak

Subject: NSW Legislative Council GPSC No. 4 Inquiry into Museums & Galleries

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission in relation to your Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in NSW, on behalf of Lake Macquarie City Council.

Council is committed to cultural development in Lake Macquarie City through integrated policies and plans. The City's cultural landscape includes one major public gallery, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, and smaller privately owned art galleries. There are also a number of historical societies and history groups in Lake Macquarie. Some of these have displays in small museums, while others manage history display cases in Council facilities. History-interest groups include East Lake Macquarie Historical Society; Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society; Lake Macquarie Family History Group; Friends of Lambton Colliery, among others. Historic houses with museums include Dobell House, the preserved home and studio of artist William Dobell at Wangi, and Sunnyside Historic Home and South Sea Island Museum at Cooranbong.

As the major purpose-built cultural institution in the City, the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has been servicing the community successfully for over 35 years – from its humble beginnings as a small and mostly volunteer-based gallery to its current position as a nationally recognised regional gallery – the community has always been the focus.

The multi-award winning Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has a strong reputation for its Aboriginal and contemporary art programs, as well as its lakeside location encompassing a sculpture park. The collection comprises over 700 artworks, including outdoor sculptures, by well-known artists from the Hunter and further afield. During 2015–2016, the Gallery welcomed over 48,000 people, with 2,200 of them being school students.

Please find below our feedback on the terms of reference of the Inquiry that are relevant to Lake Macquarie City.

"Quality Lifestyle"

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- a) *NSW Government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries, museums and gallery buildings and heritage collections, including volunteer-managed museums and museums managed by councils.*

The NSW Government's policy objectives, as delivered through Arts NSW, are respected across Council's cultural sector. 'Quality' in excellence and innovation, 'reach' through diverse engagement with communities and 'health' through building resilience and viability in cultural organisations are, in particular, supported by the Gallery's strategic planning and programming. The Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery also addresses five of the six priority areas of regional, Aboriginal people, CALD people, people with a disability and young people, again supporting Council's strategies and plans.

Over the past 25 years, Council has consistently attracted substantial grant funding from the NSW Government through its arts funding program. During that period, the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has increased its funding capacity from support for smaller projects to annual program funding, and is now in its third consecutive multi-year funding agreement, with the most recent, 2016-18, attracting \$110,000 per year.

During 2013-2015, Council was also successful in developing and managing a state-wide strategic project addressing the NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy by supporting four Aboriginal emerging arts leaders in four regional galleries: Lake Macquarie, Western Plains (Dubbo), Lismore and Goulbourn. This program was co-funded by the NSW Government and the Australian Government through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program.

- b) *Potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council's amalgamations.*

Council was deemed Fit for the Future as a stand-alone council and continues to implement strategies and improve processes to maintain excellence and financial viability.

- c) *Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach, and impact of museums and galleries, and their research and collecting priorities*

Beyond the sound financial support and advice given directly to the sector by Arts NSW, it is Council's understanding that service organisations such as Museums & Galleries NSW and Regional Arts NSW are funded by the NSW Government to support and facilitate the growth and sustainability of the sector across the state through devolved grants, advocacy and professional development programs. The larger Sydney-based galleries and museums also have a remit to support their regional counterparts through advice, loans and touring exhibitions. Members-based, volunteer run organisations such as Regional & Public Galleries NSW and Museums Australia NSW also support member groups through advocacy and professional development.

A review, identifying the multiple layers of services and programs currently provided in NSW, would benefit the sector, particularly the regional sector.

- d) *Access to the collections of the Museums of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian Museum and any other state collections held in trust for the people of New South Wales, and programs that promote physical and online access*

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has strong relationships with the Sydney-based state and national galleries and museums and accesses those collections in two ways: the first is through touring exhibitions and the second is through loans.

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has hosted many exhibitions from state cultural institutions. The most recent projects from the Art Gallery of New South Wales include the *2015 Archibald Prize* (2016), *Contemporary Australian Drawing: 20 Years of the Dobell Prize for Drawing* (2013) and *Christo: John Kaldor Family Collection Artist Room* (2013). Council has also borrowed many artworks from that collection for gallery-curated exhibitions and currently has two major works, one by Arthur Boyd and the other by Sidney Nolan, on loan for five years as a regional partnership. Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has also hosted exhibitions for the MCA and borrowed works for gallery-curated exhibitions.

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery also has a strong relationship with Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences through hosting touring exhibitions such as *Frock Stars: inside Australia Fashion Week* (2012) and *Fruits: Tokyo street style* (2010) and a partnership project which saw Gallery Curator Meryl Ryan co-curate the gallery's own version of *Contemporary Japanese Fashion: the Gene Sherman Collection* (2010).

The Australian Museum has always been helpful with information, although the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery has not hosted a touring exhibition or borrowed objects from that institution as yet. Rather, the Gallery toured an award-winning Aboriginal project, *A Possum Skin Cloak by the Lake* (2011), to the Australian Museum, which was a great success for both parties.

- e) *The sale of the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta, and whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development*

The move to Parramatta for the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences affords a great opportunity to develop a purpose-built twenty-first century museum for Sydney and regional New South Wales. The key to its success for regional stakeholders will be in the continued access to this significant collection both for curators and for audiences.

- f) *The development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries*

Council has been presented with appropriate opportunities through which to inform NSW Government cultural policy, as well as funding objectives and processes, by using such avenues as the 2013 Arts Funding Program Review. In addition, the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Director has been invited to Arts NSW consultation sessions, and has participated in Arts NSW assessment panels, most recently as the Chair of the Regional Fellowships panel and the Annual Program Funding panel. In this capacity, the Gallery Director, along with other panel members, is able to contribute to discussions concerning aspects of the funding objectives and how they can be best interpreted and articulated for the sector, as well as

simplifying the processes to increase access. This is particularly important for the regional sector.

- g) *The impact of the efficiency dividend on the budgets of the museums and galleries over the last 10 years, and funding levels compared to other state.*

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery's budget has gradually increased through avenues such as contributions from Council's general fund, generated income and other government arts funding, in particular from the NSW Government. This has allowed more strategic programming, encompassing excellence in presentation and engagement.

- h) *The economic impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism, and their role in supporting the visitor economy in Sydney and regional New South Wales.*

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery offers a unique cultural tourist experience by incorporating a purpose-built gallery facility on five hectares of lakefront land, including a sculpture park and restaurant café in historic Awaba House. Of the one million domestic and international tourists who visit Lake Macquarie annually, an estimated 13,500 of them visit the Gallery as cultural tourists, thus contributing to the tourist economy. In addition, the Gallery's programming contributes to the general economy of Lake Macquarie and beyond, through employing artists, tutors, casual curatorial staff and supporting craftspeople and makers by consigning their goods in the shop.

In summary, it our experience that NSW Government agencies sufficiently support the organisation, structure and funding of museums and galleries with which we are involved. We suggest that a review of the services and programs delivered to regional NSW by various agencies would identify opportunities to improve the coordination of regional service delivery.

Should you require further information, please contact Council's Director Community Development, on

Yours sincerely

Brian Bell
General Manager